



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

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

November 2020

Wisdom in Priesthood

“Thus, she reaches mightily from one end all the way to the other, and she orders all things sweetly. I have loved her and searched for her from my youth, and have asked to take her to me as my spouse, and I became a lover of her form” (Wisdom of Solomon 8:1-2).

True Wisdom

Last month's article, October, dealt with the first church services addressing the need for finding and anointing godly people “...men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom...” (Acts 6:3); to "serve tables" in order for the apostles to devote themselves entirely to prayer, and evangelism emphasizing the need for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in carrying out the process. This month's article elaborates on those required traits focusing specifically on the last but not least one "wisdom". No one but Solomon has written so elaborately on this holy trait.

“And if anyone loves justice, her labors hold great virtues: for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice and virtue, and nothing is more useful in human life. And if one desires a multitude of knowledge, she knows the past and forecasts the future; she knows the subtleties of conversation and the response to arguments; she understands the signs and portents, before the events take place, events both of the present time and of future ages. Therefore, I resolved to take her to me to live together, knowing that she will be a good counselor and will console my thoughts and my weariness. Because of her, I have clarity in the midst of confusion, and honor among the elders in my youth; and I will be found to be astute in judgment, and will be admired in the sight of the mighty, and the faces of leaders will wonder at me. When I am silent, they will wait for me; when I speak, they will respect me; and when I talk for too long, they will put their hands on their mouths. Thus, by means of her, I will have immortality, and I will bequeath an everlasting memorial to those who come after me. I will set the peoples in order, and nations will be subject to me. Hearing me, terrible kings will be afraid; to the multitude, I will be seen as good and valiant in war. When I go into my house, I will repose myself with her, for her conversation has no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but only joy and gladness. Thinking these things within myself, and recalling in my heart that immortality is the intention of wisdom, and that in her friendship is good enjoyment, and in the works of her hands are honors without flaw, and in debate with her is understanding, and glory in

sharing conversation with her; I went about seeking, so that I might take her to myself" (Wisdom of Solomon 8:7-18).

These verses analyze the good traits imparted freely by wisdom and which ought to be sought by those called for priesthood specifically and by every believer in general.

1. Learning and Teaching

Priesthood requires that a priest get diligently fortified with knowledge in order to be able to disseminate this knowledge to those whom he serves. As St. Paul has taught Timothy, "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15). This can only be sought and found in wisdom and righteousness as worded by Solomon, "*And if anyone loves justice, her labors hold great virtues: for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice and virtue, and nothing is more useful in human life*" (Wisdom of Solomon 8:7).

2. Honor and exaltation

"Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory she will deliver to you" (Proverbs 4:8-9).

This is not a prideful honor, but a glorification inherent in the Holy Sacrament of Priesthood, "*Because of her, I have clarity in the midst of confusion, and honor among the elders in my youth; and I will be found to be astute in judgment, and will*

be admired in the sight of the mighty, and the faces of leaders will wonder at me" (Wisdom of Solomon 8:10-11). A priest should understand that any honor and respect he receives is derived from the inward honor of Jesus Christ who dwells in him, "*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (Colossians 2:3).

3. Establishment of Justice

God's commandment is clear concerning justice administered by priests, "*For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts*" (Malachi 2:7). Therefore, a priest is required all the time to be careful while giving advice or settling matters in the church or among members of his congregation, "*and I will be found to be astute in judgment, and will be admired in the sight of the mighty, and the faces of leaders will wonder at me*" (Wisdom of Solomon 8:11).

4. Spiritual and Corporal Shepherding

Sensing the importance and urgency of wisdom, Solomon implores God to send him that required, indispensable wisdom saying, "*Send her out of your holy heavens and from the throne of your majesty, so that she is with me and labors with me, and I will know what is acceptable with you. For she knows and understands all things, and will lead me soberly in my works, and will guard me by her power. And my works will be acceptable, and I will govern your people justly, and I will be worthy of the throne of my father. Moreover, who will know your mind, unless you give wisdom and send your holy spirit*

from on high? And in this way, those who are on earth are corrected in their path, and men learn the things that are pleasing to you. For by wisdom they are saved, who have pleased you, O Lord, from the beginning” (Wisdom of Solomon 9:10-12,17-19).

5. Spiritual Victory

The outcome of acquiring wisdom is spelled out in these verses, *“When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things”,* (Proverbs 2:10-12).

“Hearing me, terrible kings will be afraid; to the multitude, I will be seen as good and valiant in war” (Wisdom of Solomon 8:15).

False Wisdom

False wisdom is earthly wisdom wrought by self-deceit. St. James describes it saying, *“This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there”* (James 3:15-16).

A priest has to be cautious not to depend on his personal wisdom lest he drift away and fall in the trap of self-righteousness that will inevitably take him down the wrong paths of arrogance, self-dependence without seeking the help

of the Holy Spirit, *“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil”* (Proverbs 3:7).

Isaiah warns against this type of earthly wisdom, *“Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!”* (Isaiah 5:21).

The remedy is firstly in the fear of God, *“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones”* (Proverbs 3:7-8); and secondly in the virtue of humbleness. Humility is the key to acquiring wisdom and the measuring stick by which anyone should calculate the rate of their spiritual growth.

St. James described the main features of true wisdom, *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”* (James 3:17-18).

While all these traits are important, a priest's measure of humility is directly related to his gentleness and willingness to yield.

Gentleness coming from a contrite heart that admits a priest's personal sinfulness will make him patient and compassionate in dealing with the mistakes and sins of the congregation. Thus he will be ready to pray for himself as well as for them

Yielding by definition, this trait means "not hard or rigid". In spiritual terms it translates as obedient, not seeking one's own way or desire even when it seems right. Obedience especially to

authority is a true sign of humility and is well pleasing in God's sight and an invitation to the wisdom granted by Holy Spirit.

Articles on the Christian History

The Sixth Century

Abba Daniel of Scetis

St. Daniel, hegumen of Scetis, is one of the sixth century saints whose biography testifies for the aestheticism and power of the Coptic Orthodox monasticism manifested in authentic spirituality and service. Father of many monks in the desert of Scetis, he presented to the church bishops fortified with knowledge and discernment through the study and preparatory programs offered in the monasteries in which St. Daniel taught along with other well learned and pious elders. In addition, St. Daniel's educational fortification extended to the nuns' monasteries.

St. Daniel was born in 485 AD. At the age of sixteen, he went to the desert of Scetis embracing monasticism. His desire to live a solitary life led him to the inner desert where he fell in the hands of the Berbers three times. During the third time, in trying to escape, St. Daniel threw a stone at his arrester that killed the man. That incident tormented St. Daniel with the feeling of guilt. He asked Pope Timothy III (518-536 AD) to punish him. However, Pope Timothy assured him of the legitimacy of his self- defense act. In addition, many of the other fathers that he had consulted confirmed Pope Timothy's justification. In the end, to appease his troubled conscience, he submitted himself to the judiciary authorities in Alexandria. Strangely enough, the

judge acquitted him as not guilty and wished St. Daniel had killed even more of those Berbers.

St. Daniel's Heroic Stories

- **Anastasia the Worshipper**

She was a deaconess from Antioch of rich and noble descent whom the Emperor of Constantinople wanted to marry. She escaped to Egypt with St. Severus the Antioch (518 AD). Disguised in men's attire, she revealed her story to St. Daniel who allowed her to stay in a cave close by where she had lived in disguise for twenty-eight years. Her food and water supply were provided for her once a week by one of St. Daniel's fellows who would leave the provision by the door of her cave. Whenever Anastasia needed spiritual advice, she would write to St. Daniel in Greek, a language that the disciple who would carry back the written script did not understand what was written. Thus back and forth messages were conducted without revealing her identity until her repose time.

- **Eulogius, the Stone Cutter**

On his way to the city to sell the straw pots, his handwork, St. Daniel met Eulogius, a stone cutter gaining his daily living by cutting stones and helping the poor. Seeing how hard Eulogius worked to care for the poor and house the sojourners, St. Daniel prayed asking God to give the man more money. In response to St. Daniel's prayer, Eulogius found a treasure hidden in the stones he was cutting. In Constantinople, Eulogius left his first mission of alms-giving and pursued worldly desires and status becoming a minister. Upon hearing about the wrong path that

Eulogius had taken, St. Daniel went to Constantinople to meet with him but was prevented by the guards of the palace. One night, St. Daniel saw a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ, the judge, demanding Eulogius' lost soul from St. Daniel. Back to his monastery, St. Daniel continued praying for Eulogius. However, an angel of the Lord appeared to him asking him to stop interfering with God's plan concerning Eulogius. Eventually, in 532 AD, Eulogius involved himself in a conspiracy against Emperor Justinian. After that he fled to Egypt and went back to his original trade, that of cutting stones. Then he met with St. Daniel and narrated to him what had befallen him because of the money that had led him astray. St. Daniel comforted him and restored him to his love of the poor and alms giving.

- **The Repentant Thief**

One night, a thief pretending to be St. Daniel and dressed up similarly, broke into one of the nun's convents overseen by St. Daniel. The nuns, fooled by the thief's appearance asked him to pray on their blind sister. Ridiculing their faith, the thief asked them to wash her eyes with the same water they had used to wash his feet. To his amazement, the nun had her sight restored. The thief was deeply moved. In repentance he sought St. Daniel to confess his awful deed. St. Daniel told him that he had been present with his spirit at the convent during the incident. The thief adopted Christianity, was baptized and became a follower of St. Daniel.

- **Tolerance of Persecution**

St. Daniel was exposed to terrible beating to the point of death for having rejected the Tome of Leo, Chalcedonian heresy,

before Emperor Justinian's representative. Consequently, Upon the advice of his followers, St. Daniel escaped to Tambok where he erected a monastery and stayed there till the death of the Emperor (565 AD). For forty and half years St. Daniel lived a life of fasting and prayers in the deserts performing a lot of miracles, fathering many monks and nuns and bearing a lot of sufferings for the sake of his faith. Near the time of his departure, he gathered his followers to inform them and to strengthen and console them. He reposed on the eighth day of Pashons.

- **St. Daniel's Sanctity in the Sight of the Latin and Greek Churches**

Although the Latin and Greek churches admit the sanctity of St. Daniel's followers and count them among their saints, yet the Greek Church questions his orthodoxy. On the other hand, the Latin Church openly refused to pronounce him as a saint because of his rejection of the findings of the Chalcedonian Council (451 AD). Strangely enough the Greek Church has in their synaxarion both St. Anastasia and Eulogius the Stone Cutter commemorating the first on the 10th of March and the second on the 27th of April.

In an article on the biography of St. Daniel, (posted on the St. Macarius Monastery website) Father Matthew the Poor wrote, "The old historians had done St. Daniel harm and disfavor because he had been a proponent of and believer in Monotheism and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, they tried to spoil his reputation by questioning his ethnicity alleging that he was Greek and that he was a mythical figure; all in an attempt to destroy the reputation of the Coptic Orthodox church."