



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

April 2016

My beloved children,

I want us to put aside the book we are reading and talk about something else for a moment –

During these blessed days, we have all, in some way, increased our “spirituality” by abstaining from food, attending late liturgies, increasing our readings and perhaps increasing our prostrations and other forms of worship. Undoubtedly, all such things are wonderful and I pray that God may bless you and accept your fasting and prayers; however, I also pray that these may not be the only changes we experience during the Great Fast, but that we finish this glorious journey resurrected and renewed!

If there is a certain virtue that you seek to attain, such as that of humility, then now is the time to seek God’s grace in living it! Pray about it, write it on posters in your cell, read about it, and most of all, practice it. Let not a day go by without truly feeling transformed – do not be satisfied simply by accomplishing your daily duties, my beloved, but be renewed!

Be faithful in taking the time to examine yourself before God. Pray that He enlighten you and grant you the courage to accept the revelation of any weaknesses within you and ask for His grace to help you truly change.

In the first chapter of book of Genesis, when reading about the last day of creation, it is written: *‘God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.’*¹ The Church Fathers say that in this instance the word ‘very’ was used, as opposed to just saying, *‘it was good’*² – as was the case when referring to each day individually – because here God is observing the individual works united together. My beloved, now is the time to examine your heart and see if you have any selfish motivation that is keeping you from humbly uniting with those whom God has granted you. If it has been a long time that you have been keeping a respectful distance with one of your brethren/sisters, then now is the time to break those boundaries and show an act of love. If out of fear, you

¹ Gen. 1:31

² Gen 1:10

have been harboring resentment in your heart, now is the time to be free of these bounds and confess them.

The Desert Fathers say that a true monk does violence to himself in everything. Therefore, we should not allow ourselves to simply behave carnally because it is what is acceptable by the standards of the world, but we should rather deny our natural will and voluntarily choose the narrow path. The wide gate is opened before you and perhaps no one will stop you from walking through it, but instead I ask you to make this decision for yourself – deny your will – and believe me, God will be there to support you.

Be renewed. Be purified! If you are overcome with anger, do not act on it but hold your tongue. If you are mistreated, do not retaliate but be a peacemaker. If you are overworked, do not complain but take the blessing of serving your Lord. If you are falsely accused, do not accuse your brother/sister instead but remain silent and trust in God's love. If you are hurt, do not gossip or run to report the story against your brother/sister, but learn from the pain and show an act of love. If there is unresolved animosity, then do not keep it hidden but reconcile with your brother/sister. If you are given a choice between two things and the lesser would go to your brother, deny your will, and take the blessing of charity. If you know that you have behaved on account of pride, do not let a moment go by as if nothing happened, but take courage, face your sin, and apologize to your brother/sister. If you feel envious or jealous, do not deceive yourself and deny it and turn this feeling into an action to gratify your emotions, but rather admit it before God and suffer these emotions in silence before Him – He will grant you victory. If your praises have lost their zeal and you feel dejected, then revive your spirit and renew your mind. If you are offering worship mechanically, remember your first Love.

Beloved, with all my heart, I pray that this time be a true period of change in our lives. Be different. Be renewed. Be transformed. Do what is difficult even if you can get away with not doing it. Do it even if it means it will hurt and you will get the lesser portion. Your Father in heaven is watching you and will bless your sacrifice.

Pray to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit that God may enlighten you to see if your choices and behaviors are according to His will or if they according to your own, and if it is the latter, then do not accept to remain this way even for a day but be renewed!

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.