



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

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

**October 2019**

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (Jn. 14:27)

My dearly beloved children, we were given the most precious heavenly gift—one that has been a defining characteristic of Christians since the very beginning—the gift of peace from the Prince of Peace. When troublesome thoughts arise and when our desires are not for God alone, we often find ourselves at a loss of peace, but knowing the value of this precious gift, we should always be on guard. Through prayer and the renewal of our mind, we should fight against all that is foreign and allow nothing else but the peace of God to rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15).

The remembrance of wrongs is a great danger to a peaceful heart. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to be merciful and forgiving, to return good for evil and blessing for a curse because this maintains our peace and saves us from a hardened heart and a bitter and angry disposition. “A brother asks Abba Rufus, ‘What is interior peace, and what use is it?’ The old man said, ‘Interior peace means to remain sitting in one’s cell with the fear and knowledge of God, holding far off the remembrance of wrongs suffered and pride of spirit. Such interior peace brings forth all virtues, preserves the monk from the fiery darts of the enemy, and does not allow him to be wounded by them. Yes, brother, acquire it. Keep in mind your future death, remembering that you do not know at what hour the thief will come. Likewise, be watchful over your soul.’”<sup>1</sup>

Losing sight of the goal often stirs in us feelings of anxiety, for we lose the remembrance of God. The devil never ceases to guide us off the right path with anything that we are willing to accept as a distraction. Every thought coming to us should be examined and if the thought continually takes away our peace then we must pray to our Savior and ask Him to deliver us—“Be anxious for nothing, but in

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<sup>1</sup> *The sayings of the Desert Fathers: the alphabetical collection*, Ward, B., trans. (London: Mowbray: Cistercian Publications, 1983), p.210.

everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, *which surpasses all understanding*, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7). One who keeps his eyes on the goal will always strive to benefit from all things— Abba Phortas said, “It is necessary that those who are consecrated to God and look only to Him, should be so well disposed that they do not consider anything as an injury, not even if someone wrongs them ten thousand times.”<sup>2</sup>

The battle can also come from the inside as opposed to external thoughts. The vow of voluntary poverty protects us from much of this type of warfare, for how can one who willingly desires nothing but God alone, be tempted by anything? It is said that “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” (James 1:14) so for instance, if one completely abhorred honor, the devil would have a difficult time distracting him with this, and so forth. Therefore when, by the grace of God, we discover within ourselves a desire which turns into a tool for devil to use against us, we should ask it, “Friend, why have you come?” (Mat. 26:50) and strive to be delivered from it.

When our thoughts trouble us with the wrongs others have done to us, let us look to ourselves and remember that, “God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8). When we find that our thoughts are consumed with any matter that has taken us away from our Bridegroom, let us pray our psalms and meditate on every beautiful and comforting word of joy, peace, and protection—“You have put gladness in my heart, [...] I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” (Ps. 4:7-8), “In Your presence is fullness of joy;” (Ps.16:11), “I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble.” (Ps. 142:2) and we should continually pray that our desires remain for nothing and no one but God alone, and shun every thought that does not bring us closer to the Kingdom.

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> *The sayings of the Desert Fathers: the alphabetical collection*, Ward, B., trans. (London: Mowbray: Cistercian Publications, 1983), p.243.