



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic

February 2019

My beloved children,

Peace and grace. I pray that you are each doing very well in health and spirit and that you are daily growing in the light of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Recently I have been thinking about what each one of us has been called by God to do, in order to glorify His holy name, and I considered the beauty and wonder of the life of monastics. You have truly been hired by God to join the ranks of angels in prayers and praises before His holy throne. As a monk or nun, you have been hired to be an angel — how absolutely wonderful!

What is a little less wonderful is the warfare that interferes with your job. The devil, of course, is not simply going to ignore anyone who decides to accept the invitation of joining the rank from which he fell — he takes this matter very seriously and fights to no end to entice you back to the appealing wide path where everything is comfortable for the ego and struggle free. The warfare is very subtle and ever so gently causes you to lose sight of your goal. You first let go of this and then that and then slowly, without realizing, you fall into neglect and begin to slip away from the path you were called.

My beloved children, in the world you had a certain job or profession and whenever someone asked you, “what do you do?” your response was clear and you even defined yourself by this — I *am* so and so. Your responsibilities were well defined and you faithfully committed to what you were hired to do. Which of you ever went to work in the morning and then did a completely different task than what you were hired to do? Which of you stepped out of the “office” and wasted the entire day talking on the phone instead of working or sleeping on the job because you were tired? Which of you showed up in the evening for a morning shift or in the morning for an evening shift? None of you, of course, such a thing would be absurd and you would definitely get fired!

However, in the life of a monastic, when you do not realize that your job is to praise and pray then you can easily do such things and not notice that these are distractions from the goal. You can even become annoyed from long prayers and

praises — forgetting completely that this is your job! There is a famous saying that when one loves what they do, they do not work a day in their life and this is very true. In the world, if you were passionate about what you did, you did not mind working overtime, right? Sometimes warfare blinds us from the same thing here.

A monastic must die to the self in order to have nothing interfere with lifting ones heart in praise and prayer and so a monastic must daily struggle, by the grace of God, against every temptation and stumbling block that comes their way. The Desert Fathers have already struggled through the narrow path and have left for us instructions to imitate them in Christ and so, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we each know well what we are supposed to do.

“For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” (Luke 12:48).

God has given us physical and mental health, shelter and provisions, churches a walk away from where we lay our heads, and we have been given the grace to serve in His house and He has blessed the work of our hands for the glory of His holy name — we have been given much and have also been invited to stand before God in the most glorious choir every single day of our lives! God has called us to be filled with Him alone and has called us to a life of praise and prayer in order to pray on behalf of the whole world! We need only to remember — remember that you are called to a life of prayer and were given much and much is required of you — do not let anything distract you.

The narrow path is not easy, and I know that the struggles of a monastic is not easy, but listen to the words of your forefathers and endure patiently in our Lord Jesus Christ — “The victory over all the afflictions that befall you, is to keep silence”¹ and, by His grace, you will overcome and learn and grow.

Do not allow yourself to get distracted, my beloved. When you fall and the devil suggests for you to take a break with him, reach out to our Lord Jesus Christ and get back up following Him down Golgotha — trust in Him and He will give you rest. When something hurts your ego, do not run away from the pain and seek a way in which to avoid such harm but rather understand that it ‘comes with the territory’ and that your heart is being purified. Do not resist the purification but remain steadfast in the Lord. Let the work of your hands and the struggle of your body be for the glory of His holy name and may your lives be blessed. Indeed you have the best jobs in the world!

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

¹ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers; the alphabetical collection*, Ward, B., trans. (London: Mowbray: Cistercian Publications, 1983), p.172