



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

October 2016

My beloved children,

We are about half way through *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* and I have decided to stop here and discuss the subject of the last step and to let you continue exploring the journey, through this marvelous book, on your own. I pray that you have each benefited from the letters and that they have served to help you remember why you left the world. I highly encourage you to continue reading and to meditate on how each step unfolds in your personal monastic life and to faithfully struggle to attain it.

*‘Let all that you do be done with love.’*¹ The last step of the ladder speaks of love – the one virtue that if we lack, but have all others, we remain as nothing.² However, are acts of love done for the sake of attaining virtue? Or are they done because it is the closest we can ever get to living heaven while still on earth? Let me explain what I mean.

Think of yourself and what makes you happiest. What gives you a godly happiness? What are the things that put you in a good mood? I would like each one of you to take a moment, close your eyes, and name as many things as you can think of.

Now consider if these things make you feel loved.

I am confident that the things that make you happiest are the things that make you feel loved – and there you have it, my beloved! Nothing can be simpler. If I have godly happiness, it is because I feel loved; if I am filled with love, then I am filled with God because God is love; if I am filled with God then I am a living heavenly being amongst my brethren and sisters and all my actions will reflect what I feel inside.

Now change your focus from yourself to others – instead of simply looking at it as a struggle to love those who are difficult for you to love and therefore make the entire experience something about yourself, think of it from their perspective: what would make *them* feel the complete fullness of love? Answer that question even if it entails giving up something to the other person that you would rather have yourself. Be a participant in God’s work of giving the full measure of love to your brother or sister.

¹ 1 Cor. 16:14

² 1 Cor. 13:2

Nevertheless, one may wonder why should we do this? If my brother or sister causes me pain or behaves in ways that I perceive to be stumbling, why should I desire that God work through me to give abundantly to that person? It seems intuitively backwards. Although it is commanded of us, still somewhere within us, we would feel better if there was justice and evil was repaid for evil. However, the truth is, that what we really seek can be attained with just the opposite.

Let us say, for instance, there was a brother or sister who caused turmoil in the monastery and everyone was troubled by it. Instead of claiming to suffer in silence and thinking of ourselves and how we could show acts of love, because that is what is commanded of us, let us consider that perhaps this great turmoil is foremost due to a lack of love. Very simply, perhaps my brother or sister needs love. Not love limited to my terms, but the fullness of God's love for them. And if my brother or sister is filled with this great love, then that turmoil will vanish on its own, and all will be at rest.

It is indeed simple, but I urge you to be careful to remember that all things be done in prayer and for the glory and will of our heavenly Father. I say this because if I forget that I seek the love within me that is given from God, my intentions may be selfish, my actions may be worldly and my brother or sister may eventually suffer as a result of it.

The same is true for receiving love. Without humility and thanksgiving, I can easily fall into pride and even resent he or she who is showing me acts of love, forgetting completely that I receive not because I am worthy, but because my God is a loving God who desires to unite us by working His love through each one of us.

May God grant us broad hearts and an enlightened mind to pray for one another to give and to receive the fullness of God's love.

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.