



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

February 2016

Dear Beloved,

As we read the ninth step of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* – On Malice – I would like to share with you a letter:

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#### A Dialogue with the Holy Trinity

“If the remembrance of wrongs is the ‘keeper of sins’<sup>1</sup>, a ‘ruin of virtues, the poison of the soul, a worm in the mind’<sup>2</sup>, then what I am to do, Lord, if I cannot forget?”

“You must first forgive. *‘For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.’*<sup>3</sup>”

“But what then if I cannot forgive?”

*“But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, for it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”*<sup>4</sup>

“Because I see the wrong with my eyes and I cannot turn away from it in my mind.”

“Then remember the words of the monks before you, for it was once said, ‘my sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the errors of another.’<sup>5</sup>”

“Oh, Heavenly Father! I am trying but simply cannot do it. I am a weak sinner.”

“Why do you rely on your own strength, My child? Has it not been said, *‘Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of*

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<sup>1</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Malice. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 152). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>2</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Malice. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 152). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 6:14-15

<sup>4</sup> Rom 14:10-12

<sup>5</sup> Ward, B. (1975). Moses. In *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (p.139). Michigan: Cistercian Publications.

*God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*<sup>6</sup>”

“My God of great compassion, surely the warfare will not cease. How then can I endure long enough to keep Your commandments and walk worthy of this path You have placed me on?”

“Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything<sup>7</sup> and remember your greatest example; ‘the remembrance of what Jesus suffered is a cure for remembrance of wrongs, shaming it powerfully with His patient endurance.’<sup>8</sup>”

“It’s too hard.”

“Dear child, ‘with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’<sup>9</sup> I want you to rejoice always and ‘count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.’<sup>10</sup>”

“Help me Lord, I am a poor monk – as Saint Paul once said, ‘the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice’<sup>11</sup> – I still feel resentment within me.”

“Let your malice and your spite be turned against the devils.”<sup>12</sup>

“My mind understands this saying, but my heart blames my brother.”

“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?”<sup>13</sup>

“It is true. The problem is within me. I have forgotten my own sins. What shall I do now?”

“I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”<sup>14</sup>

“Please do not be angry with me, but I must be doing something wrong because it has

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<sup>6</sup> Heb 4:14-16

<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 Malice*. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 154). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. 19:26

<sup>10</sup> Jas. 1:2-4

<sup>11</sup> Rom. 7:19

<sup>12</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). *On Malice*. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 153). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>13</sup> Jas. 4:1

<sup>14</sup> Matt. 5:43-45

been so long and I still cannot love, I still cannot forget. What can I do differently? I have resolved to just keep silent.”

“Do not do this unless there is peace in your heart. ‘Worms thrive in a rotten tree; malice thrives in the deceptively meek and silent.’<sup>15</sup> So, ‘if after great effort you still fail to root out this thorn, go to your enemy and apologize, if only with empty words whose insincerity may shame you. Then as conscience, like a fire, comes to give you pain, you may find that a sincere love of your enemy may come to life.’<sup>16</sup>”

“Be with me Father, and I will.”

*‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’<sup>17</sup>*

“Please tell Your servant the secret to remain silent and be at peace?”

“It is said about Joseph, ‘because he kept silence, he sold himself by his humility’<sup>18</sup> therefore one must be humble in heart and have faith in his Father.”

“Oh my beloved Father, truly, *‘it is good for me that I have been afflicted that I may learn Your statutes.’*<sup>19</sup> *‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom’*<sup>20</sup>”

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“To forget wrongs is to prove oneself truly repentant, but to brood on them and at the same time to imagine one is practicing repentance is to act like the man who is convinced he is running when in fact he is fast asleep.”<sup>21</sup>

“Such is the ninth step. Let him who has taken it have the courage henceforth to ask Jesus the Savior to free him from his sins.”<sup>22</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>15</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Malice. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 154). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>16</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Malice. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 153). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>17</sup> Heb. 13:5

<sup>18</sup> Ward, B. (1975). John the Dwarf. In *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (p.90). Michigan: Cistercian Publications.

<sup>19</sup> Ps. 119:71

<sup>20</sup> Luke 23:42

<sup>21</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Malice. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 154). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>22</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Malice. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 154). New York: Paulist Press.