



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic

November 2020

On the Monastic Life

“By night on my bed I sought the one I love” (Song of Songs 3:1) that is a monk’s life seeking the one he loves. Being detached from everything, leaving behind everything even himself, Christ says he who wishes to follow me let him deny himself and carry his cross daily and follow me. Who says of his father and mother, ‘I have not seen them’; Nor did he acknowledge his brothers, Or know his own children; For they have observed Your word And kept Your covenant. They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, And Israel Your law. They shall put incense before You, And a whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar. Bless his substance, LORD, and accept the work of his hands; Strike the loins of those who rise against him, and of those who hate him, that they rise not again.” (Deuteronomy 33:9-11) A monk’s life is a daily search for the one he loves till he finds Him and when has found him “he will hold him and would not let him go” (Song of Songs 3:4)

A diligent monk has no time to waste, once said an elder “Don’t forget these words: God has given you time to build your eternal salvation. Do not waste it!” Let us help one another to grow spiritually, edifying, and building one another in love, in meekness, in humility, and in obedience. St. John the Beloved says “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. (If we have love for one another)” (1 John 3:14). Let us love one another with a pure heart free from deceit, malice, envy, and hypocrisy. Let us pray for one another till we arrive at our heavenly dwelling “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” (Hebrews 13:14-15) Let us put God in front of us at all times and before everything we do as David has said “I have set the Lord always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.”(Psalm 16:8). Truly if we have God in front of us we shall not be moved, for He is the life, salvation, hope, healing, and the resurrection of us all. Let us put the old man away and his evil works as God has said all old things have passed away, behold I make everything new and I will wipe away every and each tear. Let us ask God to renew our hearts and our whole being praying for one another. We have left the world with our own will to live in chastity, poverty and obedience; let us strive helping one another to live and fulfill these vows with all our might. “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore, I run thus: not with

uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”(1 Corinthians 9:24-27) St. Paul is commanding us to run so we can attain our heavenly crown, also St. Paul commands and exhorts St. Timothy saying “And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.”(2 Timothy 2:5) These are our rules; let us abide in them which are:

Chastity: “A chaste body is more precious before God than a pure offering. These two, humility and chastity, prepare in the soul a tabernacle for the Holy Trinity”¹ It is written in the book of wisdom “oh how beautiful is the chaste fruit of purity! For its remembrance is immortal, because it is observed both with God and with men.” (Wisdom 4:1)

Saint Isaac the Syrian says “the mind’s wings sprout up in the womb of chastity, and that on them the mind ascends to divine love”² to acquire pure a chastity we have to keep the mind from wandering, for every sin starts with a thought. St. Isaac teaches us further to “scour the beauty of your chastity with tears and fasting and the stillness of solitude”³ St. Paul says those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. “To be chaste is to put on the nature of an incorporeal being. A chaste man is someone who has driven out bodily love by means of divine love, who has used heavenly fire to quench the fires of the flesh”⁴ St. John Climacus teaches us “the man who struggles against the enemy by sweat and bodily hardships is like someone who has tied his adversary with a reed. If he fights him with temperance, sleeplessness, and keeping watch, it is as if he had put fetters on him. If he fights with humility, calmness, and thirst, it is as though he had killed the enemy and buried him in the sand, the sand being lowliness since it does nothing to feed the passions and is only earth and ashes”⁵ St. John Cassian teaches us loftiness of chastity “the reward of chastity is lofty and heavenly, it is assailed by ambushes of adversaries that are all the more serious. Therefore, it is to our advantage to cling not only to bodily abstinence but also, with frequent groans and prayers, to a contrite heart. It is thus the furnace of our flesh, which is the Babylonian King does not cease to heat up with the impulses of carnal suggestions, Will be extinguished when the dew of the Holy Spirit descends into our hearts, and unless a foundation of humility is laid we cannot overcome this passion.”⁶ Let us cry with St. Paul and say

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24)

“Then we must hold constantly to a humble and patient heart and be attentive and careful during the day with respect to anger and to other passions. For where the position of wrath makes and inroad the fire of lasciviousness will certainly penetrate too. But above all a watchful concern is necessary at night. For just as purity and carefulness during the

¹ Saint Isaac The Syrian, The Ascetical Homilies (Holy Transfiguration Monastery), Homily 51, P. 380

² Saint Isaac The Syrian, The Ascetical Homilies (Holy Transfiguration Monastery), Homily 34, P. 282

³ Saint Isaac The Syrian, The Ascetical Homilies (Holy Transfiguration Monastery), Homily 36, P. 286

⁴ John Climacus, The Ladder Of Divine Ascent (Paulist Press), on chastity P. 171

⁵ John Climacus, The Ladder Of Divine Ascent (Paulist Press), on chastity, P. 172

⁶ John cassian the Institutes, PP. 160, 161

day prepare the way for nocturnal chastity, so nocturnal watchfulness establishes a strong and secure condition for the heart and for its daytime observances”⁷

Therefore, let us glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God’s. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Poverty: But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ. (Philippians 3:7-8) St. John Climacus says about poverty “the poverty of a monk is resignation from care. It is life without anxiety and travels light, far from sorrow and faithful to the Commandments. The poor monk is lord of the world. He has handed all his cares to God, and by his faith has obtained all men as his servants. If he lacks something he does not complain to his fellows and he accepts what comes his way as if from the hand of the Lord. In his poverty he turns into a son of detachment and he sets no value on what he has. Having withdrawn from the world, he comes to regard everything as refuse. Indeed, he is not genuinely poor if he starts to worry about something. A man who has embraced poverty offers up prayer that is pure, why are men who loves the possessions prays to material images”⁸

St. Moses the strong says “ The love of possessions disturbs the mind” It was written about our Lord He had nowhere to lay His head, the creator of this whole entire world had nowhere to lay His head, the one that this whole earth is His footstool had nowhere to lay His head. Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9) The deep meaning of poverty is to be detached to earthly things and to be attached to what is heaven. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. (1 Timothy 6:7)

Amma Synkletike was asked is voluntary poverty always a good thing? And she said “it is entirely good to those who are capable. For those who endure it suffer in the flesh, yet receive comfort in their souls. Just as durable clothing is washed and whitened when one beats and scrubs it, so the strong soul becomes even stronger through voluntary poverty. So one could say that voluntary poverty is the most valuable treasure for a manly mind, since it restrains bodily sins like a bridle. The enemy is also soundly defeated by those who practice poverty; for he has no means to harm them. Voluntary poverty is certainly then the greatest blow against the enemy and an invaluable treasure for the soul.”

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

⁷ John Cassian the Institutes, P. 162

⁸ John Climacus, The Ladder Of Divine Ascent (Paulist Press), On poverty, P. 189

Obedience: Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17) Obedience is the teacher of humility without obedience we can never reach humility St. John Climacus says "Slaughter your pride with the knife of obedience". As it is written in the book of proverbs woe to those who are wise in their own eyes. Sirach teaches us "And if you see a man of understanding, stand watch for him, and let your feet wear down the steps of his doors." (Sirach 6:36) that is to ask for guidance and not to trust ourselves.

St. John Climacus teaches us the importance of obedience he says: Obedience is a total renunciation of our own life, and it shows up clearly in the way we act. Or, again, obedience is the mortification of the members while the mind remains alive. Obedience is unquestioned movement, death freely accepted, a simple life, danger faced without worry, an unprepared defense before God, fearlessness before death, a safe voyage, a sleeper's journey.

Obedience is the burial place of the will and the resurrection of lowliness. A corpse does not contradict or debate the good or whatever seems bad, and the spiritual father who has devoutly put the disciple's soul to death will answer for everything.⁹

When the thought strikes you to judge or condemn your superior, leap away as though from fornication. Give no trust, place, entry, or starting point to that snake. Say to this viper: "listen to me, deceiver, I have no right to pass judgment on my superior but he has the authority to be my judge. I do not judge him; he judges me"¹⁰

It was written about our Lord "He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. (Isaiah 50:4-5) shouldn't we be like our Lord and obey. Let's be obedient like Isaac and say here we are do as you wish with us even to the slaughter. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. (Isaiah 53:7) 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.

In the end let us follow in the footsteps of the flock. Great fathers have walked the same path before us, St. Anthony the great, St. Macarius the great and so many more. We are their sons and heirs of what they have attained, let us take pride in our monastic call and to preserve it to the end pure. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come so let us walk worthy of the calling with which we are called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3) for He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (Revelation 21:7).

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

⁹ John Climacus, The Ladder Of Divine Ascent (Paulist Press), Step 4 On obedience, PP. 91,92

¹⁰ John Climacus, The Ladder Of Divine Ascent (Paulist Press), Step 4 On obedience, P. 93