



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

May 2018

My dear beloved,

This month last year, we discussed what it means to be called “Father” or “Mother” and we mentioned that if we are truly living out the meaning of this form of address then it means that we are living a life of self-denial, dying daily and living in the community according to our vows as a blessing to others, giving love generously, and accepting all things that come our way as opportunities to learn and grow in virtue. We also mentioned that God teaches the humble His way (Ps. 25:9) and that a true Father or Mother loves generously and never seeks his or her own will above that of another. This year, I would like to continue in the same train of thought but expound on a specific virtue — humility — and discuss with you what I see to be the monastic mind.

Simply put, the mind of the monastic is humble. Yes I know, it is easier said than done. Humility is not just something we can attain overnight — it is said by many desert fathers to be the mother of all virtues — and so it is not just because we are aware of this fact that all of a sudden it will become our manner of life. We joined the monastery to strive towards a life of perfection and so we are warring against the old man within us, which strongly desires to live a much different kind of life (and happily reminds us of this as often as possible!). However, it is imperative that we should, at absolutely all times, remember that the humble mind is our goal. What do I mean by this?

The humble mind is obedient and submissive. Although we may not yet fully have this mind, we do however struggle to be given the grace to attain in. Therefore, throughout the day it should be on the forefront of our consciousness so that when we interact with our brothers or sisters, our words and our behavior will reflect this humble mind. For instance, we may struggle with those we work with and so seek to have a task in which we can work alone or with only select individuals — if this is the case, we must ask ourselves why, and once we come up with the answer, we should then ask ourselves if this issue would be dissolved if we had a humble mind? I guarantee that the answer will always be yes.

“A brother lived in the Cells and in his solitude he was troubled. He went to tell Abba Theodore of Pherme about it. The old man said to him, ‘Go, be more humble in your aspirations, place yourself under obedience and live with others.’”¹ When you find

¹ *The sayings of the Desert Fathers: the alphabetical collection*, Ward, B., trans. (London: Mowbray: Cistercian Publications, 1983), p.74.

yourself murmuring about others, I want you to stop and change your perspective — focus rather on yourself and see if you, the monastic who has died to the world — is doing anything wrong. If, after you have judged yourself rather than your brother or sister, and have somehow found yourself to be absolutely innocent, then ask yourself the following question: “how can I handle this situation with humility?” I promise you, my dearly beloved, once you enter into such a prayer, you will be filled with peace and you will find our Lord speaking directly to your heart.

Strive always. Always. Once you find yourself living according to your own will, having a difficult time submitting, frustrated by the rules of the monastery, opinionated about many things, preferring to lead rather than to submit, know that you are far from the monastic mind (and perhaps closer to the mind of a member of royalty). A spiritual exercise that will help you quiet the old man and strengthen the new man, in a spirit of humility, is to be quick to say “*hader*” rather than offer another opinion, and to accept all things, no matter how difficult, with thanksgiving — “Truly, O Lord, if we do not humble ourselves, Thou dost not cease to humble us. Real humility is the fruit of knowledge; and true knowledge, the fruit of trials.”²

Do not despair, my beloved, the path of humility is indeed a narrow one to tread, “but he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22). Take courage that this is the same path trod on by our Lord Jesus Christ, and so every time you fall in pride, seek Him and get back up and humble yourself once again. Find encouragement in remembering the lives of the saints and the teachings of our desert fathers — 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.’³ And if you would like to know where you stand in relation to humility, Saint Isaac the Syrian tells us, “Do not be angry with me that I tell you the truth. You have never sought out humility with your whole soul. But if you wish, enter its realm, and you will see how it disperses your wickedness. For in proportion to your humility you are given patience in your woes; and in proportion to your patience the burden of your afflictions is made lighter and you will find consolation; in proportion to your consolation, your love for God increases; and in proportion to your love, your joy in the Holy Spirit is magnified.”⁴

“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.”⁵

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

² *The ascetical homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, Syrian, I., (Boston, Mass: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), p. 288.

³ *The sayings of the Desert Fathers: the alphabetical collection*, Ward, B., trans. (London: Mowbray: Cistercian Publications, 1983), p.228.

⁴ *The ascetical homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Syrian, I., (Boston, Mass: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), p. 344.

⁵ *The letters of Saint Anthony the Great*, A. & D. J. Chitty., (Oxford: Publisher not identified G. Press, 1991), p. 8.