



# Abbey of the Arts

*Dancing Monk Icon Guide and Reflection Questions*

## **Abba Anthony the Great (251-356)**

*Always have God before your eyes.*

Anthony was born into a wealthy family in Egypt. After his parents died when he was still a young man, he sold or gave away his wealth to live as a hermit in the desert for many decades. He was seeking silence, solitude, and radical intimacy with God. Considered one of the first monks, others sought him out for guidance and wisdom. 'The Life of Anthony,' an early autobiography was written about the time of his death and became immensely popular, inspiring and influencing the foundation of early Christian monasticism.

Anthony invites you to consider:

***How do you nourish your inner monk?***

***What are the moments of silence you seek in your day?***



## **Amma Synclectica (380-460)**

*We must kindle the divine fire within ourselves.*

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century desert landscape of Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, Christian monasticism began flowering in response to a call to leave behind the excesses of the world. These spiritual seekers came to be known as the desert fathers and mothers. When Amma Synclectica's parents died, she sold everything to give to the poor and went with her blind sister to live as a hermit. Eventually a community of women formed around her.

Amma Synclectica invites you to consider:

***What are you called to leave behind?***



## **Angela of Foligno (1248 – 4 January 1309)**

*The world is pregnant with God.*

Known as “Mistress of Theologians,” Angela is a mystic from Italy. She came from a wealthy family, married at a young age, and had seven children. At age 40, Angela had a vision of St. Francis. When her mother, husband, and children all died a few years later, Angela joined the Third Order of St. Francis and began writing several books on spirituality. She also helped found and support several religious communities of men and women dedicated to helping the needy.

Angela of Foligno invites you to consider:

***How might your life change to be more spiritual and philanthropic?***



## **Archangels (Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel)**

*God will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

Michael the warrior, Gabriel the messenger, Raphael the healer, and Uriel the wisdom-bearer are four archangels mentioned in the sacred text of the Abrahamic traditions. Archangels are one of several types or levels of angels, which are most simply described as divine messengers. A common role for these heavenly beings is to act as a go-between for God and humans, delivering messages and blessings. Often times they appear to humans in disguise, only revealed once the message has been received.

The Archangels invites you to consider:

***What message from God would you most hope to receive?***



## **Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-543)**

*Let our hearts overflow with the inexpressible delight of love.*

St. Benedict is one of the early founders of communal monasticism. Benedict experienced his initial calling as a hermit and soon had flocks of people coming to him for guidance. He went on to found several monasteries and wrote the Rule of Benedict, an enduring and far-reaching text which continues to offer guidance to monasteries and oblates 1500 years later. The core of the Benedictine way still revolves around time in silence, *lectio divina*, and praying the Liturgy of the Hours.

Benedict invites you to consider:

***What would your rule of life look like?***



## **Brendan the Navigator (c. 484—c. 577)**

*Help me to journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown.*

Brendan is best known for the great sailing voyage he took for seven years in search of the Island Promised to the Saints. *The Navigatio*, which is the narration of this journey, was written hundreds of years after he lived. Stories include Brendan saying Easter Mass on the back of a whale and visiting the Island of the Birds, where birds would join the monks in praying the Liturgy of the Hours.

Brendan invites you to consider:

***What great journey are you being called to take?***



## **Brigid of Kildare (c. 451-525)**

*Christ dwells in every creature.*

St. Brigid was also known as the Mary of the Gaels. She founded a monastery in Kildare, which means “church of the oak” and is the site of an earlier pagan shrine. Brigid is one of the three patron saints of Ireland and wrapped in much legend and mystery. Her father was a chieftain and her mother a slave baptized by St. Patrick. Her feast day is February 1<sup>st</sup> which in the Celtic Wheel of the Year is also Imbolc. The snowdrop is one of her symbols, as it is the first of spring’s flowers.

Brigid invites you to consider:

***What spiritual seed are you called to plant and nurture?***



## **Ciaran of Clonmacnoise (c. 516—c. 549)**

*Circle me God, keep fear without, keep joy within.*

Ciaran went out to the island of Inismor to visit with the great Abbott Enda. There they both have a dream of great fruitful trees growing beside a stream in the middle of Ireland. Enda told Ciaran: “The great tree is you, Ciaran, for you are great in the eyes of God and all people. All of Ireland will be sheltered by the grace in you, and many will be nourished by your fasting and prayers. Go to the center of Ireland, and found your church on the banks of a stream.” This is how Ciaran came to found the monastic settlement at Clonmacnoise.

Ciaran invites you to consider:

***What practices lead you to your true center?***



## Clare of Assisi (1194-1253)

*We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become.*

Clare was born and raised in Assisi, where she lived her entire life. She was the oldest daughter of a local nobleman but gave up her wealth and position to follow a life dedicated to prayer and service. While Clare is often known as a friend of Saint Francis, she was a spiritual force all her own. She started the Order of Poor Ladies (later renamed the Order of Poor Clares in her honor). While she was a gentle soul who often struggled with illness, she stayed true to her vision of a new religious order, even in the face of opposition from Church authorities.

Clare invites you to consider:

***What commitments are so strong in your heart you are willing to fight for them?***



## Colman of Kilmacduagh (c. 560 - 632)

*A robin sings of the beauty found in stones and thorns.*

St. Colman went into the forest of the Burren in Ireland and found a cave where he lived as a hermit. He brought a rooster, a mouse, and a fly with him. The rooster would wake him for his morning prayers. The mouse would nibble on his ear if he fell back to sleep, and the fly would help him keep his place in his book of prayers. He lived there for seven years in silent contemplation, allowing the wilderness to teach him. Finally, he was called back to community life and built his monastery Kilmacduagh (means "church of Macduagh"), near Gort. It became a large ecclesiastical site with many pilgrims seeking it out.

Colman invites you to consider:

***What companions and helpers do you have on your journey?***



## **Columcille of Iona (521-597)**

*Alone with none but you, my God,  
I journey on my way.*

Columcille is one of the three patron saints of Ireland. He founded many monasteries there. In the year 563, he traveled with twelve other monks to cross the sea in a coracle and landed on a small island off the coast of Scotland, now known as Iona. It was here that he began his new work and Iona became a center of pilgrimage for Celtic Christianity. From Iona, many other monastic settlements were founded across Scotland, out to the Hebrides.

Columcille invites you to consider:

***What spiritual foundations are you called to lay down?***



## **Desmond Tutu (7 October 1931 – 26 December 2021)**

*We address God in the quiet of our hearts, in hymns and psalms, in dance and chant, with tears, with pleas, and with rejoicing.*

Desmond was born and raised in South African. He married Momalizo Leah Tutu and had four children. Desmond was a teacher before becoming an Anglican priest. He taught in seminaries and universities, as well as being one of the leading African activists in anti-apartheid and human rights. Desmond eventually became the Anglican bishop of Cape Town, where he continued to inspire and teach others. Even in retirement, Desmond continued to speak out on behalf of human rights in South Africa and around the world.

Desmond Tutu invites you to consider:

***How do you respond to God's presence in your life?***



## **King David (c. 1040-970 B.C.E.)**

*David danced before God with all his might.*

Young David famously slays the Philistine giant, Goliath, with a single stone from his sling-shot. Thus David becomes a champion in Saul's army, leading many successful campaigns against the Israelite's enemies. David is anointed king by the Prophet Samuel. He is eventually able to defeat the Philistines and establish the Kingdom of Israel. David dances before the Ark of the Covenant when he brings it to Jerusalem and its new home on what will become the Temple Mount.

David invites you to consider:

***What giants are you called to face?***

***What battles are you called to fight?***



## **Dearbhla of Belmullet (6th century)**

*She looked at the world as if for the first time.*

Dearbhla was supposed to marry but didn't want to. She fled to County Mayo and her fiancée followed. She asked him why he loved her, and he swooned over her beautiful eyes. The story tells us she then plucked them out of her head and extended them out to him. He was horrified and ran away. Dearbhla is then said to have washed her eyes in the waters of the holy well and her eyes and sight were miraculously restored. Dearbhla then set up her monastery at there.

Dearbhla invites you to consider:

***What or who are you being called to see with fresh eyes?***



## **Dorothy Day (1897-1980)**

*Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet too.*

Along with Peter Maurin, Dorothy Day started *The Catholic Worker* newspaper in the 1930s. This movement of the same name has grown into a leading voice for the poor and against injustice. She was also a Benedictine Oblate at St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle, IL and often went there on retreat. Although she famously said, "Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed so easily," the Church has begun the canonization process.

Dorothy Day invites you to consider:

***What outside labels are you called to reject?***

***How do you define yourself?***



## **Enda of Inismor (5th century)**

*Seeking the way light, water, and stone can remind of elemental things.*

In the year 484 Enda's brother, who was a king in the province of Munster, gave him some land on the island of Inismor where he set up a monastery. Enda is known as "the patriarch of Irish monasticism" because of his impact on the spread of monastic spirituality and most of the monks of his time would have at least visited Enda to gain wisdom from him including St. Ciaran, St. Brendan, St. Colman, St. Columcille, and St. Sourney. Inismor became an important pilgrimage destination.

Enda invites you to consider:

***Who might you seek mentorship from in the spiritual life?***





## **Francis of Assisi (c. 1181-1226)**

*The world is my monastery.*

Francis founded one of the most widespread and enduring religious orders. His focus on simplicity and spirituality led him to become a reformer within the Catholic Church, helping to rebuild it. He received the Stigmata (or marks of Christ's Crucifixion) as a sign of his piety. Francis is known for his strong connection to nature. He is the patron saint of animals. Many churches today still hold "blessing of the animals" ceremonies on his feast day, October 4<sup>th</sup>.

Francis invites you to consider:

***How might you deepen your intimacy with nature?***



## **Guinefort the Greyhound (c. 13<sup>th</sup> Century)**

*Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place*

Guinefort is a folk saint and a canine who was the companion of a French knight near Lyon. Due to a tragic rush to judgement, the knight killed Guinefort because he thought she had eaten his child. But Guinefort had actually saved the child's life by killing the snake that was about to attack the infant. The knight buried Guinefort in a well, but when locals learned of the greyhound's sacrifice they began to venerate the tree that grew up near the well.

Guinefort the Greyhound invites you to consider:

***What sacrifices you make for the protection and betterment of others?***



## **Gobnait of Ballyvourney (5th-6th c.)**

*Go seek the place of your resurrection.*

Gobnait first founded a community on the island of Inisheer. Then an angel appeared and instructed her to find the place where nine white deer would be grazing. Only there would she would find her true place of resurrection. She wandered across Ireland in search. When she arrived to Ballyvourney in County Cork, she saw the nine white deer grazing all together just as the angel had promised, so she settled there and founded her monastic community.

Gobnait invites you to consider:

***What or where is the place of your resurrection?***



## **Harriet Tubman (c. March 1822 – March 10, 1913)**

*God set the North Star in the heavens and meant I should be free.*

Harriet Tubman was born into slavery just south of the Mason-Dixon Line in Maryland. She was brought up in the Methodist church. Harriet eventually escaped north to Pennsylvania. But she soon joined the Underground Railroad, making thirteen rescue mission that freed 70 people. Harriet worked as an abolitionist up to and through the American Civil War. Later in life, Harriet became very involved with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and her visions and vivid dreams have become part of her enduring legacy.

Harriet Tubman invites you to consider:

***What is a sign or symbol of your freedom?***



## **Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)**

*I am a feather on the breath of God.*

Hildegard of Bingen was a mystic who lived in the Rhine valley of Germany. She was a Benedictine, living first as an anchorite. Later she founded her own community of nuns in Rupertsberg and in Eibingen. Hildegard was an incredibly gifted visionary who wrote theological texts, had her visions illuminated, and wrote extensive compositions of music to pray during the Liturgy of the Hours which was the center of their prayer life. She was a herbal healer and wrote a book of medicine.

Hildegard invites you to consider:

***What creative work are you called to focus on right now?***



## **Howard Thurman (1899-1981)**

*There is something that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself.*

Howard Thurman was an American writer, teacher, philosopher, theologian, and civil rights leader whose radical nonviolence approach was influential to countless social justice movements. Most famously, he was a mentor to Martin Luther King Jr. Thurman was dean of the chapels at Howard University and Boston University, as well as co-founded one of the first interdenominational and interracial churches in America. An author of over twenty books, Howard Thurman continues to be a major influence of contemplative practice and social justice.

Howard Thurman invites you to consider:

***How does your practice of silence sustain or inspire your commitment to working for justice in the world?***



## **Ignatius of Loyola (23 October 1491 – 31 July 1556)**

*Go set the world on fire.*

The youngest of thirteen siblings, Ignatius grew up in the Basque region of northern Spain and trained to be a soldier from a young age. Recovering from a battle injury, Ignatius' sister-in-law gave him a book on the lives of the saints to read. His subsequent saint-inspired conversion included simple contemplation that led to his creation of the 'Spiritual Exercises.' Ignatius continued to study theology and went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He ultimately founded a new order known as the Society of Jesus, or simply the Jesuits.

Ignatius of Loyola invites you to consider:

***What changes to your life do you need to stop and contemplate?***



## **Ita of Killeedy (died c. 570)**

*I thirst for divine love.*

Ita is the second most significant woman saint in Ireland after Brigid and her name means thirst. When she was young she had a dream where she was gifted three precious stones. Unsure as to its meaning, she pondered it. Later, in another visitation, it was revealed to her that throughout her life she would receive many dreams and visions, and the three stones represented the gifts of the Trinity coming to her. At the monastery she founded, she educated many young people.

Ita invites you to consider:

***For what do you thirst the most now in your life?***



## **John of the Cross (1542-1591)**

*Oh night thou was my guide.*

John of the Cross lived in Spain during a time of much religious persecution. He was imprisoned and tortured for many months, during which time many of his great poems were composed. For him the spiritual life is about realizing our union with God, not acquiring it. We need to let go of everything that keeps us from seeing this reality. The dark night journey is about stripping away all of our false idols and securities so that we might come to a more profound realization of the love that already dwells within us.

John invites you to consider:

***What are some old images of God that you have outgrown?***

***What new ones have you embraced?***



## **Julian of Norwich (1343-1416)**

*The fullness of joy is to see God in everything.*

Julian lived much of her life as a permanent anchoress, walled into her cell attached to the church. She would have experienced solitude as well as times when she offered spiritual direction to those who came to her window. During a period of grave illness she had a series of visions which inspired her to write "Revelations of Divine Love" (the first English language book authored by a woman). Julian preached a God of love in the midst of the Plague.

Julian invites you to consider:

***During difficult seasons of life, in what ways does the God of Love sustain you?***



## **Kevin of Glendalough (498-618)**

*He finds himself linked into a network of eternal life.*

There is a story of Kevin praying every day with arms outstretched. One day, a blackbird landed in his palm, and slowly built a nest. Kevin realized what was happening and knew that he could not pull his hand back with this new life being hatched there. So he spent many days waiting for the eggs to be laid, and the tiny birds to hatch, and for them to ready themselves to fly away.

Kevin invites you to consider:

***What divine gifts are you being invited to accept?  
To what holy surprises are you being called to surrender?***



## **Mary, Mother of God (c. 16 BCE - c. 48 CE)**

*My soul proclaims the greatness of our God, my spirit rejoices in God.*

While still betrothed (but not yet married) to Joseph of the House of David, Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel who told her she had been chosen by God to give birth to the long awaited Messiah. She visits her cousin Elizabeth who is also pregnant with John the Baptist and he leaps in her womb. Mary was present at the crucifixion of her son and was one of the first witnesses to the resurrected Christ.

Mary invites you to consider:

***What is the holy birthing you are being asked to say Yes to?***



## **Mechtild of Magdeburg (c. 1207 – c. 1282/1294)**

*God wants to lead you in the heavenly dance.*

Born to a noble family, Mechtild had a vision of the Holy Spirit at twelve years old. She eventually left home to become a Beguine, a Christian mystic, at Magdeburg, Germany. She had many visions and wrote seven books. The most famous over her writings is “The Flowering Light of Divinity” and was written in the German vernacular of her day. Mechtild was not afraid to confront Church authorities and is remembered as a leading female figure of her era.

Mechtild of Magdeburg invites you to consider:

***What is your vision of Holy and the Divine?***



## **Meister Eckhart (c. 1260 – c. 1328)**

*The light will overflow your soul and dance with radiance in your life.*

Eckhart Von Hochheim born in what is now central Germany. He joined the Dominican order as a young man. Eckhart soon earned a reputation as a good preacher and quickly rose in the rank of his order. He was accused of heresy in his day and fell into obscurity for many centuries. But Eckhart’s modern reputation is as one of the Church’s great mystics who has influenced many modern theologians and church leaders.

Meister Eckhart invites you to consider:

***What has the overabundance of God’s love created in your life?***



## **Melangell of Powys (6th century)**

*Take the soft hare of your life into your arms.*

Melangell fled from Ireland to Wales to live a hermit life. One day hunters came chasing a rabbit across the fields. The rabbit leaped into Melangell's cloak and found sanctuary there. The hunters and their dogs were not able to approach. The prince was so impressed by Melangell that he wanted to marry her. She declined, so instead he gifted her the land where she lived as a sanctuary for all who are being hunted. A beautiful church still stands in this valley in Wales.

Melangell invites you to consider:

***What parts of myself are longing for protection and sanctuary?***



## **Prophet Miriam (1446 BCE)**

*All the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing.*

Miriam is the older sister to Moses. After the plagues, when the pharaoh's pursuing chariots and charioteers are drowned in the Red Sea, it is Miriam who takes up her tambourine and leads the people in a spontaneous song of praise. This "Canticle of Miriam" is perhaps the oldest written portion of the Bible. Miriam was also a leading figure during the wilderness experience of the Book of Exodus.

Miriam invites you to consider:

***What brings you joy and calls you to dance?***





## **Muirgen of Lough Neagh (6th century)**

*They heard the celebration of angels beneath the waves.*

Liban was a young woman whose family drowned when a great lake gushed up. She and her dog survived by swimming below and finding a cave and lived there for a year. During this time she was transformed into a mermaid and her dog into an otter. Her angelic singing caused her to be discovered by a passing boat and she agreed to come to shore. She was baptized Muirgen (sea-born) and immediately died and ascended to heaven. She was buried in a nearby monastery.

Muirgen invites you to consider:

***What caves in your life offer you a place of safety and transformation?***



## **Nicholas Black Elk (1863-1950)**

*I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit.*

A Native American who was a second cousin to Crazy Horse, Nicholas Black Elk fought at the Battle of Little Bighorn and survived the Wounded Knee Massacre. Later in life he converted to Catholicism and became a catechist. He is known for his spiritual visions and teachings, combining sacred Lakota and Roman Catholic teachings. A man with a foot firmly rooted in two cultures and faiths, his poetry and preaching sheds new light on the commonality of his shared spirituality.

Nicholas invites you to consider:

***What worlds do you straddle? What helps you to hold this tension?***



## **Oscar Romero (15 August 1917 – 24 March 1980)**

*A church that preaches a gospel that does not unsettle: what kind of gospel is that?*

Oscar's family arranged for him to apprentice with a carpenter, but he was called to study for the priesthood. His studies took him to Rome, but eventually returned to his native El Salvador where he was a humble parish priest for many years. Oscar rose slowly in the church hierarchy. In the midst of the Salvadorian Civil War the quietly pious Oscar was appointed Archbishop of El Salvador, but quickly became an outspoken opponent to the oppression and violence in his country at great personal sacrifice.

Oscar Romero invites you to consider:

***How might you speak out against injustice and on behalf of the oppressed?***



## **Patrick of Armagh (385-460)**

*Christ within me and all around me, in everyone I meet.*

When Patrick was young, he was captured by pirates and taken to Ireland where he lived as a slave for six years. During this time, while spending long hours in solitude tending sheep, he had a spiritual awakening. Through dreams and other voices, Patrick was able to escape and return back home again. After many years, he had another dream where he heard the Irish people calling out to him to return to the land of his enslavement.

Patrick invites you to consider:

***What from your past are you called to reclaim?***

***What difficult past experience are you called to face with new resolve?***



## **Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)**

*May what I do flow from me like a river.*

Rainer Maria Rilke was a German-language poet who was born in Prague and traveled extensively during his lifetime, living in a variety of cities such as Paris, Munich, and Vienna. He was not a religious man but appreciated intensely the human quest for intimacy with the divine. His earliest book of poetry, *The Book of Hours*, was inspired by time spent at a Russian monastery. The poems are written as prayers to God.

Rainer invites you to consider:

***What role does poetry play in your own loving for divine connection?***



## **Sourney of Drumacoo (6th century)**

*Walking the rounds, footsteps bless the ground.*

Sourney is one of the female Irish saints, and while there is little written about her, two sacred sites continue to be dedicated to her memory. The first is on the island of Inismor and was her hermitage. Later in her life, she was called to Drumacoo where there is a large church and holy well dedicated to her memory. We don't know the details of her life and service, but despite this, two beautiful sites persist over fifteen hundred years to carry her spirit forward.

Sourney invites you to consider:

***What is the state of your inner well or sacred source?***



## **Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)**

*Allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise, and love.*

St. Teresa of Avila is probably best known for her book on the soul's inward journey, *The Interior Castle*, in which she likens the soul to a castle made from a single diamond with a series of concentric rooms within. As the ego is slowly released and love is embraced, the soul eventually discovers the treasure of divine communion at the very center of things. This icon depicts a moment of ecstasy she describes in her writing when she tasted the sweetness of divine love.

Teresa invites you to consider:

***What hidden treasures are you being called to discover?***



## **Sister Thea Bowman (1937-1990)**

*I want to live until I die.*

Born in Mississippi, Thea Bowman converted to Roman Catholicism at the age of nine years old and later joined the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Thea earned an MA and PhD in English. She was a teacher, a scholar, and an evangelist. She was instrumental in creating an African American Catholic hymnal and the foundation of the National Black Sisters Conference. In her later years, Sister Bowman became a much sought-after speaker on spirituality and faith and was known for her joyous, vibrant spirit and love of music and dancing as a spiritual practice.

Sister Thea Bowman invites you to consider:

***What brings you the fullness of life?***



## **Thomas Merton (1915-1968)**

*Join in the joy of the cosmic dance.*

Thomas Merton lived out his monastic commitment at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky. He was a part of the Trappist order, which is a reform movement of the Cistercians and the Benedictines. It is known for its ascetic lifestyle and simplicity of architecture. He is probably best known for his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, but went on to write dozens of books about contemplation, journals of his inner life, as well as books of poetry.

Merton invites you to consider:

***What aspect of your life are you being called to simplify?***

