



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Questions and Answers January 2020 (1)

**Q39:** Sometimes we fear each other, and we act in fear – not even wanting to do good things – just in case this good thing will upset the Father or /mother in charge of the task. How can there be respect and love without fear?

**A39:** There is no contradiction between loving each other without fear and also respecting each other. There need not to be fear in order for there to be respect.

If we are asked to do something, so long as it is not detrimental to the community, we should submit and obey out of the desire to please God. If we are the ones initiating something, it should not break the rules established in the community and should not override anyone's responsibility.

Why do we fear each other? We are brothers and sisters – without familiarity there should always be an exchange of love and respect in our interactions with each other. We should be careful not to be too casual in order not to make the mistake of losing reverence for one another.

There is a saying that if a disciple does not want to grow on their own, the one who's responsible for them suffers in their service. If the goal is to be free to do as we please without any fear of "getting into trouble" then perhaps we should reexamine our goals. It is true that a monastic might reach the stage of living how they want to live without being observed by anyone, but this person should greatly weep for themselves.

What is there to do with someone who is always complaining and arguing and does not want to be corrected or changed? How will this one grow? We have no choice but to leave them to their own will and pray for them.

The goal should be God and to live a life pleasing to God, not ourselves.

Therefore, there should be no thought of fear of one another – *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1John 4:18).*

**Q40: When we meet together as a community - for the purpose of strength and unity - some Fathers/Mothers don't participate and this brings negativity to the whole community. How can we overcome this?**

**A40:** I want to differentiate between two types of Monastics:

Some are determined to bring anything down and have negative perceptions and negative interpretations about everything. You can sit with them all day long and they will do nothing but complain the entire time. For such monastics, we need to pray for them. Perhaps it is better that they don't participate in such activities - perhaps they would bring negative energy to the activity.

Others may not participate because they feel that the atmosphere of the activity does not lift them up. For instance, these activities may inspire gossip and idle social time as opposed to edification and unity and therefore prevent certain monastics from wanting to participate.

- I believe that we need to get the feedback of the monastics that do not participate and listen to what they have to say seriously. Perhaps they have suggestions and solutions that would improve the gathering. Perhaps there could then be certain rules applied to the gathering, such as practicing silence for a time, that would help aid the spirit of the activity.
- Also, my attitude towards the gathering is very important. If all of us understand that the purpose of the activity is to build unity and love, then we should all approach the activity with this mindset. Let's say I am upset with one of my brothers or sisters, then, with this attitude I will make an effort to work with this specific person in order to break down the wall we have between us and build a bridge instead.
- It is also my vision that we if we get together to do something productive for the monastery/convent this will naturally build love and unity because, in such activities, we would all have the same end goal.

May these three points help us overcome any issues.

**Q41: When I'm exhausted, is it better to return to my cell and rest after Midnight Praises so I can function during the rest of the day? Or remain and struggle in and out of sleep until the end of the Liturgy?**

**A41:** St. Isaac the Syrian says that, "**A man can never learn what divine power is while he abides in comfort**" — if the saints, by whose example we live by, never gave rest to their bodies, is it right that we would leave the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and sleep?

Yes I understand that we sometimes have busy schedules and that sometimes we are not feeling well physically or emotionally or are very tired, but we are here to struggle against the flesh that God may grant us the gift of prayer — again St. Isaac says, "**For anything that is quickly obtained is also easily lost, whereas everything found with toil is also kept with careful watching.**"

Does this mean that if I'm tired I can just take a corner in the church and sleep? Of course not — we are not here to sleep, but to pray — and this is not struggling against the flesh but giving in to it. However, if I faithfully make every effort to try and stay awake and offer God every ounce of energy I have left in me, then I wouldn't worry that I accidentally fell asleep against my will but carry on and God will see my struggle and reward me.

I leave you with another quote from St. Isaac, "**The knowledge of God does not dwell in a pleasure-loving body, and the man who loves his own body will not obtain divine gifts. Just as from labor-pangs a fruit is born that delights its mother, so from toil there is born in the soul the knowledge of the mysteries of God; but slothful and pleasure-loving men reap the fruit of shame. As a father cares for his child, so Christ also cares for the body enduring hardship for His sake and He is near to its mouth at all times.**"

May God strengthen you.