



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic and Consecrated Servants

September 2018

My beloved children,

What do you think? Haven't we become very good at talking about God? We have been in the Church for many years now — we have been taught, we have heard a lot of sermons, we have read a lot of books, and we have also taught and have given a lot of sermons and have maybe even written books! I think we can consider ourselves pretty good at giving advice and sharing Bible verses. I guess we can say that we have become somewhat experts on the matter... Yes? I don't think so.

How many amongst us are *living* examples of the Gospel? Without preaching with words, how many of us are living as true disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ?

None of us really have any need to be told what is right and wrong. Sure, a basic set of guidelines helps us in our specific calling, but in general, we cannot really claim that we do not know if we are behaving correctly, can we? By God's mercy, each one of us the Holy Spirit and each one of us intuitively feels that maybe what we just did probably was not very pleasing to God.

If the Diocese were to pass out exam papers to everyone — a list of various scenarios that could potentially occur in our service — being accused falsely for instance or working in partnership with a difficult personality, and everyone were asked to write out a response to every question, which would then be graded based on whether the response supports the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, what do you think would happen? I am certain that we would all receive perfect scores! Is there anyone amongst us that does not know that being falsely accused is a blessing? St. Isaac the Syrian said, "The man who endures accusations against himself with humility has arrived at perfection, and he is marveled at by the holy angels, for there is no other virtue so great and so hard to achieve." He also said, that "A gift free of trials is a disaster to those who receive it." For we all know that we are called to carry our cross, deny ourselves and follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So what then? If we can preach and we can answer every question perfectly, why do we resist being humbled? Why do we set boundaries to our love for one another? Why do we hesitate to wash each other's feet? Why do we seek honor? Why do we complain? Procrastinate? Give in to envy and jealousy? Are afraid to admit our mistakes? Why are we

concerned to keep a certain image in front of others, but in secret we have no problem neglecting our praise and prayers to our Creator and merciful and loving God? We can tell the stories of the saints but seldom speak to them. We can take great comfort in our garb but seldom live true to our calling.

My beloved, I know the road is not easy and I know that there isn't a single one of you who hasn't faithfully chosen to walk the narrow path. I know that there isn't one amongst you who doesn't struggle. Throughout the years I have watched you grow and, as your father, I am proud of each one of you and of your sacrifice. I share this letter with you not because I think we have failed in our struggle or service, but to encourage you to carry on, and to share with you that I am also one amongst you, carrying the cross, and following our Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't forget the promise you made before God. Don't forget your vows and your calling. Don't forget your purpose and get lost in the overwhelming details of your day. Remember God's commandments.

My beloved, may God receive your prayers and your sacrifice.

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.