

The Desert Mothers
Spiritual Practices From the Women of the Wilderness
March 4, 2020

Chapter 1: Introduction - Where Are the Mothers?

Desert Mothers or mamas = “lovers of souls” pg 2
...implying wise guidance and care of the souls... pg4
They offer the comfort that discomfort. pg 4

These mamas and abbas (desert fathers) are down-to-earth, blunt, and savvy about what is needed to mend the ragged fabric of human community. pg 2

In Romans 16:7, Paul names Junia as an apostle, one sent by the resurrected Christ to proclaim the gospel. Phoebe, a deacon, was sent to the Romans (Romans 16:1). pg 3

Blandina, a slave, was martyred in 177 during a persecution of Christians in Lyon and Vienne in Gaul (now France). Perpetua was executed with Felicity and four men in Carthage in 203. pg 3

To pray with the desert mothers entails coming to terms with our hungers and thirsts, our cravings in the wilderness, our unspoken, wild yearnings for community and for God’s presence. pg 5

We have collections of sayings from three ammas, Sarah, Syncretica, and Theodora. We have mention of a woman named Amma Matrona. pg 5

These women chose to respond to God’s call to a different life, and they chose in a variety of ways. Their very choosing flies in the face of centuries of mindless interpretation of the story of Eve - that foremother whose taste of the apple has been interpreted again and again to prove that women’s wills are maliciously inclined and that any choice women make cannot be well made. Wrong say the desert mothers. With our feet and our bodies, we choose Christ. With our lives and our wisdom, we choose a creation made in the image of God. With our humility and our obedience, we choose not to judge one another. With our stillness and our silence, we listen for the Voice that speaks every particle of creation into being. pg 6

Chapter 2: Desert Spirituality

“Salvation is exactly this - the two fold love of God and of our neighbor” Amma Syncretica

Each woman’s history also included a time of unease with what was expected of her, a moment of recognizing that what the living God might be calling her to be and to do was at variance with the various roles her family and her culture had to offer. When we “recognize” someone or something, we know again (“re” = again; “cognize” = to know.) When we recognize ourselves, we remember who we are called to be. pg 7-8

*For it was you who formed my inward parts;
You knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
Psalm 139:13-14*

...when we lose sight of being “wonderfully made,” we fail to see other persons or the creation in that light. pg 8

In the desert, men and women sought to recover the image of God in themselves and in one another. pg 8

... if God is willing to be merciful, then so should we. pg 9

Selected reflections on mercy:

- Reflect on moments when you have known mercy, moments when someone has extended themselves, unbidden to come to your aid or to offer comfort.
- When have you extended mercy to another person? When have you withheld judgment, acted kind, initiated relief for another who might not have a claim on your life? How did you feel about your actions?
- When have you been merciful with yourself? When have you forgiven yourself past mistakes and failures/ When have you suspended your own judgement and deference to love and mercy of God?