

Readings: *Ephesians 6: 10 – 13,18; Psalm 15 (16); Matthew 19:16 – 26.*

Antony was born to wealthy Christian parents about AD 251 in southern Egypt. They died when he was about twenty years old. Soon after their deaths Antony was passing a church and heard the reading of the Gospel passage indicated above. He was moved by the words *If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.* So, he followed the Lord's advice, gave some of his lands to neighbours, sold most of the rest and gave the money to the poor.

For thirteen years he lived in cemetery and then moved into the desert where he lived almost entirely alone for another twenty years. During this period, he suffered from many temptations, which are graphically portrayed by later artists. The reading from Ephesians refers to the need to *struggle...against ...the spiritual army of evil in the heavens.*

In about 306 he founded his first monastery, consisting of a number of cells for men who lived as hermits. For five or six years he spent his time teaching and leading an increasing number of monk-hermits who joined him. A second monastery was founded in 312, after which he retired to a remote cell for the remainder of his life, except for a brief period in which he assisted the Egyptian bishops in refuting the Arian heresy, which denied the full divinity of Christ.

The age of persecution ended in AD 313 with the imperial Edict of Milan. From this time onward an increasing number of Christians sought a 'bloodless martyrdom' by escaping from the life of the world – even when it was nominally Christian – into the desert. Antony's example and teaching was influential in creating the monastic life. His *Life* was written by (Saint) Athanasius and published a few years after his death. The tradition of his teaching has led to him being called 'The Father of Monks' and it influenced the conversion of (Saints) Jerome and Augustine, as well as the Rules of Eastern and Western monastic communities..

Antony's death in 356 at the age of 105 is well documented. He was at first buried next to his cell, but in 361 his remains were moved to Alexandria, and later (to escape the Muslim invasion of Egypt) to Constantinople. The relics were eventually enshrined in the Abbey of Saint Antony in south-eastern France

