



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic

November 2019

My dearest children,

Why did we decide to join the monastic life? Was it not for the dream of living a heavenly life as angels on earth? In the Divine Liturgy we say, “You have filled the earth with the heavenly peace”—a heavenly life in the presence of God, while still on earth is what we all sought. Remembering this, we then are able to understand that all the things which distract us from being in the presence of God are deceptions that remove us from our heavenly peace. St. Paul said, *“fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”* (Phil. 2:2-4). This is the key to life.

St. Paul said, *“being of one accord,”* something which is repeated many, many times in the Book of Acts—a book which recounts the beginning of the early Church—the beginning of the unity of the believers as one body in Christ. Why then is this so easily neglected? Both me and my neighbor should seek out the mind of Christ, neither of us should seek our own opinions and will, and thus we will find a peaceful ground to share our love with quiet surrender.

The problem is often our selfish ambitions or conceit—we desire a certain thing in a certain way or at a certain time. We love ourselves more than our neighbor and we don’t like being stripped of our pride for the sake of being filled with God alone. Don’t you see that our will stands in the way of our freedom? Don’t you see that only a bondservant of Christ is truly free? Don’t you see that our grumbling heart tears us away from heavenly peace?

In *The Conferences of John Cassian*, Abbot Moses says, “For hence it arises that in the case of some who have despised the greatest possessions of this world, and not only large sums of gold and silver, but also large properties, we have seen them afterwards disturbed and excited over a knife, or pencil, or pin, or pen. Whereas if **they kept their gaze steadily fixed out of a pure heart** they would certainly never allow such a thing to happen for trifles, [...]”

We speak again and again about the means of attaining a pure heart, about true monasticism, which is the way of perfection, about love and sacrifice, and yet “I brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able” (1 Cor. 3:1-2).

What do you think? Do you think that we are easily distracted with our obediences—tasks which are meant to keep us focused on God and yet become a god themselves? Do you think that we sometimes deal with each other as coworkers—superiors and subordinates rather than brothers and sisters and “esteem others better than himself”? Do you think we sometimes lose sight of the goal and, instead of being light bearers, become a completely different light in the community?

As we approach the blessed fast of the Nativity, I would like for us to grow closer to God and to His commandments. Before we seek our own will and then pray about it being blessed, let us ask God what He wills instead. Let us be filled with the Holy Spirit and the words of the Holy Bible so that we can be blessing to one another every day and in every encounter.

Through humility my dear children, we will truly live heaven on earth.

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

Glory be to God forever. Amen.