

EDITORIAL

ST PAUL said that Christ crucified, whom he preached, was folly to the Greeks. But even more foolish in their eyes, as the Apostle had discovered at Athens, was Christ risen from the dead. This is more than foolishness, it is fantastical nonsense. And it is probably true that most of us Christians today, with our mentalities so deeply rooted in the rational soil of Greece, find our faith in the resurrection of the dead much harder to make sense of than our faith in the power and wisdom of the cross. There is greatness and nobility about our Lord's death for us, and it evokes a ready religious response from the most indifferent, as is shown by the churches packed on Good Friday. But then hard on the heels of Good Friday comes Easter Day, like a happy ending tacked on to a Greek tragedy; add the doctrine of our own resurrection to that of our Lord's, and you have introduced the childishness of 'they all lived happily ever after'.

If we dared to be honest with ourselves, we would perhaps be tempted to agree with those Corinthians who said that there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. xv). But St Paul made it quite clear where the logic of that idea would lead; 'if the dead do not rise, neither has Christ risen; and if Christ has not risen your faith is vain, you are still in your sins. If our hope in Christ is confined to this life only, then are we of all men the most pitiable.' Without the resurrection, ours as well as our Lord's, the cross has no meaning and no power; nor therefore have mortification, spiritual discipline, moral effort.

The main articles of this number are all ascetical in tone. *Askesis* means training, and training has no meaning unless it is training for something. Likewise there is no point in abandoning yourself to the divine will, or trusting whole-heartedly in divine providence, or turning your back on the world for the desert—unless the dead rise again. That is what we are training for, to be conformed to the glory of Christ's resurrection. We train for it by conforming ourselves to his death.

We do not forget the ~~the~~ ~~cross~~ Easter, we look back on it with pride. So these ~~ascetical~~ ~~articles~~ are not out of place in this April issue. But neither ~~do~~ ~~we~~ forget the resurrection on Good

Friday. Christianity has often been derided for promising to its devotees pie in the sky. It is an accusation we should not be too hasty to deny. The way our Lord put it was, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly'.



SPIRITUALITY OF THE JUDAEAN DESERT—II:

Mar Saba and St John Damascene

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

ALL pilgrims and visitors to Jerusalem include Gethsemane, the valley of the Cedron, and the Mount of Olives in their itinerary. This eastern side of Jerusalem is all 'holy place', for as St John tells us, our Lord was often there (cf. John xviii, 1-2). Very few however linger long enough to trace the course of that occasional torrent-bed or *wadi*, which starts as the Cedron and continues down towards the Dead Sea as the Wadi en-Nar. But let us suppose that we have done so and skirted the site of Old Testament Jerusalem, past the pool of Siloam (John ix) on our right. If we continue down the course of the *wadi* by what at best would be called a bridle path, twisting and turning, strewn with boulders, we finally plunge down between high cliffs of sombre and sinister rock. We start south, but a sharp bend serves to make the general direction south-east. After about three miles we have on our right the ancient site of Deir Dôsi, or the Monastery of Theodosius, where John Moschus began his monastic life about A.D. 538, and lived and struggled after perfection, little realizing that his *Pratum Spirituale* was to become centuries later a spiritual classic, throwing much light on those happy centuries of Palestinian monastic life, and at the same time tracing the first lineaments of a style of spiritual writing which is also exemplified in the *Little Flowers* of St Francis.

These are the memories of the Christian past which come to mind as we stumble down the stony path and enter a world of savage loneliness and rocky steppe-land, which constitutes the desert of Juda stretching from the Jerusalem-Hebron hill-ridge down to the western shores of the Dead Sea—now so much better known by the finds of the Dead Sea scrolls at Kh. Qumrân.