

An Interview with Robert J. Wicks

Q. In your book *Crossing the Desert* you mention four questions that all of us must respond to in the spiritual life. What are they?

A. The first question is: What is filling me now? The second: Why do I resist letting go? The third: How do I let go? And the fourth, the most intriguing one, is: Once I let go and “the room is swept clean” what do I fill myself with that is both satisfying yet still leaves me empty to experience life anew?

Q. You also mention three gates we must pass through in our spiritual journey; why do you emphasize the third one so strongly?

A. The first gate is *Passion*. We must have a sense of energy and awe in how we face life and seek God. The second gate is *Knowledge*. It is foolish not to be open to the wisdom that we have been graced with in life; that is why this book draws on the guidance of contemporary figures (Merton, Nouwen, Suzuki, Kornfield . . .) and fourth century desert *abbas* and *ammās*. However, the narrowest gate is the third one: *Humility*. It was seen as the cardinal virtue of the desert. With it almost anything is possible. Yet, it is so rare today in both the United States and even in parts of the Church.

Q. You close the book by offering guidance on how to become a modern desert apprentice and offer three suggested steps to inner freedom. Would you share one point you make in that section that you would like to leave us with?

A. Desert wisdom includes, at its core, an appreciation of: gratitude, simplicity, a listening spirit, appreciation of one’s vulnerability, recognition of the fragility of life, the necessity of reading scripture as if your own identity were on the line (because it is!) and the importance of unceasing prayer. *Crossing the Desert* offers ways to embrace all of these elements of the spiritual life. It is done not just for the sake of the person reading it but for those whom they touch in life as well because one of the greatest gifts we can share with others is a sense of our own peace...but we can’t share what we don’t have!