



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Monastic

July 2018

My beloved,

I call you my beloved children because we have been united together in our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not know each other by chance. Each one of us has been purposely put together to live together, to serve together, to strive together. Nothing happened haphazardly or by mistake but, as long as we have purposed to follow our Lord Jesus Christ, we are exactly where we are meant to be. And so we live for the present moment to glorify God and to live each day fulfilling our calling. Regardless of our circumstances, we trust that He will direct our path and in return, we have only to love Him.

There was a time when we lived to fulfill our own carnal desires — we thought only of ourselves and of our own comforts and cared little to make sacrifices and to deny our will. We thought highly of our opinions and understanding and considered ourselves to be living piously without any need for direction. Then came the time of enlightenment! The Holy Spirit gently began to reveal to us our weaknesses and the focus slowly changed from our ego to our Lord Jesus Christ.

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,” (Matt. 5:44). My beloved, this is the teaching of our Master and Lord Jesus Christ, to whom we have forsaken all to follow — I wonder how often we meditate on these words in our day. When we have an unpleasant encounter with one of our brethren or sisters, and we feel wronged, do we bless them? Do we do good to them? Do we pray for them? Let us be honest with ourselves and consider our reactions and our thoughts in troubling situations. We are recognized by the world as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ by our love for one another (John 13:35). Our way is not the way of the flesh but the way of the spirit and so we do not accept to respond to anything at all that happens to us with justice, anger, bitterness or revenge, but with love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22).

“that you may sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). Yet we spend much time stumbled by others and being harsh on them, talking about them and justifying our judgmental thoughts by reason of their behavior. This is not the way of the Christian, this is not the way of the monk.

“For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even tax collectors do so? (Matt. 5:46-47). The world teaches justice and an eye for an eye but the spirit teaches us endurance and forgiveness. The world teaches us to treat others as they are treating us, but the spirit teaches us to treat others as we desire to be treated. “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

My beloved, I know that it is always easier said than done – we read the Holy Bible and spiritual books and we feel motivated to change, but we soon discover that the seed fell on stony ground and we quickly forget what we were commanded to do. Yes, we fall often but this will never excuse us from not rising back up. We must absolutely never give up striving. Never give in and never lose hope — on ourselves and on one another. We have only to keep our eye on the goal and to faithfully do the things which we have been asked to do. The carnal man complains and rebels; the spiritual man is humble and obedient. We cannot wake up tomorrow morning and claim to now love all our enemies and possess all the fruits of the spirit; we can, however, be faithful followers of our Lord Jesus Christ and strive to live by the spirit and fight against the flesh, and trust in Him to give the increase.

Saint Isaac the Syrian said, “Be on guard against idleness, O beloved, for it conceals a sure death, just as without it a monk cannot fall into the hands of those who strive to enslave him. On that day God will not judge us about psalmody, nor for the neglect of prayer, but because by abandoning them we have opened our door to the demons. Whenever they find room, they enter and close the doors of our inner chambers and our noetic eyes, and then they accomplish tyrannically and impurely in us that which subjects its perpetrators to Divine judgment and most severe punishments. Thus, we become captives because we have forsaken small things which, nevertheless, very wise men deem worthy of attention for Christ’s sake. As it is written, he who does not subject his will to God will subject it to his adversary.”<sup>1</sup>

I am very proud of all of you. May God see your striving, hear your prayers and bless you.

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>1</sup> *The ascetical homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Syrian, I., (Boston, Mass: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), p. 276.