



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Questions and Answers April 2020

Q 51: In the story of Achan the son of Carmi, although he confessed, why did he perish and why with his children?

A 51: There's a difference between making someone confess and someone confessing of their own volition.

The Lord said that Israel had both stolen and deceived and yet Achan did not confess; the Lord then said that everyone should come out according to their tribe and Achan still did not confess; then according to the families and then households and yet Achan *still* did not confess.

Only when Joshua confronted Achan did Achan say, "Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done" (Jos. 7:20); God gave Achan many opportunities to confess on his own but the truth only came out when he was cornered or caught, but this is not true confession.

Of course, his children should have confessed and told the truth, but their silence was a participation in the sin.

A true confession is not taken from us out of fear but given from us out of repentance.

Q 52: In the 9th hour Gospel the Lord takes His disciples away privately but when the multitude came to Him, He received them. We see our Lord Jesus Christ's constant mercy in this regard, but we can find the complete opposite with some of the Desert Fathers like St. Arsenius who never received anyone at all. Why the difference?

A 52: It is because our Lord Jesus Christ was serving and monks like St. Arsenius lived in seclusion from the world. There is a difference between the path of service and the path of meditation, worship and contemplation.

If you were consecrated servants, I would not advise you not to interact with laypeople because this is your service. However, as monastics — dead to the world — it is not so.

I am here in the monastery and if someone comes right now and asks to meet with me, I cannot decline because I am serving. However, when I was living in the monastery, I did not interact with laypeople at all. If someone I knew from church or service came to visit, the most I would do would be to greet them only. This, of course, changed once I went out for service. As a matter of fact, the very first time I spoke to a female more than 5min was after I became a serving priest.

The life of service is service, and the life of monasticism is monasticism.

Q 53: I took something from the kitchen without asking. Is it really that necessary to ask before borrowing or taking any small thing in the monastery/convent? Sometimes the process of asking takes so long that we don't even want the thing anymore!

A 53: Yes, it is necessary to ask. In the Sourian no one took anything without permission. I recall that, in our garden, we had an orange tree — a tree outside from which anyone could simply reach and take fruit from, however no one would do this. Even if an orange fell to the ground, I still wouldn't take it. If I wanted it, I would go to the Father in charge and ask permission. If the Father granted me the permission, then I would take it. If not, then I would not.

This is part of monastic ethics. We are not simply a group of people living together. There are monastic rules, and these are to be adhered to in the same way soldiers abide by the rules of the army. The difference here is that the army is not based on love, whereas the monastic life is.

There are some monastics that enjoy challenging every rule established and they are stumbling blocks to their own personal growth and to others in the monastery/convent. One can notice that as soon as a rule is established, these have some form of objection or request for exception and this is very dangerous to their lives as monastics.

So yes, you should have asked the person in charge before borrowing or taking anything.

Q 54: Should there be chorus leaders, or should we say hymns and praises all together as a group without necessarily having leading voices?

A 54: There should be chorus leaders. However, a leader isn't someone who raises his/her voice over everyone, but their role is to facilitate the harmony in the group. For instance, in a chorus, I may be weak in a certain part of the hymn therefore I lower my voice and allow the others to confidently say this part and so on. There is a type of management and awareness when saying hymns and praises together.

A chorus that knows how to sing together in one voice is a sign of humility. The one that doesn't is a sign of pride. Why? Because the prideful person wants to stand out regardless of if they know the hymn or not and this causes disharmony.

Thus, every chorus should have leaders and every leader should be helping harmonize the voice of the group.