



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic

December 2020

I, who have saddened Your heart by my rejoicing

In the vain pleasures of the world.....

So be sorrowful, O my soul for your sins that caused these sufferings to your compassionate redeemer.¹ An elder once said “to fall and be injured is human, since even a man’s life lasted for only one day his mind is inclined to evil from his youth. But to fall and remain fallen is not human. Repentance recreates man; it was given to us to cure the soul after baptism. If it did not exist, rarely would a person be saved. That is why, the virtue of repentance is unending as long as a man is alive, for only the perfect do not err. My children, every time you see your thoughts reproaching you for some sin, immediately take the medicine: repent, weep, go to confession, and behold, you return to your former and better state”. Christ did not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners. When the Pharisees grumbled when our Lord was sitting with tax collectors and sinners, He told them what man of you having hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after than one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost! I say to you that likewise there will be more Joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. shouldn’t we take courage and rejoice in the power of repentance. For by it our bonds are broken, our load is which burdened us are taken off and put on the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Repentance is reconciling ourselves to God, Saint John Climacus says “repentance is renewal of baptism and is a contract with God for a fresh start in life. Repentance goes shopping for humility and is ever distrustful of

¹ Fraction to the Son: O Only-begotten Son.

bodily comfort. Repentance is critical awareness a sure watch over oneself. Repentance is the daughter of hope and the refusal to despair. (the penitent stands guilty but un-disgraced.) Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the performance of good deeds which are the opposites of the sins. It is the purification of conscience and the voluntary endurance of affliction.”² Let us not be ashamed of repentance and confession but let us be ashamed of sinning, if we have fallen let us not despair but let us turn back and humble ourselves and say to our Lord what else could be expected from me, O Lord, such a weak an immoral person? And right then thank Him, that the sin stopped there, and confess, if it were not for Your immeasurable goodness, O Lord, I would not have stopped at this, but definitely would have fallen into something even worse. St. Isaac the Syrian says “repentance is given to the sons of a men as grace after grace, for repentance is a second regeneration by God. that of which we have received an earnest by baptism, we receive as a gift by means of repentance. Repentance is the door of mercy, opened to those who seek it. By this door we enter into the mercy of God, and apart from this entrance we shall not find mercy. ‘for all have sinned,’ according to Divine scripture, ‘being justified freely by His grace.’ Repentance is the second grace and is begotten in the heart by faith and fear. Fear is the paternal rod that guides our way until we reach the spiritual paradise of good things. As it is not possible to cross over the great ocean without a ship, so no one can attain to love without fear. This fetid(rotten) sea, which lies between us and the noetic Paradise,

we can cross with the boat of repentance, whose oarsmen are those of fear. But if the oarsmen of fear do not pilot this barque(ship) of repentance wherewith we cross over the sea of this world to God, we shall be drowned in the fetid sea. Repentance is the ship, and fear is the pilot; Love is the divine haven.

Thus, fear sets us in the ship of repentance, transports us over the foul sea of this life (that is, of the world), and guides us to the divine port, which is love. Hither proceed all that labor and are afflicted and heavy laden in repentance. When we attain to love, we attain to God.³

Let us not delay our repentance, for it is the key of renewal, my return to God, the washing of my sins, the kingdom of God. Our beloved said he who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. Our beloved was consented to be tied ropes that He may loosen us from the bonds of our sins. The door of

² John Climacus, *The Ladder Of Divine Ascent* (Paulist Press), On Penitence P. 121

³ Saint Isaac The Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies* (Holy Transfiguration Monastery), Homily 46, PP. 357, 359.

repentance is always open before us let us be bold and enter through it, let us not heed to the devil when he says our sins are greater than to be forgiven, he is the father of lies. God to show us his immeasurable love, when He couldn't find a greater sacrifice, He sacrificed His only begotten Son. Let us not listen to him when he says your father of confession will look down upon you, he is the father of lies. Nothing rejoices a father of confessions heart as much as to see his spiritual children free from all the bonds of sins. Let us mingle our repentance with tears like the sinful woman, not even today His treasury lacking in forgiveness. It is full just as it has always been, and it's door will be opened for the one who seeks Him. Whoever has pains in his body should run unto Him. And whoever iniquity of the soul has marked should take shelter in Him. Bring tears just like the sinful woman, to the house of God. And receive, just like her, forgiveness of sins for yourselves. Kiss His gates and draw near to His threshold, just as she did. And sprinkle with your tears the ground of the house of atonement. It is here [in the house of atonement] that Jesus is the one loved by the sinful woman. And He stands ready to forgive hidden sins for those who invite Him. He who is needing forgiveness for his deeds, let him sprinkle tears on His threshold and, behold he is forgiven. He who is bitten by the serpent who killed Adam, let him drink the cup of Jesus, who conquered the serpent's poison. He who has made a mark on his soul through free will, he has a physician who will freely heal him. He who willfully went astray and fell, let him also wish to stand up. For it is your choice to run your course according to your wish. Make a petition, just like the sinful woman, and bring to Him. For in Him is His mercy every day and every moment. Weep just as She wept, loving as she loved, and you will receive from the Giver the same atonement as hers. Jesus is today and He was yesterday and will always be. Just as He forgave, He well also forgive the one who seeks Him. His gate is open, and His Love is poured out to the penitent one. Blessed is the Compassionate One, the story of whose mercy cannot be contained.⁴

Let us come back to ourselves and return to our heavenly Father like the prodigal son. Let us not despair when we fall but shout with the prophet *“Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The LORD will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, Because I have sinned against Him, Until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness. Then she who is my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, “Where is the LORD your God?” My eyes will see her; Now she will be trampled down Like mud in the streets. Who is a God like You, pardoning*

⁴ Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the sinful woman.

iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:8-10, 18-19) God commanded that we should forgive one another seven times seventy, would He not forgive us when we turn back to him by repentance and confession, surely he will. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

St. John Saba (The spiritual elder) says, O great mercy, how abundant you are! O Lord, can anyone not marvel from Your mercy? Can anyone not confess Your Grace? You came that we be born from the womb of repentance as You were born from the Blessed Virgin Mary Your mother. We have lived in evil and wickedness, but repentance can purify and enlighten us. Adam can bear children from Eve, which resemble the physical world. Likewise, Jesus, from baptism and repentance, can bear children who resemble the spiritual world. He says to us, “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” How can we find repentance if it is close? Repentance is the mother of life, blessed is he who is born from it, he will never die. Christ calls everyone to repent, but the devil prevents people from hearing that calling. Repentance saves those who are captives to sin. Repentance changes adulterers to celibates. It is fire, which burns the weeds. It is the water for the holy plants. It is the intercessor of the captives. Who is he who does not love you, O repentance; you carry all the blessings? Only the devil hates you for you have taken away his wealth, properties and made him empty from his inheritance which he once plundered. No one who puts his hope in you ever fails. No one ascended to heaven without you. Who can see God without repentance? Who repented and did not reap the fruits of joy? Who did not wipe his face with the tears of repentance and did not see God in his heart? You have saved David from sin and the people of Nineveh, even after God’s judgement on them. Blessed are you O mother of forgiveness (Repentance). God has granted repentance to be the intercessor of sinners. God will never close His door if you ask Him, for He has given you the keys of the kingdom. Let us embrace repentance and confession for the sake of He ascended upon the cross naked that He might clothe us with the garment of his righteousness. Let us embrace repentance and confession for the sake of He who opened His side by the spear that we might enter into Him and dwell in the throne of His Grace, and that the blood might flow from His body that we might wash ourselves from our iniquities. My Lord it is my sins, O my God, are the thorns pierce Your Holy Head; I, who have saddened Your heart by my rejoicing in the vain pleasures of the world. It is Your love have we ever seen such love the creator dying on behalf

of His creation; therefore, I thank you and your angels and the whole creation on my behalf for I am unable to present Your praise as befits your love. And now I bend the knee of my heart begging for Your clemency.

Lord, I long for your forgiveness to come to me. Give me tears that I may ask for mercy while there is still time. I thirst for your mercy and without it I cannot exist. Sea of mercy, pour out on me the streams of your kindness. The confused sins of an evil world our traps for me. By your mercy, Lord destroy them, and I will escape. Like a legion thirsting for blood my sins surround me. Come, Mighty warrior, to the aid of a humble worker. The king of error has poured down his arrows aiming at my death. Commander, apply to me your remedy by which I may be healed. Your treasury is not too small to give Mercy to those who do not deserve it: because even when a sinful Woman approached You, You loved her deeply. For none but broken people seek your remedy; and for the one who has no need, not even mercy is dear to him. Here are some wounds: Bring your medication that it might shine on me, because it is very beautiful to you when you hear of the stricken ones. You do not look for a fee, Lord, so that it might be returned to you, for what did the sinful Woman give when you loved her? She gave oil and tears alone when you healed her. Your promise wiped out a great wound with a meager payment. The river of fire that was threatening the defiled woman, in a drop of tears that she sprinkled on it, she quenched it. The negligible water that the eyes of this woman, for those impurities, poured forth fell upon the flood of flame and stopped it.⁵

In the end *“Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust”* (Psalms 103:1-5, 11-14)

⁵ Jacob of Sarug’s Homily on the sinful woman.