



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States**

**The Monthly Message
to the Fathers, the Priests**

March 2020

The Priest and Credits

Just as it is important for individuals to be concerned about balances, stocks and credits while managing their financial affairs of expenditure and savings; so is it important for priests to be attentive to these and to other types of balances as well to ensure successful management of priesthood and bring about good harvesting and fruitful blessings for themselves and those whom they serve. Some of those important deposits are:

1. A Stock of Spiritualities

Spirituality is the core of a priest's service. St. Paul clarifies this point to the Corinthians saying, *"If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?"* (1 Corinthians 9:11). Therefore, a priest is responsible for procuring a balance of spiritualities sufficient for him and for those whom he will serve. This balance is strongly interconnected with his personal active spiritual life. A spiritual priest is not someone with a holy appearance in terms of outlook, words or prayers. A spiritual father is the one who gets filled with the Holy Spirit in order to become one of God's sons guided by God's Spirit.

Therefore, guarding his spiritual life and its perpetual orderly manner of growth is of prime importance as an essential stock for life in general and service in particular.

St. Paul hints at the immense power of a spiritual person by saying, *"But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one"* (1 Corinthians 2:15). Consequently a priest's spirituality is not to be reduced to outward appearance or social fame, but is to be raised to the standard of the fullness of the spirit of wisdom, counseling, love, and guidance, *"The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears"* (Isaiah 11:2-3). It is obvious that a spiritual reserve is totally and partially related to prayer, *"for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer"* (1 Timothy 4:5).

Therefore, dear brother, be concerned about your spirituality and abide in it. *"Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all"* (1 Timothy 4:15).

2. A Credit of Love, Good Works

The parable of the unjust steward shows the character of the master. Although the former was unjust and a thief, yet he knew the value of good works and acts of love for others as tools for obtaining acceptance. Likewise, a priest has the best opportunity to do good and express love for all not only for the sake of gaining acceptance, but for following the steps of his master; *"how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him"* (Acts 10:38).

Good works come from a pure heart, *“For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money”* (Titus 1:7); with no ulterior motives but to build a rich balance of love in people’s hearts.

“At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up” (Acts 9:36-40).

How beautiful it is for a priest's good works to honor and witness for Him. St. Paul said, *“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:2).

3. A Stock of Trust

Firm trust in and towards someone is built on several premises:

- **Love.** The more love exchanged between a priest and his congregation, the greater is the stock of trust.
- **Justice.** Rational, non-discriminatory treatment for all the members of the congregation regardless of race, color or social status, will increase people’s trust in their priest (their father) *“I will not show partiality to a chosen group but be*

equally concerned for all” (from the priest’s vow of commitment).

- **Credibility.** Compatibility between a priest’s words, actions and life style will go a long way in building trust. St. Luke writes about Jesus Christ's credibility saying *“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen”* (Acts 1:1-2).
- **Time Factor.** Planting and harvesting are two interrelated, irreversible essentially time-bound actions. To plant and reap obedience and submission, one has to put in mind the time factor. The fruit of obedience and submission do not appear between a day and a night. Those two virtues are planted and gradually harvested on the basis of a priest's love and truthfulness in his service. St. Paul advises, *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”* (Galatians 6:9).

Sadly enough, so many spiritual and corporeal fathers suffer from lack of trust between them and their children because of failure in correctly building and perpetuating such trust.

Beloved father, trust is not granted on the basis of the “father” title. It is gradually constructed. Therefore, be concerned with serving and loving your congregation candidly. All the rest will be added to you: trust, love and perhaps subservience, as is the case with the advice the good, wise elders had given to King Rehoboam, *“Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, ‘How do you advise me to answer these people?’”* And they spoke to him, saying, *‘If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak*

good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.” (1 Kings 12:6-7).

4. Faith

This is a crucial and basic credit for every Christian generally and every priest specifically. The best example is the one the Lord has given concerning sitting and calculating the costs before building a tower or going to war. Is there enough in the faith account that will ensure safety during the journey with Jesus Christ bearing the cross of self-denial and willing to let go of the people and things that might hinder service?

Unshakable faith is the basic and most protective credit that needs to be activated and enlarged in order to shelter both priests and congregations against the dangerous attacks and temptations along the journey of life.

Beloved father, how desirable it is to share with the fathers and apostles in their request to Jesus Christ, saying *“And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith.’”* (Luke 17:5). How enriching it is to always remember God's miraculous hand in many occasions during service, praying *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits”* (Psalm 103:2). Remembering God's interventions during weaknesses, failures, hopelessness; and His repair of damages and restorations of the years eaten by locusts, will add to the investment in faith and trust in the glorious Lord who works within you and with you at any circumstances.

Beloved brother, you are required to invest in faith and strive to make it grow as much as possible, *“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith”* (1 John 5:4).

5. A Monetary Stock

Having a monetary stock is not controversial to Jesus Christ's teachings concerning the love of money; because the concept refers to supervising for the sake of managing the financial needs and requirements. A priest should follow St. Paul's teaching to the Philippians, *“I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:12-13).

As the head of his family, a priest is responsible for taking care of their financial needs not out of concern for the future or covetousness, *“For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world”* (1 John 2:16).

A priest who knows how to manage his household successfully will be able to do so with the church of the living God. On the other hand, a priest who stumbles in financial affairs either through bad gain or mismanagement becomes the subject of concern. As God has warned Jeremiah, *“If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?”* (Jeremiah 12:5).

Therefore, successful tracking of finances is a sign of good managerial skills. Correct decisions resemble Joseph's successful leadership traits in governing Egypt; taking advantage of the good bountiful years to supply for the needy years. Thus, Joseph deserved to be described by Pharaoh as unique in his performance, *“And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?’ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you.’”* (Genesis 41:38-39).