



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

November 2013

My beloved children,

Peace and grace.

Today, I would like you to ask yourselves this question: if you were to remove your monastic/consecrated garb and put on a regular pair of pants and shirt, would those who knew you as a monk/nun/sister still recognize you? Would those who did not know you notice something in you 'unlike the others' and attribute to you the traits of a monk/nun/sister?

Today, I want you to ask yourselves what truly defines you as being consecrated to God - is it the clothing in which people see on the outside or are you a monk/nun/sister because of what you are made up of on the inside?

St Antony the Great said that there are three things one must keep in order to be saved, that is:

1) To always have God before your eyes; 2) Whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the Holy Scriptures; 3) and in whatever place you live, do not easily leave it.

So let us ask ourselves - do we behave as though we are constantly in the presence of God? Or do we allow hidden thoughts to abide in darkness? Are we distinguished from others by our ascetic life free from the cares of the world, seeking only how we may please the Lord, or is our life one of self-indulgence? Would those observing us describe us as prayerful and forbearing always waiting on the revelation of the will of God or are we always making excuses, looking for ways to satisfy our own will?

It was not St Antony's many words but his living example, which had the greater impact on monasticism, and so we ask ourselves, if without the monastic garb, would we too, stand out as a living example of monastics? Do we have a calm demeanor, carrying ourselves in a gentle and quiet spirit? Would we be likened to our desert fathers for our self-denial and service to others? Would we be set apart for our modesty and renunciation of all attachments to worldly and material things?

Let us examine ourselves today and see if, deep within, we find a humble and forgiving spirit and ask ourselves if we are truly faithful to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which we will to make to the Lord.

I want you to recall the day you became consecrated to God and meditate on the grace that called you from the cares and troubles of the world to a life of service only to Him. On this day, you may have still been the exact same person you had always been except there was a drastic change which suddenly took place - immediately after you were dressed, people began treating you with reverence, serving you, kissing your hand, asking you for prayers and seeking from you words of wisdom - all this simply because, on the outside, your garment carried with it the title of a monastic. Let us, therefore, take care lest we lose ourselves in the false security of outward appearances and grow neglectful of Satan's insidious tactics. Let us daily remember our beginnings and continually strive for perfection.

May we live a life of truth, virtue, simplicity, and growth, so that our inward purification may be reflected outwardly and that we may be found wearing the proper wedding garment on the Day of Judgment - for *many are called but few are chosen*.

May the peace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.