



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Consecrated – July 2025

The Church in the Teachings of Saint Paul the Apostle

As we approach the celebration of the martyrdom of the great Saint Paul the Apostle, the sweet-tongued preacher, it is fitting to reflect on a small yet profound aspect of his teachings. Through the mouth of Saint Paul, the Holy Spirit revealed a great mystery; the mystery of the Church, a mystery not grasped by human intellect, but by divine revelation. The Church is not merely a spiritual institution or a human organization; rather, it is:

- The Living Body of Christ
- The Pillar and Ground of the Truth
- The Only Ark of Salvation

Therefore, it is essential for every consecrated woman to live this mystery deeply; not only by belonging to the Church, but by being united with it intimately, serving the Body of Christ, bearing witness to the truth, and dwelling within the ark through which the world is saved.

First: The Church is the Body of Christ

Saint Paul says: *“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually”* (1 Corinthians 12:27). The Church, therefore, is not merely a community of believers, but the true Body of Christ, whose head is Christ Himself and whose members are us. This unity is not built on an idea or a principle, but on the Holy Spirit who dwells within us and unites us to Christ through the mystery of the Eucharist. Every person who believes in Christ, is born of holy baptism, and anointed by the Holy Spirit is a living member of this Body. One cannot grow, bear fruit, or live outside this Body.

The community of believers forms the Body of Christ and its members. As our teacher Paul says: *“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”* (1 Corinthians 12:27) We, collectively, form the Body of Christ, and individually, we are its members, and Christ is the head of this Body, as he also says: *“And He is the head of the body, the church”* (Colossians 1:18).

And how do we become this Body of Christ, which our teacher Paul calls the Church? We form this Body by our organic union with one another, so that each one cares for the other with one heart and without division, just like the cooperation of the parts of our physical body:

“But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:24–26)

Our union with one another resembles the organic connection between the members of our body, a union that begins from the head. Likewise, it is with us; our unity begins from the head, who is Christ: *“Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share” (Ephesians 4:15–16).*

Thus, in this model of unity, each member in the Church, the Body of Christ, fulfills its role under the guidance of the mind of Christ, the Head of the Body, just as each part of our body performs its function according to what God has prepared for it, as Paul says: *“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us” (Romans 12:4–6).*

Meditate well, my consecrated sister

When you stand reverently before the altar, remember that you are not standing in an ordinary place, but within the living Body of Christ. You serve the members of this sacred Body, share in His sufferings and glory, and touch with your heart the pulse of His crucified love.

And when your hand reaches out to serve someone in need, know that you are serving a member of the Body of Christ. Every pain you soothe, every weakness you support, is a touch of love to Christ Himself. If you comfort a wounded soul, or console a grieving heart, or heal a spiritual, emotional, or physical wound, be confident that you are aiding the Lord Jesus personally, who said: *“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40).*

Let this sacred thought dwell deeply in your heart; it is what can preserve your consecration, pure, steadfast, and blameless, according to God's heart.

Second: The Church is the Pillar and Ground of the Truth

Saint Paul writes to Timothy: *“But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15)*

This highlights that the Church is not a mere human institution but the guardian of the faith, the herald of truth, and the community that lives and embodies that truth. It preserves the apostolic doctrine and teaches it across generations.

What does “Pillar and Ground of the Truth” mean?

Pillar of Truth: The Church lifts the truth high like a visible pillar, showing the world the straight path to eternal life.

Ground of Truth: It is the foundation on which truth rests, the faithful guardian of the apostolic teaching.

Church ministers of all levels and roles are the mouthpiece and instrument of the Church in teaching and guidance. Upon them rests a great responsibility:

1. Proclaiming the true faith as received by the Church, without distortion or compromise.
2. Spiritual discernment, between sound and misleading teachings, as John the Apostle said: *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* (1 John 4:1)
3. Warning against strange doctrines, as Paul the Apostle said: *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers”* (2 Timothy 4:3).

Just as the Church stood firm against all heresies and broke down every lie raised against the divine truth within her, so we too must have the same heart and readiness.

The Church is not a museum of doctrines, but the living heartbeat of divine truth, and its ministers are the guardians of that truth. Let us ensure we live that truth, teach it, and stand against all deviation with steadfastness and faithfulness.

Third: The Church is the Ark of Salvation

Just as God saved Noah and his family from the flood through the ark, so Christ offers the Church as the only ark of salvation in the sea of this world. *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free and have all been made to drink into one Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 12:13).

There is no salvation outside the Church, for the sacraments are given only within her, and the Holy Spirit dwells only in the Body of Christ. The Church is the house of repentance, the table of life, and the place of true encounter with God. As Saint Cyprian said: *“He cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother.”*¹ Saint John Chrysostom also declared: *“Just as those who were outside Noah’s ark perished, so also those who are outside the Church will perish.”*²

“And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated

¹ Cyprian treatise: The Unity of the Catholic Church, written around 251 A.D.

² John Chrysostom on verse 1Peter 3:21

https://www.catholiccrossreference.online/fathers/index.php/1Pet%203:21#mnf_iv.iv.lxxiv-p44.2

and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight – if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel”(Colossians 1:20–23).

My consecrated sister, your service within the Church is a calling to participate in the salvation of others, not by words alone, but by being a “sign” of the presence of this ark amid the world and inviting others into it. You cannot fulfill this role unless you have a living relationship with the Church, its sacraments, and the means of grace offered through her!

Beware the disease of routine in church life. Beware the spiritual lethargy that may affect your engagement with the liturgies; whether the Divine Liturgy, the source of power, or the praises that lift the mind and comfort the heart, among others.

Finally, keep the mystery of the Church in your heart, “*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*” (Ephesians 5:25). If Christ gave Himself for the Church, is it not worthy that we also offer our lives for her?

Be a living member in His Body.

Be a witness to the truth in the pillar of His Church.

Be sheltered in the Ark and a herald of salvation through it.

Live in the peace of Christ.