**JOURNEY TOWARD WHOLENESS**

Around the 3rd century CE, a group of faithful Christian men and women began moving into the Desert to live out their faith in the fullest way possible. Through living lives of extraordinary simplicity and utter devotion to God, they found that they could maintain a state of inner vigilance, inner listening, and full presence to God. Many of these men and women became great teachers and amassed followings of those who wished to learn from them. Their teachings have been collected in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers & Mothers*.

**Choose a saying. Read it slowly and read it multiple times.**

**What is God speaking to you through one of these men or women? Where do you hear an invitation to wholeness?**

**SAYINGS OF THE DESERT FATHERS & MOTHERS**

Abba Poemen said, “Teach your mouth to say that which you have in your heart.”

Abba Poemen said, “As the breath which comes out of his nostrils, so does a man or woman need humility and the fear of God.”

Abba Poemen said that a brother who lived with some other brothers asked Abba Bessarion, “What ought I to do?” The old man said to him, “Keep silence and do not always be comparing yourself with others.”

Abba Poemen also said, “Do not give your heart to that which does not satisfy your heart.”

Some old men came to see Abba Poemen and said to him, “When we see brothers who are dozing at the synaxis, shall we rouse them so that they will be watchful?” He said to them, “For my part, when I see a brother who is dozing, I put his head on my knees and let him rest.”

A brother said to Abba Poemen, “I see that wherever I go I find support.” The old man said to him, “Even those who hold a sword in their hands have God who takes pity on them in the present time. If we are courageous, he will have mercy on us.”

A brother said to Abba Poemen, “Give me a word,” and he said to him, “As long as the pot is on the fire, no fly nor any other animal can get near it, but as soon as it is cold, these creatures get inside. So it is for the monk; as long as they live in spiritual activities, the enemy cannot find a means of overthrowing them.”

A brother questioned Abba Poemen, “What ought I to do about all the turmoils that trouble me?” The old man said to him, “In all our afflictions let us weep in the presence of the goodness of God, until God shows mercy on us.”

Amma Sarah said, “If I prayed God that all humankind should approve of my conduct, I should find myself a penitent at the door of each one, but I shall rather pray that my heart may be pure towards all.”

Amma Syncletica said, “In the beginning there are a great many battles and a good deal of suffering for those who are advancing towards God and afterwards, ineffable joy. It is like those who wish to light a fire; at first they are choked by the smoke and cry, and by this means obtain what they seek (as it is said: “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:24): so we also must kindle the divine fire in ourselves through tears and hard work.

Amma Syncletica said, “Just as it is impossible to be at the same moment both a plant and a seed, so it is impossible for us to be surrounded by worldly honour and at the same time to bear heavenly fruit.”

Amma Syncletica said, “There are many who live in the mountains and behave as if they were in the town, and they are wasting their time. It is possible to be a solitary in one’s mind while living in a crowd, and it is possible for one who is a solitary to live in the crowd of her own thoughts.”

Amma Syncletica said, “Those who are great athletes must contend against stronger enemies.”

Amma Syncletica said, “Imitate the publican, and you will not be condemned with the Pharisee. Choose the meekness of Moses and you will find your heart which is a rock changed into a spring of water.”

Amma Syncletica said, “It is dangerous for anyone to teach who has not first been trained in the “practical” life. For if someone who owns a ruined house receives guests there, he does them harm because of the dilapidation of the dwelling. It is the same in the case of someone who has not first built an interior dwelling; he causes loss to those who come. By words one may convert them to salvation, but by evil behavior, one injures them.”

Amma Syncletica said, “There is grief that is useful and there is grief that is destructive. The first sort consists in weeping over one’s own faults and weeping over the weakness of one’s neighbours, in order not to destroy one’s purpose, and attach oneself to the perfect good. But there is also a grief that comes from the enemy, full of mockery, which [refuses to come face to face with the present]. This spirit must be cast out, mainly by prayer and psalmody.”