



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Questions and Answers March 2020

**Q47: Is favoritism a sin and, if so, how do I overcome it?**

**A47:** There's a difference between a friendship — someone who elevates me spiritually — and favoring someone. Favoring is when we apply double standards. For instance, I could be responsible for a certain task in the monastery and make exceptions for some and be strict with others. This is favoritism and yes, it is a sin.

We find mention of the sin in James chapter 2, "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or 'Sit here at my footstool,' have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?" (James 2: 1-4) and we also are given the solution to overcome it, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors." (James 2: 8-9).

If I find that I have a tendency to favor someone, I need to fight against this tendency in my heart.

**Q48: Is it right to leave the church quickly at the end of the prayers even before the benediction?**

**A48:** I have an issue with the word "before the benediction". Several Fathers of the Church likened those leaving the church before the last benediction to Judas who left after eating the bread at the Last Supper. So, we should remain until the benediction.

After the benediction, one should ask themselves why do I leave so quickly from the church? Is it truly because I want to return to my cell and continue prayer? If so, this is great. Is it because I don't want the laypeople to distract me? If so, this is also great. However, if I am leaving the church quickly in order to avoid another member of the community then this is not good.

Regarding chatting after the congregation is dismissed, Abba Macarius the Alexandrian once told the brethren, "Flee" and when they asked "Father, how can we flee more than to the desert?" he, laying his hands upon his mouth, said to them, "Flee from this." Fleeing to your cell is a monastic virtue if you are doing it for the right reason, but we need to examine our hearts and see why we are quickly leaving the church. Is it to run to my cell in peace and silence and continue prayer or is it so I can catch the bus that's leaving with a group of laypeople that I would like to say goodbye to?

Examine your heart and understand why you make the choices you do — is it for God or for another reason?

**Q49: What's the purpose of greeting each other when we first enter the church? What if I just I greet with my hands, but I don't say the words, "I've sinned, forgive me"?**

**A49:** We enter the church in order to pray and in order for God to accept our prayers, we need to be reconciled with one another. It's the same principle during Divine Liturgy when we greet one another after the Prayer of Reconciliation. So as soon as I enter the church, I greet the whole community lest there should be something in my heart that I am holding against them and if this is the case then how will my prayers be heard?

If I'm holding a grudge or I'm greeting in silence to purposely not say the words, "I've sinned forgive me" then my prayers will not be accepted by God. This greeting is very important. One can think it's insignificant and so not do it or one can avoid greeting the entire community in order to avoid a specific person they are upset with, but this is not right. Furthermore, knowing this is not right they can resort to thought of not attending the prayers at all, but that's not the wise solution — the solution is to greet each other with humility and with a pure heart, it's not to have a hardened heart and greet in silence or not greet at all nor pray at all.

No matter at what point we enter the church, this greeting should be done with everyone and with a pure and humble heart.

**Q 50: I would like to suggest forbidding speaking in front of the cells and in church.**

**A 50:** Concerning the cells, I agree that there should be a rule that there be no speaking in front of the cells. If I were in my cell praying while others are outside my door in conversation, this would definitely be a distraction to me.

Respecting each other's silence is important. Fr. Matteous used to tell us to be careful when opening and closing doors so not to disturb our brethren. This is a monastic ethic—when opening a door, we should not simply let it shut behind us, but hold it and close it in order to avoid unnecessary noise. He also used to tell us to pick up our feet when we walk so not to make a rustling sound with each step.

Concerning the church, there's really no need to talk. If I want to say something about the order of prayers, there's no need since someone is leading and we can simply follow and tell them after prayers are done. I recall that Fr. Pachom used to tell us that even if there should be a fire in the church, no one should move from their place. This goes even further than just not speaking.

Remember this verse from the last psalm in the sixth hour, whether in or outside church, "Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever."