



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

August 2018

My beloved children

What is justice? In the world's standards it is merited rewards or punishments depending on an action performed — when one performs well in a given situation, it is expected that recognition and/or honor should ensue, and when one transgresses then it is assumed that a punishment will shortly follow. Well... what happens when things do not turn out exactly as planned?

By the standards of the world, what is fair will be sought after by any means necessary and no rest will be found until justice prevails. Such journeys usually entail a lot of frustration and a lot of exhausting battles for the truth — a subconscious desire to prove to the other that what they are doing is wrong!

By the standards of heaven, what is fair is only awaited for in heaven. There is no expectation of justice in the world for us; here we seek only mercy, peace and love — those things which are pleasing to the Lord — not to stand up for our rights and to seek revenge — those things which were never taught to us by our Master.

But why should we follow such difficult ideals? Because if we live by the standards of the world, we will inherit the world and if we live by the standards of heaven, we will inherit heaven. It is a simple equation; conflicts only occur when we expect to inherit a certain life when living by the standards of another.

Our Lord Jesus Christ lived a life filled with the most painful and difficult experiences. He humbled Himself and lived a life of complete servitude to His creation — healing the sick, raising the dead, comforting the saddened, encouraging the weak, guiding the strong, saving souls, gentle, merciful, peaceful, loving — in return He was insulted, disbelieved, dishonored, betrayed, abandoned, and crucified. He received no justice at all in His earthly life and most importantly, He taught us to seek out the same. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to expect the same from this life and not to despair because He will never leave us nor forsake us (Deut. 31:6) nor fear for He is with us (Isa. 41:10).

As monks and nuns, we willingly choose a life of asceticism, a path of self-denial through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. We very consciously choose to carry our cross every day and follow our Master down the narrow path — “If indeed we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified together” (Rom. 8:17) — and so it is unbecoming of us when we abandon the struggle to do what is right instead of what is just. What is right is to follow our Lord’s commandments and to strive to always be spiritually minded, what is just is to follow the law of society and to think with our carnal minds.

Saint Isaac the Syrian says, “An unwise man in a lamp in the sun. The prayer of one who remembers wrongs is a seed upon a stone. An unmerciful ascetic is a barren tree. A rebuke springing from envy is a poisoned arrow. [...] Sit amid lions rather than amid the proud. Be persecuted, but persecute not; be crucified, but crucify not; be wronged, but wrong not; be slandered, but slander not. Have clemency, not zeal, with respect to evil. Lay hold of goodness, not justice. Justice does not belong to the Christian way of life and there is no mention of it in Christ’s teaching.”¹

So we ask ourselves a final question: *why* are these the standards of heaven? Could they not have been reversed? Why so much suffering? Well, the truth is that neither path is free of suffering and neither path is free of justice — a balance is found between justice and suffering when measuring from our beginning until eternity, therefore the question we must ask ourselves is which part of our life do we seek to be the scale tipping towards justice and which part towards our acceptance of what God allows us to suffer?

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

¹ *The ascetical homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Syrian, I., (Boston, Mass: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), p.382.