



Roman martyrology: On Thebaid (Known as Egypt Today), St. Paul, Hermit, was one of the first to embrace the monastic life.

Etymology: From the Latin meaning "small" or "humble".

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Paul was reportedly born into a Christian family in the year 229 in Thebes, Egypt. Paul's parents showed him by their own lives how to love God and worship him with one's whole heart. At the age of fifteen, Paul lost both his parents.

A few years later, in 250, Emperor Decius started a cruel persecution of the Church. Paul hid in a friend's home, fearing his own brother-in-law, who was after his money and property so the man could easily betray him to the authorities. Paul fled to the desert where he found a cave near a palm tree and a spring of fresh water. There he settled. He sewed palm branches together for clothes, and he lived on fruit and water.

Paul had intended to stay there only while the persecution lasted. But by the time it was over, he had fallen in love with the life of prayer. He felt so close to God that he decided to stay in the desert and never return to his wealthy city life, praying daily for the needs of all people and performing penance for sin.

Legend has it that after 21 years of solitude, a bird began bringing him half of a loaf of bread each day. Without knowing what was happening in the world, Paul prayed that the world would become a better place.

God showed Paul in a dream about Anthony, another hermit who was going to go look for him. Filled with happiness about his new friend, they became specially close in the few days they got to spend together, since, as Paul predicted, he died on January 15, 342. Anthony buried him in a cloak that had belonged to St. Athanasius. Then Anthony took home and treasured the garment of palm leaves that Paul had been wearing.

Thought to have been about 112 when he died, Paul is known as the "First Hermit."