



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

June 2015

My beloved children,

Peace and grace.

This month's topic on the second step of the *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; 'On Detachment' is not merely a topic for beginners but also a rule for those well advanced in the monastic life; after having taken the first step of renouncing the world, one must continually choose to let go of all worldly attachments, for if this crucial step is not taken, one can never climb further up, for the weight of the world will always be holding him down.

God asked us to love Him with more than just our bodies – the physical step of leaving the world – but to also love Him with our heart, mind, and soul<sup>1</sup> – the greater step of detaching ourselves from its shackles. Climacus tells us, 'it would be a very great disgrace to leave everything after we have been called – and called by God, not by man – and then to be worried about something that can do us no good in the hour of our need, that is, of our death.'<sup>2</sup> We must, therefore, be quick to remove the seed of worldly attachments that try and establish new root within us as we journey on our path, and likewise be keenly attentive to when God reveals to us what has been long developing within and bravely seek His mercy to help us uproot all that keeps us grounded to the earth.

A monk's life in a monastery is quite like a patient's in a hospital – both undergo treatment and both experience uncomfortable side effects as a result of their medication. In the latter case, physical side effects could include headache, nausea, dry mouth, and vomiting, whereas in the case of a monk, we experience anger and frustration, defense and talkativeness, complaining and despair, sloth and gluttony, and disobedience and arrogance. As God medicates us by means of interactions with our elders and our fellow brethren and sisters, we each react differently depending on the disease that lurks within us.

John Climacus said, 'mortification of the appetite, nightlong toil, a ration of water, a short measure of bread, the bitter cup of dishonor – these will show you the narrow way.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 22:37

<sup>2</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Detachment. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 81). New York: Paulist Press.

Derided, mocked, jeered, you must accept the denial of your will. You must patiently endure opposition, suffer neglect without complaint, put up with violent arrogance. You must be ready for injustice, and not grieve when you are slandered; you must not be angered by contempt and you must show humility when you have been condemned. Happy are those who follow this road and avoid other highways. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’<sup>3</sup> All these things seem like scenarios we are willing to accept when we read them in books with a heart inflamed with the desire for the monastic life, but they are quite different experiences when we face these very realities and learn that we have reacted in every way contrary to what we expected.

Climacus began the chapter by reminding us that if we ‘truly love God and long to reach the kingdom that is to come,’ we will easily let go of all we once regarded as important – both the tangible and the intangible – and ‘turn freely to Christ.’<sup>4</sup> No one can give away one hundred percent of something unless he has one hundred percent of that thing, therefore in the same way, we cannot give ourselves wholeheartedly to our Lord Jesus Christ unless we are truly free to do so.

This level of freedom can be measured by the kind of monastics we are when we close our cell door behind us – are we like the rich young ruler<sup>5</sup> whom Climacus likens to those who are, ‘watered by vanity as if from an underground cesspool, made to shoot up by love of show, manured by praise, and yet they quickly withered when transplanted to desert soil,’<sup>6</sup> or is our life of prayer and worship strongest before our Master behind closed doors?

‘If a man thinks himself immune to the allurements of something and yet grieves over its loss, he is only fooling himself.’<sup>7</sup> Thus if we are, for instance, stripped of our honor and we react with anger, or if we are deprived of our time and we react with frustration, know that within us our ego lives and breathes very, comfortably.

Just as a man suffers from a fever because his body fights against an infection, we also must be brave and longsuffering when our attachments are slowly ripped away from us for the glory of His name, for our spiritual growth, and for our eternal salvation.

“This is the second step, and if you take it, then do as Lot did, not his wife, and flee.”<sup>8</sup>

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Detachment. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 83). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>4</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Detachment. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 81). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 19:16-22

<sup>6</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Detachment. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 82). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>7</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Detachment. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 83). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>8</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Renunciation of Life. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 80). New York: Paulist Press.