

It Is Well Known That There Are Four Kinds of Monks

by St. Benedict of Nursia

St. Benedict of Nursia describes the four kinds of monks and emphasizes the importance of discipline and self-control in the spiritual life.

Scripture: Proverbs 27:17, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Hebrews 13:5, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Monastic Life", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

St. Benedict of Nursia distinguishes between four kinds of monks: Cenobites who live in monasteries under a rule and an Abbot, Anchorites or Hermits who go out to combat the devil after learning in a monastery, Sarabaites who live without discipline or experience, and Gyrovagues who wander from place to place indulging in their own desires. St. Benedict focuses on providing a rule for the Cenobites, the strongest kind of monks, with God's help.

Transcript

It is well known that there are four kinds of monks.

The first kind are the Cenobites:

those who live in monasteries

and serve under a rule and an Abbot.

The second kind are the Anchorites or Hermits:

those who,

no longer in the first fervor of their reformation,

but after long probation in a monastery,

having learned by the help of many brethren

how to fight against the devil,

go out well armed from the ranks of the community
to the solitary combat of the desert.

They are able now,
with no help save from God,
to fight single-handed against the vices of the flesh
and their own evil thoughts.

The third kind of monks, a detestable kind, are the Sarabaites.

These, not having been tested,
as gold in the furnace (Wis. 3:6),
by any rule or by the lessons of experience,
are as soft as lead.

In their works they still keep faith with the world,
so that their tonsure marks them as liars before God.

They live in twos or threes, or even singly,
without a shepherd,
in their own sheepfolds and not in the Lord's.

Their law is the desire for self-gratification:
whatever enters their mind or appeals to them,
that they call holy;
what they dislike, they regard as unlawful.

The fourth kind of monks are those called Gyrovagues.

These spend their whole lives tramping from province to province,
staying as guests in different monasteries
for three or four days at a time.

Always on the move, with no stability,
they indulge their own wills
and succumb to the allurements of gluttony,

and are in every way worse than the Sarabaites.

Of the miserable conduct of all such

it is better to be silent than to speak.

Passing these over, therefore,

let us proceed, with God's help,

to lay down a rule for the strongest kind of monks, the Cenobites.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-benedict-of-nursia/it-is-well-known-that-there-are-four-kinds-of-monks/>

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