

Dwelling with oneself

Patristic reading

For so often as by infectious motion we are carried too far from ourselves

[Benedict] returned to the wilderness which so much he loved, and dwelt alone with himself, in the sight of his Creator, who beholds the hearts of all men ... For so often as by infectious motion we are carried too far from ourselves, we remain the same men that we were before, and yet not with ourselves as we were before: because we are wandering about other men's affairs, little considering and looking into the state of our own soul. For shall we say that he was with himself, who went into a far country, and after he had, as we read in the Gospel, prodigally spent that portion which he received of his father, was glad to serve a citizen, to keep his hogs, and would willingly have filled his hungry belly with the husks which they ate (Lk. 17:13-16)? When he remembered those goods which he had lost, it is written that, returning into himself, he said: "How many hired men in my father's house do abound with bread?" (Lk. 15:17). If then, before he was with himself, from where did he return home to himself? Therefore I said that this venerable man dwelt with himself, because carrying himself circumspectly and carefully in the sight of his Creator, always considering his own actions, always examining himself, he never turned the eyes of his soul from himself, to behold whatsoever else ... We are two manner of ways, Peter, carried out of ourselves: for either we fall under ourselves by sinful cogitation, or else we are, by the grace of contemplation, lifted above ourselves ... Therefore, venerable Benedict in that solitary wilderness dwelt with himself, because he kept himself, and retired his cogitations within the closet of his own soul: for when the greatness of contemplation rapt him up aloft, out of all question he then left himself under himself.

Gregory the Great, *Dialogues II*, 3, 5-9