



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic

September 2020

O blessed humility, the teacher of all virtues for we only can forgive, love one another and obey if we acquire humility.

St. Isaac the Syrian was once asked, “How can a man acquire humility?” And he said: “by unceasing remembrance of one’s own transgressions; by expectation of approaching death; by inexpensive clothing; by always preferring the last place; by always running to do the tasks that are the most insignificant and disdainful; by not being disobedient; by unceasing silence; by dislike of gatherings; by desiring to be unknown and of no account; by never possessing anything at all through self-will; by shunning conversation with numerous persons; by having no love of material gain; and after these things, by raising the mind above reproach and accusation of every man and above envy; by not being one whose hand is against every man, and against whom is every man’s hand (Gen. 16:12.), but rather one who remains alone, occupied with his own affairs; by having no concern for anyone in the world save himself. But in brief: exile, poverty, and a solitary life give birth to humility and cleanse the heart.”

The sign of those who have attained to perfection is this: if, for the sake of his love for men, a man were to be given to the fire ten times a day, he would not be content with this, even as Moses said to God, “Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.”; and like the blessed Paul who said, “For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh”; and again, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for the nations.” And likewise, the other apostles accepted many kinds of death because of their fervent desire that men should receive life.

But the sum of all is that God the Lord surrendered his own son to death on the cross for the fervent love of creation. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son over to death for its sake.” This was not, however, because He could not have redeemed us in another way, but so that His surpassing love, manifested hereby, might be a teacher unto us. And by the death of His only begotten Son He made us near to Himself. Yea, if He had had anything more precious, He would have given it to us, so that by it our race might be His own. Because of His great love for us it was not His pleasure to do violence to our freedom (although He is able to do so), but He chose that we should draw near to Him by the love of our understanding. For the sake of His love for us, and in obedience to His Father, Christ joyfully took upon Himself insult and sorrow, as Scripture says, “For the joy that was set before Him He endured the Cross, despising the shame.” For this same reason the Lord said on the night in which He was betrayed, “This is My body which is given for the world for life, and this is my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” And again he said for our sakes, “I sanctify Myself.”

In like manner, when the saints become perfect, they all attain to this perfection, and by the superabundant outpouring of their love and compassion upon all men they resemble God. The Saints seek for themselves this sign of complete likeness to God: to be perfect in the love of their neighbor. The monastic fathers did likewise, when they strove to bear always in themselves that perfection and likeness (so full of life) of the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

“The prayer of one who humbles himself Will pierce the clouds. And it will not be consoled until it draws near; and it will not withdraw until the Most High beholds”² for surely “the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and humbled heart God shall not despise.”

In the end lets pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, humility with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, that we may attain the joy of eternal and heavenly blessedness.

¹ Saint Isaac the Syrian, The Ascetical Homilies (Holy Transfiguration Monastery), Homily 71, PP. 492, 493.

² Sirach 35:21