



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States Monthly Questions and Answers June 2019

Q9: Sometimes I feel really overwhelmed with my own sins and the sins of others and the idea to keep on striving is in no way appealing to me. I just want to avoid everyone! What should I do?

A9: There's a story from the Desert Fathers that "Abba Poemen said of Abba John the Dwarf that he had prayed to God to take his passions away from him so that he might become free from care. He went and told an old man this: 'I find myself in peace, without an enemy,' he said. The old man said to him, 'Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the affliction and humility that you used to have, for it is by warfare that the soul makes progress.' So he besought God and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, 'Lord, give me strength for the fight.'

Q10: Can Your Grace share with us a story from Your Grace's time in the monastery?

A10: There are many stories about testing the novices and the monks but the common factor was that, we did not complain nor request any changes that would make our living conditions more comfortable or convenient. We were taught to accept what was given to us as given from God.

Q11: Can Your Grace share with us something positive and something negative concerning the current state of monasticism?

A11: I think, in general, a positive in the monastic life is to have our mind on Christ at all times. The monk or nun that is focused on Christ grows spiritually every single day because s/he brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5) and so the potential ensuing action is also measured against the

Commandments. This way there is a quick turnaround when there's a fall and there's a fear of God and a zeal to do what is pleasing to Him.

The flipside of this is the negative point. If we lack the fear of God — knowing and feeling that we are in His presence at all times — then our focus is usually on ourselves. This stunts our spiritual growth as pride is usually the driving force behind everything. Consecration becomes an achievement — a status we anticipate — and our actions reflect anything but the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

If, to me, the black robe is an achievement, then I have missed the point altogether. The point is not to be called "Father" or "Mother" because if it were so, then once I've achieved my goal, what more do I have to struggle for? The point is a heart consecrated to God in the calling to which I have been invited. That doesn't change because the color of the fabric did. If I understand the path correctly then, absolutely no matter what happens, I will always be joyful because this consecrated heart is renewed everyday and purified in the fire of humility until it has reached its only Beloved.