



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic

April 2020

My very dear and beloved children in the Lord,

This month we will share in two very important seasons in our Church—Holy Pascha Week and the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The first season fills us with internal stillness and prayer through its beautiful hymns and remembrance of the passions of our Lord, and the second fills us with internal joy and faith knowing that death no longer reigns in us but that we will one day rise together with Him. Through these—prayer and faith, our Church teaches us how we are to sojourn on this earth as children of the God.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.” (1 Thess. 5:16-19) In these three verses, God is commanding us to do something continuously—regarding joy, it says “rejoice always”, regarding prayer, it says “pray without ceasing”, regarding thanksgiving, it says “in everything give thanks”, and is also telling us that by keeping these commandments we fulfill the will of God for us, and, that through this fulfillment, we kindle and strengthen our spirits.

How will we be strengthened in spirit? Because there’s a cycle that occurs — our Lord said, “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24) and anyone who receives what they ask is naturally joyful, therefore we can say that prayer leads to joy and because one who is joyful naturally gives thanks, we can then say that prayer leads to joy and joy leads to thanksgiving. Finally, how do we give thanks to God? We give thanks through prayer, and so this way we cycle through joy, thanksgiving and prayer continuously strengthening the spirit.

Why is prayer so important? Prayer is important because it is the most powerful form of healing. St. Paul used the words, “fiery darts” (Eph. 6:16) in reference to the attacks of the devil to explain that any temptation that comes our way is like a fiery dart piercing the spirit and also leaving a burning wound. Every time I lie, gossip, have an evil eye, am attacked by evil thoughts, refuse to forgive, have fears and doubts... I become greatly wounded in body and spirit. Thus prayer, because it connects me with the true Physician of my spirit and body, will remove the darts

and clean my wounds. When I stand before God in prayer, He pours on me the oil of the Holy Spirit and heals my wounds.

Why are we called to do it unceasingly when many times it seems more efficient to busy ourselves with more practical things? We pray unceasingly because prayer needs to take its course. In the same way that antibiotics need to take their full course in order to free us from bacteria, so too does prayer need to continue in order to vanquish Satan. Just like stopping the antibiotics too early produce a more resistant strain of bacteria making the antibiotic ineffective, in the same manner, if we give up on prayer too early, Satan will attack us more severely and we will find that returning to prayer is more difficult. This is why it is very important not give up, but to persevere in prayer continuously in order to be protected by God.

The more we pray, the more God satisfies all our needs and the more we will be content and not desire anything from this world. “Nevertheless, I am continually with You [in prayer]; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel [protection], and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.” (Ps. 73:23-25) If I have God, I will need nothing else but will live as a stranger without a permanent city here but a citizenship in heaven.

Prayer gives us peace. St. Paul gave us the remedy for anxiety. But what am I supposed to do with this long list of things I am anxious about?? He tells us that everything we are anxious about, by prayer and thanksgiving should be made known to God (Phil. 4:6-7). Instead of being anxious, put all these things before God and talk to Him about your anxiety “and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus—both physically and emotionally.

Prayer builds our faith and faith is needed in order to participate in the resurrection of Christ. He who believes, even if he dies, will live. Therefore there is a passing from death to life—a resurrection for those who believe. If Christ did not rise from the dead then our faith is empty and our prayers in vain.

The church gives us the story of Thomas who did not believe in the resurrection of Christ to teach us the importance of faith. To Thomas, seeing was believing. He had to see and touch in order to believe (John 20:25). Many of us are like this and need tangible proof or else we lose faith. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us that it is more blessed to believe without seeing because whatever we see cannot then be called faith. Faith is having confidence in what we don't see—but how? Through our experience and through our dealing with God we will learn that God is the God of the impossible. God, contrary to hope and contrary to science, has done many wonders. He has given life to the dead, children to the barren, sight to the blind, healing to the sick...

The resurrection of Christ is our resurrection—we die with Him and rise with him. Many times Satan will cast doubt in our hearts, doubts in God's ability, in His care, but through our faithfulness to God, we strengthen our faith in Him. The Lord for me is not an idea, He is reality; I have dealt with Him, I have experienced Him, I have a real relationship with Him, I am faithful to Him and He is faithful to me. In this relationship ask the Lord to increase your faith just as the disciples once did (Luke 17:5). So, the Lord will show you and prove to you that He is a real presence in your life and your faith will grow.

Prayer is simply to speak to God the same way you would speak to someone you love. He is your loving Father, compassionate, good, and rich in mercy. Speak to Him about anything and everything. He said ask and you shall receive so stand before Him and talk to Him and He will listen to you. God will not necessary say yes to everything that we request but He promised us that He will listen to everything and that He will do the best for us. So, no matter what the answer is, this answer will be what we need, even if we do not understand it. Pray in truth and spirit so that you may be filled with Him, with His peace and with His joy. Pray unceasingly so that you may grow in your relationship with God and increase daily in your faith.