



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

August 2017

My beloved children,

Peace and grace.

There is a question I wonder if we ever really ask ourselves: am I living the example of Christ, which He desires for me to live? The monastic life is one of structure and guided by rules and regulations and at its best, this structure serves as a means to help us grow daily in virtue and thus closer to God; at its worst, this structure can either feel like a long list of obligations that we are forced to do against our will or a list of rules that we perform perfectly but pharisaicaly. What therefore must we do to make sure that we are truly living out the calling with which we have been called? I believe that we have simply to remember our first love.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (John 14:15) and yet we break His commandments daily. Why is that? I believe it is because we have left our first love (Rev 2:4) and have blindly begun to follow our own will. Abba Ammonas said the following: “the narrow and [difficult] way is to control your thoughts, and to strip yourself of your own will, for the sake of God. This is also the meaning of the sentence, ‘Lo, we have left everything and followed you.’ (Matt 19.27).”¹ My beloved, can we really say with Peter the apostle, “We have left all and followed You”? If we are daily living breaking the vows we made before God on our day of consecration, breaking the rules of the monastery/convent, following our own carnal desires, making no exceptional sacrifices, demanding justice and murmuring against each other, then what have we left other than the physical location we once called home?

The following prayer would not be acceptable but at least I would say that it would be honest: “My Lord, I love You but I do not want to do all that You ask me. I will follow You but I prefer to live the way I want to live and not by the example which You came to show us. I do not desire to deny my will like You did nor obey like You did nor love like You did, it is simply too difficult. I do not want to humble myself and ask for forgiveness, I

¹ *The sayings of the Desert Fathers: the alphabetical collection*, Ward, B., trans. (London: Mowbray: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 28.

do not want to accept that which displeases me, I do not want to do much against my own will but I *do* want to be called Your disciple. Thank You, my Lord.”

My beloved children, do we really love God anymore? Is He still the only desire of our heart? Is He still ‘everything’ to us? Do we long for silence so we can be with Him? Are we thankful for hardships so we can share with Him? Are we quick to obey so that we can serve Him? Are we quick to love so we can please Him? “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (Jas 2:14).

There is nothing more beautiful, nothing more satisfying, nothing that gives as much rest to the soul, as life with our Savior. On a superficial level, things may seem difficult, but if we love God and have the desire to please Him, we have only to struggle a little and grace will move us to do His will and be filled with Him. Let each one of us examine ourselves and search within to discover what truly fills our hearts.

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.