



St. Paul the Hermit

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St Paul the Hermit lived from 228-340 AD. He was born in Thebes, in Upper Egypt. According to St Jerome, St Paul is the first monk to live as a hermit.

During the Decian persecution of 350 AD, St Paul and his newly married sister had recently acquired a large inheritance from their parents. St Paul made plans to escape persecution by settling in a secluded home. His brother-in-law, however, schemed to betray Paul so that he might indulge in the fortune. Out of necessity, Paul fled to the desert in order to avoid persecution: "Rescue me, Yahweh, from evil men, protect me from violent men, whose heart is bent on malice" (Ps 140:1,2).

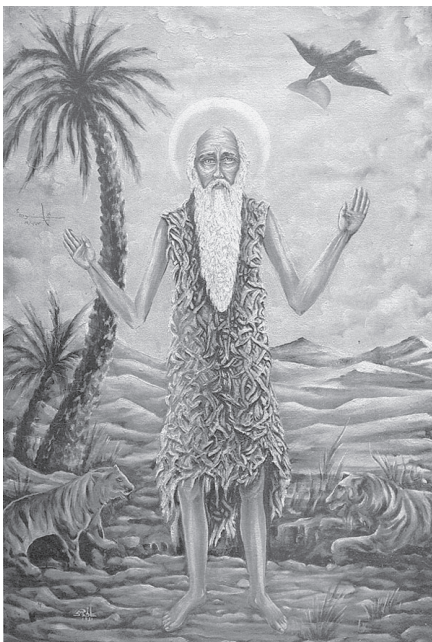
After a great deal of travel, St Paul stumbled upon a cave with a palm tree and a stream. The palm tree provided him with food and clothing—he wove a tunic of palm branches, which he wore for several years. A raven would come to him daily with half of a loaf of bread. St Paul lived in the cave for a great period of time until he was over 100 years old.

Another monk in the desert, St Antony, harbored the thought that he alone was the most perfect monk dwelling in the desert. St Antony was informed in a revelation that there was a more perfect monk. Consequently, he embarked upon a journey to encounter this monk. St Antony did not know which way to travel; he entrusted himself to the Lord Jesus Christ: "Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are?" (Mt 6:26).

After a few days of travelling, he

arrived at St Paul's cave. At first, St Paul refused to allow St Antony to enter. St Antony remained steadfast in his desire to meet Paul: "I asked and I have found; I knock that it may be opened unto me." St Paul relented and opened the cave for him. The two saints embraced and conversed for many hours: "How good, how delightful it is to live as brothers all together" (Ps 133:1).

While they were conversing, the same raven, which would bring the daily half-loaf, brought the two saints a whole loaf. Sts. Antony and Paul spent a great deal of time arguing over whom ought to break the bread until they decided to pull apart the bread simultaneously. Towards the end of their meeting, St Paul related to St Antony that he had foreknowledge of Antony's visit to him. He added that one purpose of this visit was so that St Antony might bury the body of St Paul after his repose. St Paul expressed his wish to be buried in a robe that Abba Athanasius had previously given to St Antony.



St. Paul, the First Hermit

With great sadness, St Antony left the cave in order to obtain the robe. On his return to the cave, he experienced a vision in which St Paul was ascending into heaven surrounded by angels. St Antony rushed to the cave and found St Paul's body. While thinking that he had no means of burying the saint, two lions approached the body and dug a hole in the ground for St Antony to bury him. St Antony buried the saint. He kept the tunic woven out of palm branches for himself and wore it on special occasions.

The departure of St Paul the Hermit is celebrated on February 9th. May his blessings be upon us.