



**Coptic Orthodox**

**Diocese of the Southern**

**United States**

## **Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants**

**May 2017**

Dear beloved,

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen! I wish you all a blessed Feast of the Resurrection – a time of newness and renewal. Let us continue the theme from our last letter, when we discussed our faithfulness as novices at the beginning of our monastic path, and discuss dying and rising now as fathers/mothers in Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, *‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, if we are truly called “Father” or “Mother” then we are living a life of self-denial, dying daily<sup>2</sup> and living in the community, according to our vows, as a blessing to others and also accepting all things that come our way as blessings received.

It is said that God teaches the humble His way<sup>3</sup> and so now that we have vowed our life to God, we do not simply rejoice in our black clothing, but we earnestly seek to know His will in order to live a life pleasing to Him. Far too often we forget this, my beloved. Far too often we forget this very simple and yet critical aim and we instead live according to our own desires, perhaps in what we imagine the “monastic way” to be – ascetically or other – and we delay or restrain the work of God in our lives. It should not be so.

If we seek perfection, the thought of justice and fairness should be completely removed from our minds. Were we told to follow our Lord Jesus Christ and to protect our reputation, to seek after justice and honor, and to strive to be respected? In fact, we were told quite the opposite, were we not? Is it right that we should be offended by the slightest breach of what we consider to be our entitlement? Does such offend those who are humble? If such things are not offensive to the humble, and we seek God’s will and God teaches the humble His way, then should we not strive to live accordingly? Abba Serapion said, *‘If you want to be humble, learn to bear generously what others unfairly inflict upon you and do not harbor empty words in your heart.’*<sup>4</sup> How will God perfect us if we continuously resist and complain? We have only to accept all things with thanksgiving and by doing so God will

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:23

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 15:31

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 25:9

<sup>4</sup> Ward, B. (1983). *The sayings of the Desert Fathers: the alphabetical collection*. London: Mowbray.

be glorified in us and we will live out the purpose of our calling. It is as simple as that!

Abba Poemen said, ‘Do not do your own will; you need rather to humble yourself before your brother.’<sup>5</sup> A true father/mother gives love generously and never seeks his/her own. A true father/mother rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep<sup>6</sup> for he/she is not jealous and does not compete but embraces others with a sacrificial love, always desiring what is greater for others; if our Lord Jesus Christ Himself did not seek His own, who are we to be justified in our envy and anger? ‘*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will also do; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.*’<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps it seems that a father/mother should naturally take the lead and be followed, but it is not so with us – we leave the limelight to God alone and we offer the greater seat to our spiritual brethren and children. Perhaps it seems that we should correct others when we see them in the wrong, but it is not so with us – ‘In all things think that you are in need of teaching and you will prove wise throughout your life.’<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it seems that we should demand a certain level of respect, but it is not so with us, for it is said, ‘Do not become a disciple of one who praises himself, in case you learn pride instead of humility.’<sup>9</sup>

My beloved, in a small way everyday we are given the opportunity to partake in Christ’s suffering<sup>10</sup> and to offer to God an incredible gift of love; everyday God works in us to purify and perfect us, but on the condition that we let Him – we must not trust in our outward appearance but we must, at all times, be faithful in the little<sup>11</sup> and deny ourselves in order to allow Him to do His will in us. The vows we took of obedience, chastity and poverty are not simply for the novice to be tested on but they are for the father/mother to live by – if we cannot be faithful in these, then how will we be faithful in much? ‘I beseech you, beloved, by the name of Jesus Christ, do not neglect your own salvation, but let each one of you rend his heart and not his garment (Joel 2:13), for fear lest we should be wearing this monastic habit in vain, and preparing ourselves for judgment.’<sup>12</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>5</sup> Ward, B. (1983). *The sayings of the Desert Fathers: the alphabetical collection*. London: Mowbray.

<sup>6</sup> John 11:31, Rom 12: 15

<sup>7</sup> John 14: 12

<sup>8</sup> The Syrian, S. (1984). *The ascetical homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Boston, Mass: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery.

<sup>9</sup> St. Mark the Ascetic (1979). *On the Spiritual Law*. In N. T. Hagiorite, M. O. Corinth, G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, & K. Ware (Authors), *The Philokalia*. London: Faber and Faber.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 4:13

<sup>11</sup> Luke 16:10

<sup>12</sup> (1991). *The letters of Saint Anthony the Great* (A. & D. J. Chitty, Authors). Oxford: Publisher not identified G. Press.