



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

January 2016

Dear beloved,

Peace and grace.

We have now reached the eighth step in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* – on placidity and meekness – and it is here that we are meant to let go of the anger that enslaves us in order to be free to imitate the gentleness and meekness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

‘*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*’<sup>1</sup> – when I think about the Sermon on the Mount, I marvel at our Heavenly Father’s love towards His children. Being God, He only has to command and we are meant to obey, but because His ways are not like ours<sup>2</sup>, He did not only command, but gave us His Son as a living example of all He ever asks of us and, even more than this, He bestows upon us blessings for following our Lord’s example.

Living in a monastic community is meant to be the source of all our blessings – if we are faithful in our struggle, it is by means of our community that God will sanctify us and help us to be free of our passions – ‘Take a hard stone with sharp corners. Knock it and rub it against other stones, until its sharpness and hardness are crushed by the knocking and rubbing and, at last, it is made round. So too, take a soul that is rough and abrupt. Put it into the community and company of tough, short-tempered men. One of two things must happen: Either it learns through patience to cure its wound, or it will run away and, by so doing, it will learn its weakness, its cowardly flight showing it up as if in a mirror.’<sup>3</sup>

‘Meekness is a permanent condition of that soul which remains unaffected by whether or not it is spoken well of, whether or not it is honored or praised’<sup>4</sup> – Our holy Mother, Saint Mary, was the perfect example of meekness; when, at such a young age, she was chosen to be the Mother of God, she was not filled with conceit but remained ever so quiet and gentle. In every matter, St. Mary always responded with calmness and faith and unlike those enslaved by their passions, our holy Mother always placed the needs of others before her own. Thus, the Annunciation did not incite in her a selfish and unruly excitement but inspired her to travel in order to serve another in need.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5:5

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 55:8

<sup>3</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Placidity and Meekness. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 147). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>4</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Placidity and Meekness. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 146). New York: Paulist Press.

In like manner, St. Elizabeth, although advanced in age and the wife of a high priest, was not envious of the young girl, St. Mary, for having received the greater honor, but rather said to her in all meekness, *‘but why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?’*<sup>5</sup>

John Climacus said that, ‘the first stage of blessed patience is to accept dishonor with bitterness and anguish of soul. The intermediate stage is to be free from pain amid all such things. The perfect stage, if that is attainable, is to think of dishonor as praise’<sup>6</sup> – this reminds me of a story of St. Moses the Strong – when he was asked if he was affected by the ill words spoken of him, in the council held in Scetis, he responded: ‘I was grieved, but I kept silence.’<sup>7</sup> Therefore let us find courage, my beloved, for we are not asked to reach perfection at our first testing, but to struggle towards it by the grace of God and He will grant us victory in due time.

If, through sincere prayer, we invoke the Holy Trinity to help us in every instance when we feel that our passions are being stirred within us, then we can be sure to be saved from a multitude of sins, for ‘the angry person, like a wolf, often disturbs the entire flock and causes offense and discouragement among many souls.’<sup>8</sup>

Consider the long struggle of the saints and their relentless battle against evil – David the Psalmist had many justifiable occasions in which he could have reacted poorly, but he lived as though always in the visible presence of God, and so until this day, we live by his words of praise.

‘Those who wish to join us in the Lord should therefore come to the spiritual tribunal where we can be tested in various ways and find out about the passions referred to above as well as their causes’<sup>9</sup> – remember, beloved, that *‘anger does not produce the righteousness of God’*<sup>10</sup> and in every occasion we can change our perspective in order to behave virtuously and thereby climb the ladder of which Climacus speaks of. Otherwise, we will be *‘like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was’*<sup>11</sup> and remain in a standstill, passing time in the monastery in vain.

‘On the eighth step the crown is freedom from anger. He who wears it by nature may never come to wear another. But he who has sweated for it and won it has conquered all eight together.’<sup>12</sup>

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.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 1:43

<sup>6</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Placidity and Meekness. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 149). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>7</sup> Ward, B. (1975). Moses. In *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (p.139). Michigan: Cistercian Publications.

<sup>8</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Placidity and Meekness. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 148). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>9</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Placidity and Meekness. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 150). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>10</sup> Jas. 1:20

<sup>11</sup> Jas. 1:23-24

<sup>12</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Placidity and Meekness. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 151). New York: Paulist Press.