



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic

March 2019

My dear sons and daughters,

God has given us the grace of soon entering into another year of the glorious Great Fast —as we all consider the best way in which we would like to spend it, I pray that a part of that consideration is an examination of the self for the purifying of the heart. Perhaps we want to spend it in more quiet time or more reading time or more praying time but without self-examination, we risk being hearers of the word and not doers, as our beloved Apostle James once said — “he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” (Jas. 1: 23-25).

How often do we use the Google search engine in order to get answers to things we don't know? So often that the name Google itself has become a verb! Well how about using that same technique with prayer and allowing God to thoroughly diagnose us through the Holy Spirit during this Great Fast? A careful self-examination of our thoughts and actions, perhaps always asking ourselves: “what did my reaction just say about me?” would greatly benefit each one of us. It seems rather obvious but it is not necessarily so, as many of our reactions are quick and without proper thought, and therefore can slip by dangerously unnoticed.

Maybe today we saw one of our brothers/sisters do a thing that is uncomely and it seemed natural to us to judge them but with the proper self-examination we may consider the words of St. Basil who said that if we see our neighbor sin and are inclined to judge him, rather than this, we should contemplate on the good things we know that he has done and in the end, we will see that he is better than us.

St. Macarius the Great said, “Condemn yourself, my brother, before you are condemned!” and so we pay close attention to our thoughts and behaviors — maybe tomorrow we argue/negotiate when one of our brothers/sisters asks us to do something when we planned on returning to our cell. What does this reaction say about us? Maybe it means a lack of love, or obedience, or asceticism. What if we react badly when criticized? Maybe it means we have hidden pride? What if we are

often complaining? Maybe it means a lack of a spirit of thanksgiving, lack of submission and self-denial? Perhaps I was bothered when one of my brothers/sisters interfered in my assigned obedience in the monastery/convent, is it because it truly caused an issue or is it because I have taken possession of said obedience and made it my own?

Our day is filled with blessings and lessons if we desire to learn — “Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days.” (Prov. 19:20) but if we simply go through the motions, constantly irritated by what doesn’t make sense to us, then are we really blessed, are we really growing? “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise” (Prov. 12:15).

Benefit from the beauty of the Fast in all the ways that you can — those very moving sermons, the increased prayers and fasting, the great books and meditations on the Fast, but do not neglect the goal of purity of heart and “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). What is the benefit of the mirror if we aren’t going to correct any of the flaws?

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24). I wish all of you a blessed Great Fast.

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.