



## **Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States**

### **Monthly Message for the Monastic**

**July 2019**

My dear children,

Do you realize that the only difficulty in your life is that you haven't submitted to the cross?

When our Lord Jesus Christ spoke to the Rich Young Ruler, He said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." (Mark 10:21). As you know, the offer begins first with self-denial because in order to be able to truly follow our Lord Jesus Christ, we need to first... let go.

Asceticism isn't about how poor we can be; maybe being poor requires little to no sacrifice or struggle for us. Rather it's about how much we are able, for the sake of our love for God and by His grace, to let go.

The Rich Young Ruler — a successful leader who had lived his life faithful to the law, who probably had many skills and was a man used to managing, making his own decisions and giving directions — was now was faced with something truly difficult. He was now being asked to let go of all that he has and to give it all away, never to see it again on this earth but to await it's reward in heaven. This was the first requirement before he would then have to take up his cross and follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

Again Our Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Matt. 16:24). Self-denial first and then the cross, for how can anyone carry the cross if they haven't first let go of all they have? If I am holding on to my honor, to my feelings of entitlement, to my authority, to my right to be respected, to my skills and knowledge, to my job, to my past, to my possessions... how can I ever take up the cross and follow our Lord? Who can carry all that luggage and also a heavy cross? Anyone who tries will be greatly exhausted and frustrated and will make little to no headway while everyone else is progressing.

My beloved, we first have to let go “for whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:25-26). When we feel that we have lost our joy; when we feel depressed or agitated; when we lose interest and become lukewarm; when we judge harshly and disobey, know that we still haven’t reached that first stage St. John Climacus wrote about in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* — Renunciation. Know that we are still holding on to something that we should have given up long ago.

The cross is joy when we submit to it and we can submit to it if we first agree to let go.

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.