



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic

October 2020

“Sit amid lepers rather than amid the proud.”¹ St. Isaac The Syrian

“I always think about what others are thinking about me.” I said in a low voice. My Elder looked at me with kind eyes and said, “My son, more importantly ‘ask what does God think about you?’” His words were so simple yet so profound that it felt as his answer goaded my heart.²

I asked myself, why are vainglory and pride the worst of all the Passions³? Vainglory and pride are closely related that many Fathers do not think it is useful to study these two passions separately.⁴ After all, what pride remains in a man who has conquered vainglory? The difference is between a child and a man, between wheat and bread, for the first is a beginning and the second an end.⁵

We can say about pride and vainglory “she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to hell, descending to the chambers of death.”⁶ Dee Pennock puts it bluntly that to believe your prideful thoughts is “Mental Cannibalism.”⁷

The Fathers of the Church go as far as considering vainglory to be a sickness and a form of madness. St. John Chrysostom writes, bluntly: “Vainglory is a kind of madness.”⁸ St.

¹ Saint Isaac The Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies* (Holy Transfiguration Monastery), Homily 51, P. 382.

² Cf. “*The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.*” Ecclesiastes 12:11

³ More on the Passions, Dr Jean-Claude Larchet, *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses, An Introduction to the Ascetic Tradition of the Orthodox Church Volume One* (Alexander Press), P. 127

⁴ *Ibid*, P. 243.

⁵ John Climacus, *The Ladder Of Divine Ascent* (Paulist Press), Step 22, P. 201.

⁶ Proverbs 7:26-27

⁷ Dee Pennock, *Who Is God? How Am I? Who Are You?* (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Department of Religious Education), P. 36.

⁸ Dr Jean-Claude Larchet, *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses, An Introduction to the Ascetic Tradition of the Orthodox Church Volume One* (Alexander Press), chapter 10, P. 231.

Isaac the Syrian says “No man has understanding if he is not humble, and he who lacks humility is devoid of understanding. No man is humble if he is not peaceful, and he who is not peaceful is not humble. And no man is peaceful without rejoicing.”⁹

“Self-love and height opinion of ourselves give birth in us to yet another evil which does us grievous harm; namely, severe judgment and condemnation of our neighbors, when we regard them as nothing, despise them and, if an occasion offers, humiliate them. This evil habit or vice, being born of pride, feeds and grows on pride; and in turn feeds pride and makes it grow. For every time we pass judgment our pride takes a step forward, through the accompanying effect of self-importance and self-gratification. Since we value and think of ourselves so highly, we naturally look at others from on high, judge and despise them, for we seem to ourselves far removed from such faults as we think others possess. And here, seeing our evil disposition, our ever-wicked enemy stands by watchfully and, opening our eyes, teaches us to keep a sharp watch for what others say and do. From these observations he makes us draw conclusions at their thoughts and feelings; and, on these suppositions, form an opinion of them, generally not good, exaggerating this supposed defect into a deep-rooted feature. These judges do not see and realize that the very origin of their judgment, the suspicion of wrong in others, is impressed on my mind by the action of the enemy, and then fanned by him into a conviction that they are actually such, although it is not so at all. So, brother, since the enemy watches you constantly, waiting for an opportunity to sow evil in you, be doubly watchful over yourself, lest you fall into the nets spread for you. As soon as he shows you some fault in your neighbor, hasten to repel this thought, lest it take root in you and grow. Cast it out, so that no trace is left in you, and replace it by the thought of the good qualities you know your neighbor to possess, or of those people generally should have. If you still feel the impulse to pass judgment, add to this the truth, that you are giving no authority for this and that the moment you assume this authority you thereby make yourself worthy of judgment and condemnation, not before powerless men, but before God, the all-powerful Judge of all.”¹⁰

For our Lord said “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”¹¹

God will not ask us why did father so and so do this or why did father so and so act like this, but each one of us will be asked on account his own actions. The evil one sets his trap to ensnare us when we wage the wrong war against our brethren. Do we not know that we will be in heaven together? St. Anthony said our life and death is with our brethren. St. John Chrysostom says, “Till when are we going to oppose one another? Till when are we going to war against one another, by doing this we are granting our enemy the devil victory over us.” We bear the seal of love when we were baptized into Christ “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) Let us endure just as our Lord did when He “Gave His back to those who struck Him, And His cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; who did not hide His face from shame and spitting.” Our Beloved taught us the way when He said on

⁹ Saint Isaac The Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies* (Holy Transfiguration Monastery), Homily 51, P. 384.

¹⁰ Theophan the Recluse, *Unseen Warfare* (SVS Press), PP. 197, 198.

¹¹ Luke 6:37

the cross, “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing”, but did they really not know what they were doing? One only had to look at that face which is more “comely in beauty more than the sons of men”; one only had to hear Grace flowing from his lips, “Grace has been shed forth from Your lips; therefore God has blessed You forever” asking forgiveness on behalf of His crucifiers. The one, “who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten.” The one who “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” St. John Climacus says, “ happy is the one who puts to death his will, and submits his will and obey the one who was given to him by God as an elder and a father, surely his place will be on the right hand of the crucified Jesus Christ.” St. Peter says “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”