



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Questions and Answers December 2019

Q35: Tell us about dreams.

A35: I would like to begin with mentioning that we are not responsible for our dreams so long as we are not pondering related thoughts during the day.

In Fr. Matthew the Poor's book "Spiritual Economy" he mentions that when someone sees a bad image the devil makes thousands of copies of this image and places them into the subconscious; he [the devil] then uses these images in our dreams in order to lead us into despair. However, we do not lose hope.

Things that can help prevent such dreams is to prepare for sleep in a holy way—listen to a sermon, read a story of a saint, pray psalms, read the Holy Bible—so that you cover yourself with a blanket of holy things. The eleventh hour and veil absolution, from the Agpeya, are also helpful to pray if you are being fought by dreams. Other things that help are to cross yourself, and to cross the ceiling, the bed and the corners of your cell before sleeping—so that you protect yourself with the armor of the Holy Cross.

Remain patient in your struggle and rely on God; have faith and do not despair—may the Lord grant you strength.

Q36: How do I respond to feelings of jealousy regarding work distribution, especially when I perceive there to be favoritism in the monastery/convent (i.e. some remain in their work for a long time, as opposed to others who are often rotating)?

A36: I don't think it is right to accuse the monastery's management with the favoritism. What if your judgment is wrong?

Every work in the monastery/convent is a blessing. I recall that, in the Sourian Monastery especially, we didn't have workers, nor did we ask those on retreat to do our work for us; at the time when I was responsible for the church, I would clean on my own. We didn't have vacuums nor the same technology as we do today, and so one day I was outside sweeping and one of the monks passed by and said to me, "Fr. Youstos, the dust of the church is a blessing" and indeed, I used to be very happy cleaning the church.

Later on, when I was in charge of the kitchen, I would never leave it unless everything was put back in its place and clean so that if anyone received the kitchen after me, they would find it ready for use. One time during Holy Week—a period of time that was very busy due to the schedule and the number of visitors—I was returning to my cell so exhausted that I had to sit down for a moment on the stairs before continuing on. When I finally entered my cell, at around midnight, I received a knock on my door asking me to come and help unload stones from a truck—I joined an assembly line for 3 or 4 hours unloading a truck of stones with my brothers. Allowing me only a few moments of rest before returning once more to prayers. We didn't complain of being tired, but every one of us went to help happy for the blessing.

Keep in mind that there was no electricity after nine in the evening and so we would work on candlelight and yet we would still complete our work faithfully—we did not complain nor look beyond what God had asked us to do because to us it wasn't "work" but a blessing. Whether we changed jobs or not, we were still receiving a blessing.

Concerning some remaining in the same work for a long time—HG Bishop Sarabamon, the Abbot of St. Bishoy Monastery, worked in the kitchen for fifteen continuous years—our monastery/convent has not even reached this age yet. The kitchen, during the time when His Grace was serving in it, was reputed to be a place of rest and great welcome. I recall being told that anyone visiting the kitchen was received as an honorary guest with great attention and generosity.

Don't let the devil tempt you with these thoughts about your work—there is no work greater than another. Actually, it's quite the opposite; the work that we consider to be less honorable is very important in the eyes of God when the one serving works with thanksgiving and humility.

Q37: Is it okay to pray my canon (i.e. psalms) during communal prayers and/or Liturgy?

A37: So, the priest is saying, "O God, the Great, the Eternal..." and you are saying, "The prayer of the third hour of this blessed day..."? What do you think—is this right?

Do you consider it to be a type of multitasking—you're attending the Divine Liturgy but also praying your canon? This of course is wrong.

The only time, during communal prayer, that something like this would be acceptable would be during the evening prayers. Let's say you were given a psalm to pray and you completed it but the gospel has not yet begun being read, in this case you have some time to pray any additional prayers you would like. However, as soon as the priest says, "Zoxasi" then we have to stop because communal prayers have begun.

Q38: Why do I have to attend Matins Raising of Incense? I'm usually tired and feel I need the rest so I can carry on with the rest of the day. Is it a big deal if I skip it as long as I'm not leading the responses?

A38: My beloved, do you know the difference between each offering in the Old Testament? Do you know that the burnt offering is the only one in which the entirety of it is consumed and offered to God and none of the priests partake of it?

"The burnt offering shall be on the hearth upon the altar all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it." (Leviticus 6:9)

Do you understand that, as monastics, we are that burnt offering? No part of us is reserved for anything but God and God alone and so, as was commanded to Moses by God, we are that burnt offering to be offered until morning.

This offering of praise in the morning—when we chant the Verses of Cymbals and greet all the heavenlies and saints, and pray for peace of the Church, the Fathers, the Monasteries/Convents is such a blessing! Why would you want to miss it? Even if you are not taking communion, why would you want to miss it? So, you can sleep? So, you can cook? So, you can check your emails?

Don't let the evil one take away from you this offering of sacrifice and give it to your flesh and to your desires instead.

I assure you that you will receive a blessing if you willingly offer this burnt offering to the Lord.