



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

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

September 2022

Spirituality: Seriousness & Commitment

Introduction

This month's celebration, the Nayrouz Feast is celebrated on September 11, when the martyrs and confessors are commemorated within the Coptic Orthodox Church; the day marking both the start of the Coptic new year and its first month, Thoout. This festal celebration gives us a chance to remember our martyrs meditating their faithfulness, seriousness and commitment in their spiritual life.

Seriousness & Commitment Explained

These virtues are the cornerstones of our spiritual life. This means that we are committed before God and the Holy Spirit Who lives within us to adhere to certain spiritual canons that are to lead us towards the kingdom. Devotion to these spiritual rules starts internally in our relationship with God and gradually grows to become manifest

externally in our relationship with the others. However, one wonders about the need and efficacy of the external since God sees what is in the heart and does not care about rules and regulations placed under the nomenclature 'seriousness and commitment'.

Seriousness & Commitment, Proven

The benchmarks for the existence of these virtues are:

1. Love

It is true that God sees the heart and everything lies barren before Him, however, the necessity of observing God's statutes is declared from the beginning of time, “*My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways*” (Proverbs 23:26).

Our Lord Jesus Christ made it clear saying, “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him*” (John 14:21). Therefore taking our spiritual life seriously and with great responsibility is a sign of our love for God manifested towards our brethren in actions and not just mere empty words. Our Lord Jesus Christ stated the priority of and need for kind, loving actions saying, “*Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the*

abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:33-34).

2. Maturity

The best example of the need for maturity as a sign of healthy spiritual growth is found in St. Paul's words to the Corinthians:

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-4).

In his final exhortation, St. Paul stresses the importance of maturity saying, *“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love”* (1 Corinthians 16:13-14).

We start small and gradually grow in our spiritual life through persevering diligence and commitment in love towards God and each other.

3. Success

The road to success is not paved with gold but with struggles and difficulties. However, “nothing succeeds like

success” because success leads to opportunities for further and greater successes. There are many biblical references that confirm this concept:

“The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, but diligence is man’s precious possession” (Proverbs 12:27).

“He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. He who gathers in summer is a wise son; he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame” (Proverbs 10:4-5).

“Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood” (Jeremiah 48:10).

In his message to Gaius, St. John urges the need for prosperity and success in body soul and spirit. *“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth”* (3 John 1:2-4).

Seriousness & Commitment Practiced

The areas wherein commitment can be practiced is in the following:

1. Orthodox Faith

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

The church that Christ is referring to is not the building but the faith. Let us not be shaken or influenced by any external influences, new theories or admiration of people with different theologies or personal selfish agenda because no one and nothing will prevail against our Orthodox faith

2. Spiritual Fight

“Make yourself an ark of gopherwood;...” (Genesis 6:14).

The ark that God had ordered Noah to build is a prototype of the church and of the cross, the holy sign of our salvation. Therefore, right from the beginning God has declared that salvation is to be found in the church, her teachings and exemplified in the Divine Liturgy, the Holy Sacraments and the teachings of the early fathers. Conducting our spiritual life and fighting our own spiritual fight away from the church and depending on ourselves alone is dangerous. St. Paul stresses the importance of submission to the church leadership, *“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which*

have not profited those who have been occupied with them” (Hebrews 13:7-9).

“If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents” (Song of Solomon 1:8).

3. Participation in the Cross

The first rung on the spiritual ladder is carrying the cross of service accepting pain and hardships. All the apostles knew this prerequisite. St. Paul wrote elaborately about it,

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:7-11).

Trying to escape difficulties one way or the other is futile, self-defeating and will end up either in making bad decisions or neglecting or quitting service altogether.

“Be diligent to come to me quickly; 10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia” (2 Timothy 4:9-10).

4. Serving the Kingdom

The Holy Book of Acts is the best written constitution and catalogue of successfully dedicated and committed service to the Lord. It behooves us to read and study this holy book and trace the most pain-loaded, yet most successful journeys of those very few committed and dedicated selfless disciples who have been witnessed about as *“...These who have turned the world upside down have come here too” (Acts 17:6).*

Seriousness & Commitment, Blessings & Fruitfulness

1. Continuous Joy in God's Presence

Committed diligence and diligent commitment is the fuel that ignites and runs our relation with God. Without this diligence, our love reservoir will be depleted. What will make a car run when its tank is empty of fuel? By analogy, a spirit empty of committed urgency and seriousness will soon give up, *“...the last state of that man is worse than the first...” (Matthew 12:45).* Let us not allow despondency to creep in our hearts always remembering that in the end we will reap joy in the Lord.

2. Role Model

When we look out for role models in patience and diligence, we will never find better examples than the martyrs and confessors. They are the ones who have been given the rich unequalled promise.

“Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Luke 22:24-30).

3. Winning Souls

The Lord Jesus Christ's sole aim has always been the winning of souls, *“And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' They immediately left their nets and followed Him” (Matthew 4:18-20).*

St. Peter's exhortation, though directed to wives, yet it is worth quoting as an example of winning souls through good, exemplary conduct:

“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear” (1 Peter 3:1-2).

“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:5-7).

Seriousness & Commitment Attacked By

- 1. Laziness**
- 2. Bad company**
- 3. Complacency**
- 4. Self-reliance**

Conclusion

Some of the early church fathers' sayings concerning spiritually committed persistence and the joy therein:

- "Every mortified soul resides in sadness. Weevils infect only soft wood, likewise sadness empowers only sad souls" St. Basil the Great
- "God demands from you to force yourself into not submitting to evil thoughts, mellowing them or coming into good terms with them. As for the uprooting of the evil that is within us, this takes place by God's power and grace when He sees our patience and striving against evil" St. Macarius the Great
- "Persevere in prayers. Do not say 'I have asked once, twice and three times, but the Lord does not hear.' Press on and do not depart from your prayers until you obtain your desire" St. John Chrysostom
- "It is better for us to die while striving against sin than to live in sin" St. Isaac the Syrian
- "Those who love rest have Satan abiding in them" St. Isaac the Syrian
- On being asked how for the present generation to reap the fruit of sanctity; Fr. Seraphim the Russian (from the nineteenth century) replied "By unwavering perseverance"

“For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:43-45).