



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

### **Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants**

**December 2013**

Dear beloved children,

Grace and peace to you.

Today I would like for us to reflect on the meaning of something which is commonly spoken of amongst us; a statement which, like many others, is often declared in a casual manner slowly lessening the trueness of its implications - I would like for us to reflect on the meaning of the words: 'dead to the world.' Consider for a moment what this statement means to you - not what you have read about it and not what you have heard spoken of regarding it, but how it is applied to your life.

Truly, having to die while still being alive is not something which is easily accomplished but, as in all things, we must remain faithful in our struggle and set our hearts and minds to walking according to the spirit, not according to the flesh. Albeit, this last principle may also be something which is not easily realized but we must hold to the faith that it is not by our own strength, but by His grace that we can indeed crucify the flesh and all its desires - *for with men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible (Mark 10:27).*

How, therefore, can we 'die to the world?' We know very well that it is not by leaving our family and joining the monastery, neither is it by putting on the black garb; such things are indeed necessary, but we can surely attest that they are not the factors that define the death which we are speaking of. To die to the world is to be crucified with Christ and the essence of this death lies in the inward cross, in the crucifixion of the self.

I would like for us to ask ourselves how this inward crucifixion takes affect in our lives; however, I would like for us to reflect on this question on a daily scale rather than on a large, general scale.

Let us consider the following instances -

If today we were faced with an issue with a brother/sister let us ask ourselves if we dealt with it carnally in annoyance, dissension or wrath or if we denied that internal desire to protect our dignity and instead, humbled ourselves. Did we smile when we would have rather frown? Did we compliment when we would have rather criticize? If our Lord Jesus Christ has told us to love

our enemies, bless those who curse us, and do good to those who hate us (Matt 5:44) then how much more should we be willing to hold our tongue and simply ask our brother/sister for forgiveness regardless of our perceptions of injustice? Are we very alive to our selfish desires or do we try to put an end to our ego by denying ourselves?

Furthermore, if we were to examine the sequence of events in our day how much time would we say we spent talking? Would we conclude that when amidst our brethren/sisters and/or laity we spent time in idle talk satisfying our desire to socialize and to have our opinions heard, or did we redeem our time with our Lord in silence? There is a well-known poem, titled 'Stranger' written by HH Pope Shenouda III which states, *My heart silent, indifferent to all they think is important; My listening will never yield to loud and worldly conversing.* I wonder... how often do we really hear a dead man speaking?

In addition, if we were to consider our behavior, would we conclude that there were moments in our day when what we said or did stemmed from pride - a characteristic which we can testify is most alive to the self? We may recognize signs of pride by the *loudness in the proud man's talk, a bitterness in his silent moods; when he is pleased, his laughter is loud and profuse; when he is serious, he is gloomy beyond reason. There is rancor in his replies to questions, glibness in his speech; his words break out unrestrained by any seriousness of heart. Of patience he knows nothing: charity is a stranger to him; he is bold in insulting others, cowardly in bearing their insults. He does not easily render obedience save where the thing commanded fits in with his own wish and desire. He is not to be appeased when one admonishes him; he is weak in curtailing his own wishes, very stubborn when asked to yield to others. He is always doing his best to establish his own opinions, but never ready to bow to those of anyone else. In fine, although he is quite incapable of giving salutary counsel, he is always more ready to trust his own judgment than to that of the elders (Institutes, Book XXII).*

Lastly, I would like us to think about how many things we consider to be 'ours,' not only regarding material objects but also what we consider to be *our time, our will, our wants.* St John Cassian said, *how shall we demonstrate the absurdity of the case of some, who, after the first glow of renunciation when they left familiar possessions and wealth and the service of the world, and betook themselves to the monastery, are still very obviously bound in thrall to those things which cannot be altogether dispensed with in this state of life or completely abandoned, small and of no account as they are- to such a degree that they are more engrossed with them than with the worldly possessions they have given up? Such men, indeed, will gain no great profit by having turned their backs on great riches and possessions since they have but transferred the disposition of mind on account of which such things should be given up, to things small and unimportant. For they demonstrate that the sin of covetousness and avarice, no longer possible with reference to worldly things of value has not been cut away, but retained with reference to commoner articles - the old passion has just been transferred to other objects.*

Saint Moses the Strong likened monasticism to slow martyrdom and rightfully so, for it is in the progression of the stages that we slowly die to the world within ourselves. The point, my beloved, is that we can daily die to the world by beginning with small sacrifices - today maybe we lessen our ties to the world; tomorrow maybe we deny ourselves for our brother/sister; let us take one day at a time but let us always be serious letting nothing impede our growth.

It is true that it is difficult to submit to those who are harsh with us; to obey instructions which we deem to be illogical; to ask for forgiveness rather than to defend and justify; to accept from others what we would not choose for ourselves; to keep silent when we want to voice our opinion; to make requests rather than to obey but let us hold fast to the struggle with perseverance and self-denial that by doing so, we may gain the fruits of the spirit and be crucified with Christ - *If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me (Luke 9:23).*

*Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*

The grace of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.