



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

January 2015

Dear beloved,

Peace and grace.

A few letters ago we took a short break from the subject of monastic ethics in order to discuss some important topics; we will now return to the previous subject and discuss work ethics while drawing our attention to the meaning of one of the most beautiful verses in the Holy Bible: *'do all to the glory of God.'*¹

Work ethics in the monastery is no different than work ethics in the world in terms of such things as being honest and faithful, respecting others, and being cooperative; however one thing is very distinct between the two: the definition of success.

Success in the world is often measured by power, position, and wealth whereas in the monastery it is quite the opposite – a monk's wealth is his poverty and rather than seeking to climb the hierarchal ladder he shuns all vainglory and the praise of man desiring always to be the least of his brethren.² In the world, we are taught to be sharks in the workplace, using all means in order to outperform those around us so to obtain a bigger piece of the pie, but in the monastery, before our own interests we seek that of our brethren.³ This distinction is most important because if forgotten we easily fall into the grave sin of pride opening the gateway to endless sins which separate us from God.

The question is how do we remain so watchful as not to fall into this sin of pride? John Cassian said: 'But every one does the work assigned to him in such a way that, by repeating by heart some Psalm or passage of Scripture, he gives no opportunity or time for dangerous schemes or evil designs, or even for idle talk, as both mouth and heart are incessantly taken up with spiritual meditations.'⁴ There it is, my beloved! Very simply, the answer is prayer. Prayer is the foundation of our work ethic for without it we are left with nothing but our own understanding and the task before us; without it we labor not for the glory of God but for our own interest; without it we struggle greatly with the challenges we face because we seek to make sense of them and rid ourselves of them rather than trust and depend entirely on God's Providence.

¹ 1 Cor. 10:31

² Matt. 20:26-27

³ 1 Cor. 10:24

⁴ Cassian, J. (1894). *Of the discreet rule by which every one must retire to his cell after the close of the prayers; and of the rebuke to which any one who does otherwise is subject.* INSITUTES. New York: Lectio Divina.

*'Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it;'*⁵ If we were to put God before us in all that we do, then before we react towards anything, whether it be in making a decision related to our task, facing an obstacle, or in our relations with our brethren, we would stop and ask our Lord what He would have us do – *“nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done”*⁶ This life of self-denial and prayer would therefore allow us to truly build our house upon the Rock and not on the vanity of our own fleeting desires.

Prayer is the soil on which our foundation is built and if the soil has good bearing value, it will carry the weight of the structure without the concern of future damage for many years to come – it will stand strong, resisting any condition changes, whereas if the soil is weak, the foundation will eventually crack and fail due to its uneven settlement and much hard work will have to be undertaken to restore it once again.

My beloved, I could have written to you a long list of practical do's and don'ts concerning our work ethic but the truth is that each one of us already knows that we are called to obey beyond all personal logic, to submit to our elders, to serve our brethren, and to humble ourselves. We know well that our success is measured by the amount of love by which we do all things⁷ for God did not say to us, 'well done, good and *successful* servant,' but rather, He said, '*well done, good and faithful servant,*'⁸ and this love – this faith – comes to us by the grace of God through prayer.

As always, we have a choice to either, live and work without seeking God's glory nor depending entirely on His will; or to live and work by seeking only the kingdom of God⁹ and having all we do be blessed through prayer.

May this new year also begin with a new foundation built on good soil, for what needs to get done will eventually get done but the rich fool will leave behind his wealth on earth while the faithful servant will have stored for himself treasure in heaven.

I wish you a blessed New Year and Nativity Feast. May the peace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

⁵ Psalm 127:1

⁶ Luke 22:42

⁷ 1 Cor. 16:14

⁸ Matt. 25:21

⁹ Matt. 6:33