



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

November 2017

My dear sons and daughters,

This month last year, we expounded somewhat on the three vows; we have also addressed obedience and discussed it in view of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, however this time I would like to emphasize more on why obedience is important in the monastic community.

Have you ever wondered why we specifically take these three vows? Why these three are especially important in our calling? From the very beginning when our Lord Jesus Christ began His ministry, the devil tried to tempt Him with three things: “the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). As monastics following in the footsteps of our Master, we also choose to renounce “all that is in the world” and begin our journey dying and rising daily in our continuous struggle to reach our final goal. These three vows are the beginning of our struggle and are the means of leading us through the journey of our calling.

In essence, obedience is the complete denial of our will. Simply put, this means that when we disobey we fall into pride and self-love and act according to our own will. Consequently, when we choose our own will, we are either losing the opportunity to act in obedience or we are behaving in outright disobedience. In the *Way of the Ascetics*, Tito Colliander writes of the importance of overcoming the desire to rely on ourselves – he writes: “Take a look at yourself, therefore, and see how bound you are by your desire to humour yourself and only yourself. Your freedom is curbed by the restraining bonds of self-love, and thus you wander, a captive corpse, from morning till eve. ‘Now I will drink,’ ‘now I will get up,’ ‘now I will read [...]’ Thus you are led from moment to moment in your halter of preoccupation with self, and **kindled instantly to displeasure, impatience or anger if an obstacle intervenes.**”<sup>1</sup> He later also writes, “external hindrance and opposition meet only the person who has not yielded his own will to God: and for God an obstacle is unthinkable. [...] Only for my own plans, my own wishes [...] can some external circumstance ‘get in the way,’ and then I am grieved. **But for the person who has found the narrow way that leads to life, that is to God, there is only one conceivable hindrance, and that is his own, sinful will.** If he now wishes to do something but is not permitted to carry it out, how can he grieve? For the rest he is not making any plans (Jas 4:13–16).”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tito Colliander. *Way of the Ascetics*. (New York: Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1960), p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Tito Colliander. *Way of the Ascetics*. (New York: Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1960), p.22.

We have all left the world as an act of self-denial – giving our entire lives to God – but if we do not recall this to mind every single day, we can very easily fall into pride and very sadly, even become blind to our sin. Know, my beloved, that when we negotiate, we disobey. When we disagree with instructions and bring up an opposing and more convenient view, we disobey. When we behave this way, we have lost our sensitivity to the meaning of obedience and we choose to live according to our will without realizing how destructive it is to our spiritual growth.

In the monastic community, it is always better to obey. There will forever be many ways of doing things and some of those ways, yes, may be more convenient for you or more practical in general, but believe me my beloved, it is always better to obey. The blessing comes from the denial of your will; it does not come from constantly seeking what is more pleasing to you. Without obedience, a monastic community can never form a strong foundation or a lasting system. We often hear, “this is the El-Sourian way” or “this is the Anba Antonios way” because these monasteries have been founded on self-denial and obedience. If every new monastic tries to change what has already been built, the building will never stand.

My children, we must not forget that we have left the world. We must not find ourselves falling into the temptation of the pride of life and living according to our own will. The monastic community is meant to purify us, not to help us live in a ‘spiritual environment’ just as comfortably as we did in the world. Be humble and obey what is asked of you. Practice saying “hader” and trust in the Lord. “Hereafter you will consider that everything that happens to you, both great and small, is sent by God to help you in your warfare. He alone knows what is necessary for you and what you need at the moment: adversity and prosperity, temptation and fall. Nothing happens accidentally or in such a way that you cannot learn from it; you must understand this at once, **for this is how your trust grows in the Lord whom you have chosen to follow.**”<sup>3</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>3</sup> Tito Colliander. *Way of the Ascetics*. (New York: Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1960), p.10.