



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic

July 2020

“For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (Rom. 7:15-20).

We join the monastic life with this great hope or expectation that everything will be wonderful! That we will live a delightful life and be at all times completely fulfilled and satisfied. The fact that this is not exactly how it happens. It is not because something is lacking in the path itself, but it is because something is still lacking within us. We read these edifying monastic books and we know what we should be doing and we also greatly desire to do these very things, but we find ourselves still falling and getting up and falling and getting back up again. However, my beloved, we do not despair when this happens for it is not a sign of weakness but a sign of growth – it is the battle between the flesh and the spirit not the victory of the flesh over the spirit – the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds to see the sin which resides in us.

I often hear it said, “I was not like this in the world” to which I often reply that the hidden thorns within you are making their way out and so it may seem that certain behaviors are unlike you but, in reality, the narrow path reveals the truth in us. Is this a cause of disappointment? Absolutely not! It is a cause of joy for now that we know, we can beseech God to teach us how to do something about it.

This is why we love St. Moses the Strong. We do not often hear about the weaknesses of the saints – their stories usually begin holy and increase in holiness – but St. Moses was not born to pious parents nor loved the church and so when he responded to the call of God he definitely struggled a great struggle between the spirit and the flesh. His mind no longer served sin, but his flesh willfully did, and he faced many battles from within and from without. So then why do we suffer so much when we find ourselves far from the virtues we wish to attain? This reality should be received with

a simple heart and faithful prayer. It is possible to follow in the footsteps of the saints if only we would... follow... in... the... footsteps... of... the saints.

We cannot just wear the black robe and attend mandatory prayers but also hate our brother and claim that we are walking the path of the saints; we cannot just read and practice ascetic exercises and also desire positions of authority and claim we are walking the path of the saints –we have to accept that there is a war between our spirit and the flesh but we also have to do our part, we have to resist until bloodshed, striving against sin (Heb. 12:4-11) and only then can we be worthy of treading on the same ground as the saints before us.

So when, in your daily activities, you meet sin – anything at all against your monastic and Christian life, do not accept it. Do not make excuses for yourself as to justify your thoughts and actions but pray that God may grant you the strength, humility and purity of heart to reveal it, strive against it, and rise above it.

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:24-25)

May the prayers of the saints be with us all.

May the peace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.