

(1.18) The Examples of the Holy Fathers

Spiritual perfection glows through the examples of the holy Fathers and often indicates how little we accomplish in comparison. How does our life compare to theirs?

They served our Lord Jesus Christ *on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fastings, through cold and exposure.*¹

The Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins who followed in Christ's footsteps encountered many tribulations. They understood *whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.*² The holy Fathers of the desert led deeply spiritual, disciplined, austere lives experiencing difficult temptations, constant harassment by the enemy but they always prayed fervently seeking help in overcoming their faults and remaining on the path to holiness. *They renounced their faults, kept their hands unsoiled and cleansed their hearts from all sin.*³ Their perseverance and intentions were principled as well as chaste.

At night they spent long hours in prayer while they labored by day; even then they made their prayer work by making their work a prayer. They spent their time wisely; hours of prayer seemed short and sometimes they even forgot bodily nourishment as they were completely absorbed in contemplation.

They renounced worldly values and as a result were blessed with graces and consolations. Simplicity, humility, patience enabled them grow spiritually and gain favor with God. *Wisdom teaches her children and admonishes all who can understand her. Those who love her love life; those who seek her out win the LORD's favor.*⁴

The holy Fathers of the desert are examples not only for the religious but for all who seek to advance spiritually and not grow lax in faith and good works. We are so conscientious and devoted to prayer and good works in the beginning of our conversions and the consistent zeal of these holy and perfect men remind us to persevere and constantly seek growth in virtue by not letting the power of the Spirit diminish by carelessness and neglect.



(See the endnote comments on previous chapter articles)

¹ 2Corinthians 11:2-27

² John 12:25

³ Sirach 38:10

⁴ Sirach 4:11-12