



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

Q13: I'm upset with my brother and I purposely avoid greeting him in the church. I feel like it's hypocrisy to greet and say, "I've sinned, forgive me" when that isn't what I feel in my heart.

I know I should be feeling remorse, but the truth is that, at this moment, I am upset with him and don't feel like I've done anything wrong to apologize about.

A13: I understand that when we are hurt we have expectations that the person who hurt us will acknowledge what we feel they did wrong and come and apologize to us, but unfortunately this isn't always the reality.

There's a saying that says that true humility is forgiving before we receive an apology so maybe there is no need to focus on the actions of your brother, but to remember that, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) and consider our own sins.

I believe that by doing this and asking for God to strengthen you, you will be free in your heart to love your brother again and to forgive the wrong that hurt you. This way you will be able to sincerely say, "I've sinned, forgive me brother."

Q14: I feel like my motivation for following the rules and guidelines comes from the fact that I'm being observed by others. I honestly don't know how much of my motivation is internal.

A14: In Galatians we read: "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." Our goal as Christians is to live a life pleasing to our Creator not to man, and so it is okay that we have an external motivation which helps us do this, however, if our goal is reversed, then we risk falling into hypocrisy and deceiving ourselves.

John Climacus said, "If we picture for ourselves the face of the superior whenever he happens to be away, if we think of him always standing nearby, if we avoid every gathering, word, meal, sleep, or indeed anything to which we think he might object,

then we have really learned true obedience. False children are glad when the teacher is away, but the genuine think it a loss.” Here we see that the disciple longs for the feeling of being under observation because it keeps him on the right track, not so that he can be pleasing to any human being at all, but solely so that he can keep the commandments for the love of God.

Q15: Do the Midnight Praises have to be mandatory?

A15: Please see the reply to the question above—no, it doesn’t have to be mandatory but aren’t you thankful that in school, for example, exams were mandatory? Even though studying for exams is sometimes very difficult, if it weren’t for these then how many of us would have received a good education?

What is more beautiful than praising God? Even if we don’t say anything at all, is there anything more beautiful than, first thing in the morning, listening to the blessed chants which have been chanted by the saints generations before our time? Chants that praise the One who gave us everything.

Mandatory is not always a bad thing.

Q16: One of my Sisters seems to only be really close to one person. Her love is partial and it bothers me.

A16: As St. Isaac the Syrian says, “Love all men, but keep distant from all men.” Our love should be the same for all of our Brothers and Sisters in the closed monastic community but if it isn’t yet, it’s okay, we are all struggling.

I would simply keep my focus on God.