

St. Paul the Hermit – Eyes Towards Eternity

Objectives

To learn from the biography of St. Paul the hermit how to keep our minds and hearts focused on heaven

References

- ❖ The hermit fathers by Fr. Samaan El Souriany
- ❖ Servants' preparation program (Diocese of Southern USA)
- ❖ Synexarium of the 2nd of Amshir

Scriptural Verse

“For where your treasure is there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21)

Lesson Outline

Who are the hermits?

The Hermit fathers have reached the highest level of spirituality and monasticism. They have died to worldly desires and possessions, with the intention of living completely for the Lord who is their every fulfilment and blessing and meaning in life. St. Paul spoke of them saying: “They wandered around in sheepskin and goatskin, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. Of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves” (Hebrew 11:37, 38). Such was the life of Elijah the prophet, John the Baptist, Abba Paula (St. Paul) the First Hermit, and many who followed.

St. Paul the 1st Hermit

He had a deep understanding of the vanity of this world and his heart and conscience were moved to leaving the world behind simply by seeing a dead man:

Paula was the second son of a very rich man. When the father died, the two sons argued about the inheritance and decided to settle the matter in court. Along the way, they noticed a coffin being carried, and a great multitude mourning the loss. Paula knew that he was a very rich man delighted in luxuries and today he left the world and all his riches behind. Paula felt as if he was spiritually awakened, and suddenly the world before him seemed as nought. He turned to his brother and said, “Peter, let us return.” As they were returning home, Paula walked slowly behind his brother, and then quickly escaped from his sight. Peter, searched for days, and when he could not find him, he regretted and cried bitterly.

Having left the town, Paula found an empty tomb, and so he remained within it for three days and three nights, in continuous meditation and prayer. On the fourth day, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and led him into the inner Eastern Wilderness. The angel directed him into a deserted cave, which was located near a spring of water and a fruitful palm tree. He dressed himself in a tunic he weaved from palms, and diligently prayed, and began his ascetic life in the Eastern Wilderness in the year 250 A.D., and remained there for more than 80 years.

King Solomon was also given wisdom to see the vanity of this world.

- ❖ He realized that everything in life that is apart from the purpose for which God created us is vanity. Ecclesiastes 1:2
- ❖ Work loses its purpose if it has not eternal purpose. The Lord Jesus Christ gives meaning to our labor. Ecclesiastes 1:1-4
- ❖ Knowledge is useless if it does not bring us closer to God. Ecclesiastes 1:13-18
- ❖ Merriment and pleasure is futile. Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

God wants us to be honest with ourselves

We too must ask ourselves if anything is attaching us to the world. Are there certain things, habits, and people in our lives that have entered and taken a hold of our lives?

How willing are we to give up all these things in order to live with God.

In Phillipians 3:7-9, St. Paul considered everything a loss and rubbish in order to gain the excellent knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and to be found in Him.

If we empty ourselves of the love of this world, we will be able to love God more deeply. So how do we empty ourselves of attachments of this world?

1. Evaluate whether we prefer something or someone over spending time with God.
2. Do we behave impulsively towards something and we feel that we have no control when it comes to a certain habit.
3. Is there something that occupies our time and our thoughts and our energy more than necessary?

How do we overcome such an attachment?

1. Delay gratification – if it is something I like to buy daily, try to buy it once a week.
2. Ask God to give you grace to overcome this attachment.
3. Ask God to occupy your heart so that there is no room for the love of earthly things.
4. Remind yourself of the futility of this world and the things of this world.

Conclusion

May God give us wisdom like King Solomon and St. Paul the First Hermit, in order to realize the futility of the world and to struggle and persevere in detaching ourselves from the things of this world that separate us from God.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. List the things that we easily get attached to that can affect our love and relationship with God.
2. Give examples from Scripture who followed worldly lusts and lost sight of their heavenly goal.