The Monks at Pluscarden
the life lived and what it stands for

The monastic vocation supposes two main elements: witness to the eternal truths of God, charity in the temporal relationship with man. Pope Paul VI, addressing the monks of Monte Cassino (St. Benedict’s first foundation) on October 24, 1964, said that a Benedictine monastery was designed to be “an abode of humanity, spirituality and the interior life”. In a secular and materialistic society, monastic communities represent a protest against worldliness and social disharmony, Pope Paul, while approving the monk’s separation from the world, reminds us that ‘the world and the church are realities to be faced’. It becomes a question, then, as to how, without loss to the original conception, the needs of contemporary man are to be met. Guided by their vocational grace, some communities minister actively to the needs of souls - whether in the work of teaching, giving retreats, supplying in the pastoral apostolate - while others feel drawn to further the church’s evangelical mission from inside their enclosures. Pluscarden Abbey belongs to this second category.

Committed to no external duties, the monks of Pluscarden conceive their primary service to lie in prayer, regular observance, the common life. At first sight such an interpretation of monasticism is often seen as something selfish, as a lack of concern for people outside, as a failure to carry an evangelical responsibility. On closer examination it can be seen as the conservation of energies which are now directed immediately to God. If St. Benedict, who lived in times as turbulent as our own, judged that the world could best be served by withdrawing from it and praying for it, we, fifteen centuries later, are only doing what our founder then had in mind and what in varying degrees has been practiced throughout the Benedictine tradition.

(For the article which this extract was taken from, go to www.pluscardenabbey.org/being-a-monk)

Searching for Intimacy with the Desert Fathers by Stuart Lange

When we consider the Desert Fathers, we can rightly be challenged by their faith, their commitment, their self-discipline, their disregard of worldly comfort and success, their stunning prayerfulness. But there remains a basic fallacy in their quest. God calls us to himself, in Christ. He then sends us out, not into the desert, but into the world - a world crammed with lost and hurting people.

We all need those times of stepping aside: in unhurried prayer, or in battling prayer. But Jesus’ times in prayer were not his ultimate destination. They were not the model for the whole of Christian living. They were the prelude - and accompaniment - to costly service in the midst of humanity.