

Monasticism

In the region of Judea, where Saint John the Forerunner had lived, monasticism reached its highest spiritual level. The inaccessible and inhospitable region of the desert where the Lord Jesus Christ had lived and acted, was the destination of many monks from all the regions of the earth, who chose the prayer and isolation as the goal of their lives. Ecclesiastic sources indicate that the region of Palestine was a pole of attraction for many monastics, however three were the areas which formed the special selection of hermits: Lake Tiberiad and the surrounding area, the region around Jerusalem and Bethlehem and the desert of Judea with the valley of the Jordan River in the south. The work of the monastic organization was tied with the greater aspects of the ascetic community, of Saint Hariton, Saint Euthymios, Saint Theodosios and Saint Savva. Saint Hariton, one of the first monks who had come to the Judean desert, introduced the Lavratic monasticism. Lavra, which means a narrow road, is governed by specific orders and regulations and at the same time it allows the members of the community freedom of initiatives and way of living. The Lavra consisted of a small team of monks who each one lived alone in the caves and would gather every Sunday at the common Church. Saint Euthymios perfected the Lavratic monasticism and made it into a system of living. In 423 he inaugurated the great Lavra east of Jerusalem. Saint Theodosios inaugurated the coenobitic monasticism. At the coenobium same stipulations and regulations were imposed on the monks regarding eating, prayers and way of life. At the coenobium the spiritual and physical ascesis was combined and controlled under austere stipulations. Saint Savvas under whose leadership monasticism got to know its greatest peak, organized a type of monastic life which combined all three systems: the Ascetic, the Lavratic and the Coenobitic. He perfected the different monastic systems and classified them in order. According to Saint Savva, the three systems of

monasticism correspond to the three steps which lead to redemption.