

Good work is a prayer

The young man crossed the desert and finally reached the monastery of Sceta. There he asked to attend one of the abbot's talks and received permission.

That afternoon the abbot spoke about the need to meditate using the image of the Sacred Heart. Then he spoke of the importance of silence. Finally, when the talk was over, he asked the young man who had just arrived to help him to build a road to a village near the monastery.

"But why?" asked the young man. "After all, isn't the important thing to pray?"

"Praying is very important," said the abbot. "But you can pray even better if you manage with your hands to discover a way to communicate with your neighbour."

Respecting the limits of nature

The monks of Sceta gathered together under the leadership of Abbot Paulus.

"Today we shall start a fast," said Paulus. "And it will last until we are ready to have the vision of an angel."

For several days the monks drank only water and prayed. They were so enthused by Paulus' proposal that they did not suffer from hunger. But at the end of the first week, an elderly monk began to feel ill. Paulus realized that the man was going to die and decided to interrupt the fast immediately.

At that very moment an angel appeared to the group and said, "It's important that you understand the meaning of discipline and sacrifice. But it is even better for you to know the limits of nature. You do not need to violate that limit to achieve what you want."

Fleeing from the lion

A group of monks including the great Abbot Nicerius was walking through the Egyptian desert when a lion appeared. Terrified, everyone began to run.

Years later, when Nicerius was on his deathbed, one of the monks decided to ask him: "Abbot, do you remember we came across the lion?"

Nicerius nodded his head.

"That was the only time I ever saw you afraid," the monk went on.

"But I wasn't afraid of the lion."

"Then why did you run with all the rest of us?"

"I thought it better to flee one day from an animal than to spend the rest of my life fleeing from vanity."

What pleases God?

A novice asked Abbot Nicerius, "What do I have to do to please God?"

"Abraham accepted strangers, and God was pleased. Elias did not like strangers, and God was pleased. David was proud of what he did, and God was pleased. The publican before the altar was ashamed of what he did, and God was pleased. John the Baptist went into the desert, and God was pleased. Jonas went to the great city of Nineve, and God was pleased.

"So there is no formula for this. Ask your soul what it wants to do: If you walk the road of your dreams the world will be a better place."