



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

July 2017

My dear children,

As we are nearing the celebration of the Feast of the Apostles, I have been thinking about how the twelve lived after the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. I wondered how often they feared or if they doubted; I wondered if they felt lonely in their service or often despaired. In the end, I decided that they were human just like us and surely struggled just as we do and I recalled St. Paul's words that, "we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life" (2 Cor 1:8). So then how did they carry on and in what did they find their joy? I would say that their joy was first found in our Lord Jesus Christ alone and second in serving Him through serving others. I do not think that the twelve had much time to sulk or at least did not wallow much in self-pity but that they were strong in faith and were always filled with the Holy Spirit through their faithfulness in giving to others.

Often times when things take an unexpected turn in our lives, we want to throw in the towel and hide under a rock. We are quick to question God and sometimes find comfort in complaining and justifying our negative attitude and reluctance in doing anything productive. Simply put, it just seems easier to give up. However, the truth is that this feeling is a deceptive one, which seems like it is solving our issue but is actually a downward spiral prolonging it. The solution is actually found in a much different attitude.

Psychological studies have showed that happiness does not follow success but that happiness *leads* to success. We often wait for our external environment to be positive in order for our internal environment to reflect the same but in doing so we are, in a way, chasing the wind. A more beneficial choice of action would be to work on our internal state in order to better the perception of our external one.

Our internal state should always be centered on God. If our source of joy is founded on anything else then we are bound to be let down. Having high expectations of others, of ourselves, or even of how things should 'properly' function in the world, will surely lead us to disappointment. Our hope and our trust should be in God alone, just as it was for the apostles. Let us also remember the words of Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15) for when his wife reproached him for still trusting God during his sufferings, he replied these most beautiful words: "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10).

Further studies on the nervous system also support the idea that good actions lead to good feelings and therefore a way out of sadness can be as easy as shifting our focus from being on ourselves to focusing on God and on others. Is this not what the apostles did? Is this not what our Lord Jesus Christ did? In the depth of suffering and tribulation our Lord Jesus Christ did not grumble nor give up but He prayed fervently for God's will to be done and even until His last breath, He looked out for the interest of others. I believe that this is the example, which the apostles followed, and I also believe that this is the secret to finding peace and joy in hardships.

“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom” (Luke 6:38). In times of struggle, we accept that we are going through difficult times and, although we do not try and force ourselves out of it, we can choose to shift our focus on others and allow the Holy Spirit to work in us. “And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ” (Acts 20:35). No good has ever come from hardening our hearts and silencing the voice of the Holy Spirit, but much good has always come from the opposite.

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31) the answer is really no one but ourselves. No one ever said life would be easy, but God promised us that He would never leave us nor forsake us (Deut 31:6). If we have faith then we will be anxious for nothing, to Him we will always make our request known (Phil 4:6) and in Him, we will always rejoice (Phil 4:4). My beloved, it is written, “My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation” (Sir. 2:1 RSV) and so I tell you that yes, it will sometimes be difficult, but God is working to perfect that which concerns us (Ps. 138:8) and so we must believe in Him who loves us and look outside ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to work wonders in us by serving others.

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.