



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

May 2016

Dear beloved,

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

*‘This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it’*<sup>1</sup> – we will adorn our churches in white and we will chant our hymns joyously but we will not forget that while still on this earth, we must continue to struggle in living a resurrected life so that we may be granted the victory given to us over death. We must not lose what we gained during the Great Fast, but rather live out our renewed spirituality. And so, this month we will continue with the eleventh step of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* – On Talkativeness and Silence – a vice which is said to be able to lay hold of the most apparently spiritual people.<sup>2</sup>

John Climacus begins this chapter by mentioning that ‘talkativeness is the throne of vainglory’<sup>3</sup> and goes on to list some of its negative effects on the monastic life: “a doorway to slander, a leader of jesting, a servant of lies, the ruin of compunction, [...] the end of vigilance, the cooling of zeal, the darkening of prayer.”<sup>4</sup> He also goes on to mention some causes of talkativeness such as, “a bad or relaxed lifestyle, vainglory, and gluttony”<sup>5</sup> – three vices that, unfortunately, our generation tends to take rather lightly – and so on that note, I would like us to further elaborate on the motivation that leads us to suffer the harmful consequences of being too talkative. What are the fundamental reasons behind our need to talk? Let us consider the following 3 motivating factors: 1. I speak because I want to give my opinion and feel significant, 2. I speak because I want to gossip and complain, 3. I speak because I want to glorify God.

**I speak because I want to give my opinion and feel significant.** Consider the meaning of this saying: “a man, by his stillness, conquers vainglory.”<sup>6</sup> If my underlying reason for speaking is to make my presence known, then I have given into a weakness that would

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 118:24

<sup>2</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Talkativeness and Silence. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 158). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>3</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Talkativeness and Silence. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 158). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>4</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Talkativeness and Silence. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 158). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>5</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Talkativeness and Silence. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 159). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>6</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Talkativeness and Silence. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 159). New York: Paulist Press.

have better been dealt with had I held my tongue. If I am to be faithful in my struggle, then before opening my mouth, I should ask myself who will benefit from the words I am about to speak – is it myself or is it others? Let us examine our motives. Will stating my opinion give me a sense of importance? If, when in a meeting, do I suffer if I remain silent while others are making a communal decision? Do I feel a strong desire to be heard by my elders? When I do speak, do I feel a sense of satisfaction when others agree with me? Do I feel a sense of frustration and shame when they do not? *‘How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?’*<sup>7</sup>

**I speak because I want to gossip and complain.** ‘For the man who recognizes his sins has taken control of his tongue, while the chatterer has yet to discover himself as he should.’<sup>8</sup> Is there really a need to expound on the problem with this motivating factor? Must we quote the Desert Fathers on exposing our brothers’ sin? Must we recite Bible verses on judging, backbiting, slander, and treating others, as we desire to be treated? I shall not waste your time, my beloved. If we were to take, only but a moment, to calm down and search our hearts, we may discover that we are about to render a report against our brother/sister in order to gain an advantage with the person with whom we are speaking or for many other like reasons. So, let us be more careful for we not only know that this is greatly displeasing to God, but also that it has been promised to us that we will one day give an account for every careless word spoken<sup>9</sup>.

**I speak because I want to glorify God.** Very simply, *‘there is a man who is silent because he has no answer, and there is a man who is silent because he knows when to speak – ’*<sup>10</sup> the only good reason being to glorify our Creator. How often are our words driven by selfish desires and how often are they purely to shine our light before men that our Father may be glorified in heaven?<sup>11</sup>

My Heavenly Father, I thank You for having given me the gift of speech and the ability to praise Your Holy name. I ask for Your help not to take such a gift for granted but rather to use it for Your glory. Prevent me from saying anything that is displeasing to You and teach me to find Your love in the midst of silence. Grant me the courage to be humble and the strength to be still when my passions arise within me.

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>7</sup> John 5:44

<sup>8</sup> Climacus, J. (1982). On Talkativeness and Silence. In *The ladder of Divine Ascent* (p. 159). New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. 12:36

<sup>10</sup> Sirach 20:6

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 5:16