

15// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. PAUL THE FIRST HERMIT

St. Paul which was the first hermit as St. Jerome writeth, was in the time of Decius and Valerianus, emperors, the year of the incarnation of our Lord two hundred and fifty-six. This holy man, St. Paul, saw men for Christian faith cruelly tormented, wherefore he fled into the desert.

Among whom he saw two cruelly tormented. The first for that he abode firmly in his faith, the judge did do anoint all his body with honey and did do bind his hands behind him on his back, and so did him be set in the heat of the sun for to be bitten and stung of flies and wasps.

That other that was young he made him to be in a right soft bed between two sheets, among flowers and delectable roses and herbs sweet smelling, and therein he was bounden so that he might not move him. After, he made an harlot, a ribald, come to him alone for to touch his members and his body, to move to lechery. Finally, when the voluptuosity of his flesh surmounted him, and he might not defend himself ne his members, he bit off a piece of his tongue and spit it in her visage, which always enticed him to lechery by touching and by kissings, and so he voided [had nothing to do with] the temptation fleshly, and the ribauld [whore] also, and deserved to have laud and victory.

In this time St. Paul, tofore said, was young, about sixteen years of age, and dwelt in Thebaid which is a part of Egypt, with his sister Maurice. And when he saw the persecutions of Christian men, he departed and became an hermit so long and so many years, that he was old one hundred and thirteen years.

ST. ANTHONY VISITS ST. PAUL

In this time St. Anthony was a hermit in another desert and was then ninety years of age. And on a time he thought in himself that in the world was none so good ne so great an hermit as he was himself. Hereupon came to him a revelation as he slept that, beneath all, low down in that desert was an hermit better than he, a . . .

{Here is a lacuna in the text. Anthony sets out through a forest in search of this better hermit. On the way he encounters first a centaur, then a satyr, and finally a wolf. The wolf leads him to the door of St. Paul's hermitage. At first Paul does not want to come out, but at last he yields to Anthony's entreaties, he opens the door, and they embrace. }

. . . all. And whiles they were thus talking a crow came flying and brought to them two loaves of bread. And when the crow was gone St. Paul said: Be thou glad and joyful, for our Lord is debonair [gentle] and merciful, he hath sent us bread for to eat. It is forty years passed that every day he hath sent me half a loaf, but now at thy coming he hath sent two whole loaves, and double provender.

And they had question together until evensong time which of them both should entame [make the first cut] or begin to take of the bread. At the last the bread departed even between their hands, and then they ate, and drank of the well or fountain. After graces said they had all that night collation together.

ST. PAUL ASKS TO BE BURIED IN BISHOP ATHANASIUS' MANTLE

On the morn said St. Paul: Brother, it is long sith that I knew that thou dwelledst in this region and in this country, and God had promised to me thy company, I shall now shortly die and shall go to Jesu Christ for to receive the crown to me promised. Thou art come hither for to bury my body.

When St. Anthony heard that, anon he began tenderly to weep, and wailed, praying that he might die with him and go in his company.

St. Paul said: It is need yet that thou live for thy brethren, to the end that they by the ensample of thee be made firm and taught; wherefore I pray thee return to thine abbey and bring to me the mantle which Athanasius the bishop gave to thee for to wrap in my body.

Then St. Anthony marvelled of this, that he knew of this bishop and of this mantle, and after durst nothing say, but did to him reverence, like as God had spoken to him, and weeping kissed his feet and his hands and came again to his abbey with great travail and labour, for he had from that one part to that other many journeys and foul way, through hayes [hedges] and hedges, woods, stones, hills and valleys, and St. Anthony of great age and feeble of fasting, and not strong ne mighty.

ST. ANTHONY RETURNS FOR THE MANTLE TO HIS MONASTERY

When he was come to his abbey, two of his disciples, to him most secret [i.e., his chief confidants], demanded of him saying: Fair father, where have ye been so long?

And he answered: Alas! I, wretched sinner, which bear falsely the name to be a monk, I have seen Eli the prophet, I have seen John the Baptist in desert, and certes [surely] I have seen St. Paul in Paradise.

Thus speaking and beating his breast he brought the mantle out of his cell, and all stilly without more words, he went again the long way all alone through the desert unto St. Paul the hermit, having great desire to see him, for he was afeard lest he should die ere he might come again to him.

ST. ANTHONY BURIES ST. PAUL

It happed in the second journey, where St. Anthony went through the desert the third hour of the day, he saw the soul of St. Paul, shining, ascend into heaven among a great company of

angels, of prophets, and also of apostles, and anon he fell down to the earth weeping and wailing, and crying with a high voice: Alas, Paul! wherefore leavest thou me so soon, which have so little seen thee?

Then he had so great desire to see the corpse or body that he passed all the remnant of his way as soon as a bird flying, like as he was wont to tell and rehearse, and when he came to the cell of St. Paul he found that the body was right up on his knees and the visage and hands addressed towards heaven and supposed he had been alive and had made his prayers, but when he had advised [thought about] it, he knew well that he was passed out of this world.

What weepings and what wailings he made upon the body it were a piteous thing to hear; among all other he said: O holy soul, thy body showeth in death this that thou didst in thy life. After this he was much abashed [perplexed] how he should bury the body, for he had no instrument to make his sepulchre; then came two lions which much debonairly made a pit after the quantity of his body, and St. Anthony buried his body therein. And he took with him the coat of St. Paul which was made {of palm leaves}, and afterward, for great reverence, St. Anthony ware this coat and clad him withal in great and solemn feasts.

Thus this holy man St. Paul died in the year of the incarnation of our Lord two hundred and eighty-eight. Let us then pray to him that he impetrate [beseech] and get us remission of our sins, that after this life we may come to everlasting joy and bliss in heaven. Amen.

The [iconography of St. Paul the Hermit](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

Scanned by Robert Blackmon. bob_blackmon@mindspring.com.

This text was taken from the [Internet Medieval Source Book](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history.

Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use.

E-text © Paul Halsall, September 2000
halsall@fordham.edu

Reformatted with paragraphs, rubrics, italics, and {supplemental} and [explanatory] insertions by Richard Stracke, rstracke@aug.edu