



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Consecrated

September 2022

Joy In the Life of The Servant

“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”(Acts 20:24)

The distinctive character of the life of a true Christian is joy, *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!”(Philippians 4:4)* which is also the joy of the Holy Spirit, *“And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit”(1Thessalomians 1:6).*

Joy is one of the most prominent manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace”(Galatians 5:22).*

It is a rejoice and inexpressible joy, *“Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”(1Peter 1:8)*

It does not depend on the circumstances, but may often be present despite the existence of adverse conditions, *“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food;*

Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”(Habakkuk 3:17-18)

Although joy characterizes everything that is Christian in general, it accompanies Christian ministry in particular. The service has its own distinct joys.

We see how, in his farewell speech to the elders of the Church in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul linked the ministry he received from the Lord Jesus on the one hand, and joy on the other.

He linked his fulfillment of this will of God to joy. ***“So that I may finish my race with joy.”***

Truly happy is the servant, and those who live in the service of Christ live a double happiness.

What are the most prominent aspects of joy in the life of the servant in the field of service:

(1) The joy that God shares His work with us

As the apostle Paul says, *“For we are God’s fellow workers.”*(1 Corinthians 3:9)

If a person is chosen to serve in the Presidency of the Republic, he rejoices and informs all his friends and loved ones that he works with the President directly, then how happy is the servant who works with the King of Kings and the Lord of the Lords.

He is the greatest Person, the most wonderful Person, he is God and enough! He is the One who incarnated and came not to be served, but to serve and to give Himself a

ransom for many (Matthew 20:28)! We are happy to serve with Him because He is the great Person.

He has also served us, and continues to serve us until now, with His atoning intercession for us while He is in His glory.

Even more astonishingly, even in His glory, He will gird himself and have us sit down to eat and will come and serve us by Himself (Luke 12:37). Aren't we rejoicing just because we are serving with the Lord Jesus?!

What joys do we feel deep within us when our hands do "God's work" and we are "servants of God", working with Him, servants of His flock dear to His heart. ***"The ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus."*** What an honor!

Ordinary works associated with the world and time, whatever they may be, remain limited in influence in time and space, and continue to bear the character of serving man, while the service of the Lord is a spiritual service linked to heaven, and its influence transcends time and space, and extends to eternity.

2 - Joy in valid tiredness

Life goes by quickly, health is depleted with the passage of days, and money is spent. These are facts. Are there any areas where age, health, money, or anything else are invested better than serving the Lord?

The Apostle Paul says, *"Holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain."*(Philippians 2:16).

Although the Apostle Paul says, *"And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved."*(2 Corinthians 12:15) but at the end of his service he always feels something beautiful.

The servants in their hearts, while close to eternity, stand among the memories of a happy past for which they felt satisfied and pleased, and looked forward to a day to come soon when those who served Him would be seen to hear from Him "Well done good and faithful servant" and receive crowns.

We hear the Apostle Paul say near the end of his days of ministry, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."* (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

3- Joy in the grace of our Lord working in service

Christian ministry is primarily a "grace": *"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."* (Ephesians 4:7), each one has a share in it.

Our entry into the circle of faith in Christ is by grace, and then we find ourselves raised "in grace": *"Through Whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."* (Romans 5:2). The talents and gifts given to us by the Lord are a "grace" that we have taken from Him, not deservedly, nor because I am better than anyone, but it is God's grace.

When one thinks of the truth of oneself, remembers what it was before, and then turns to look at the ministry he received from the Lord Jesus, one cannot help but exclaim with joy from the bottom of one's heart, saying, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."* (1 Corinthians 15:10).

One of the fathers recounts that when he was invited to serve he met an experienced bishop who wanted to turn his attention to God's grace working with him. The bishop

asked him, "What are you going to do? The father said to him, "I am going to serve in this region, and I will do this and that.... ". The bishop then looked at him and said, 'You will go to witness God's work in this ministry.'

This father says that he did not except the work that was completed in his ministry, but it is God's grace working with the servant and in service.

4- Joy in the blessing of the Annunciation

In service, we carry spiritual blessings that souls need, even longed for and thirst for. It is the service of the Gospel, that is, the " joyful gospel."

We also return from service with abundant spiritual blessings: "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself." (Proverbs 11:25).

How happy we are when we go with the confidence that we are sent with good news from a distant land,

And how happy we are when we find souls eager to receive service,

And how do they express their expectation for it, and that it came at exactly the right time, so that we return joyfully to the Lord.

5- Joy in the fruit we see

It is true that the servant may not find fruit before his eyes, in some of the times: "*Others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.*" (John 4:38).

But it is also true that true service is inevitably fruitful. "*And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows, and he who reaps may rejoice together*" (John 4:36)

It is true that we will not see all the fruit here, but the Lord usually allows us to see a specimen of fruit to assure us that we are on the right path, *"The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops."* (2 Timothy 2:6)

He also encourages us to continue amid obstacles and frustrations. What a pleasure the servant feels the moment when someone approaches him and whispers to him that he had come to know Christ from one of his services, that he was encouraged to hear one of his sermons, that he was comforted by reading one of his articles, or that he touched the will of the Lord in one of his sessions... Thus, the servant is very encouraged, underestimates the pains and hardships of service, and takes a strong push in his path.

6. Joy in the glory that awaits us

"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8).

All of us, as the people of Christ, yearn to meet the Lord. But the faithful servants who have completed the pursuit "with joy" are those who, with all the joy of the heart, yearn for more, long for the day of His appearance and His future glory, to which their rewards are also associated.

It is true that their only purpose is Christ. But the Lord is a God of reward, and He will reward with a reward, a glass of cold water offered in His name will not waste its remuneration from the One who does not forget our work and the labor of love, and He is the only one who appreciates — truly and honestly — the service that is rendered in His name to the souls dear to His heart.

May we not be ashamed of Him in His coming, but joyfully complete our pursuit!