



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Monastic

January 2021

### Being Born of The Spirit

St. Anthony the great, the father of the monks had said: “*The Spirit that comes down upon the holy baptism, the same comes down on the form of monasticism and purifies him who becomes a monk.*”<sup>1</sup> St. Anthony always exhorted his disciples to accept this fiery Spirit saying to them, “My dear children, I pray that this may not be a toil to you, and that you may not grow weary of loving one another. Lift up your body in which you are clothed, and make it an altar, and set thereon all your thoughts, and leave there every evil counsel before the Lord, and lift up the hands of your heart to Him, that is, to the Creator, and pray to God that He may grant you His great invisible fire, that it may descend from heaven and consume the altar and all that is on it, and that all the priests of Baal, so that the opposing works of the enemy, may fear and flee from your face as from the face of Elijah the prophet. And then you will see a cloud ‘like a man’s hand’ over the sea, which will bring you the spiritual rain, which is the comfort of the Comforter Spirit, and you will see your inner man renewed coming forth from the divine fountain. And this Great fiery Spirit which I have received also, if you wish to receive it present first bodily labors, humility of heart, and lift up your thoughts to heavenly things day and night and ask with an upright heart to receive this great fiery spirit. Then it will be granted to you because this will draw you to prayers and praises. Just as Elijah and Elisha and all the prophets have received it. And do not doubt in your heart and say who can receive this? Do not let these thoughts enter your mind but ask with an upright heart and you will receive it. And I, your father,<sup>2</sup> will labor with you and pray on your behalf that you may receive it, for I know that you have denied yourselves so that you can receive it. And I will be your witness that you ask God with an upright heart to continue in laboring and asking from all your hearts and it will be granted to you”.

What a great honor for us as monastics to be reborn once again and receive that same purifying Spirit through monasticism. St. Paul exhorting the Galatians saying to them “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?” we as monastics our answer is “no” we will continue in the Spirit not in the flesh for as many of us as were baptized into

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<sup>1</sup> Catechesis during consecration of monks.

<sup>2</sup> Letters of St. Anthony – Eighth Letter.

Christ we have put on Christ. We know that the flesh wars against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. Let us *“Walk in the Spirit and let us not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”* (Galatians 5:16-26)

“The soul that, prepared by the Holy Spirit to be His seat and house, and found worthy to participate in His Light, is illuminated by the beauty of His ineffable glory, becomes all light, all face, all eyes; there is no part of her that is not full of these spiritual eyes of light. That is to say no part of her is in shadow, but she is entirely transformed into light and spirit and is all full of eyes and has neither a part behind or a part in front but appears all face because of the ineffable glory of the Light of Christ, that has descended on her and lives with her. And as the sun is totally of one likeness, and has no "behind" or imperfect part, but is throughout splendid with light, and is light throughout; or even as fire, that is to say the light of fire is entirely like itself and has no before or behind, greater or less; so too the soul that is perfectly illuminated by the ineffable glory of the light of the face of Christ, and perfectly partakes of the Holy Spirit, and is judged worthy to be made the house and seat of God, becomes all eyes, all light, all face, all glory and all spirit.... If then you have become the throne of God, and the Heavenly Charioteer has seated Himself within you, and your soul is entirely transformed into a spiritual eye, and is made into light; if you too are nourished with the heavenly food of that Spirit and have drunk of the Living Water, and have put on the secret garment of light - if your inward being has experienced all these things and is established in rich unshakable faith, then you are living the Eternal Life, and your soul even in this present time rests with Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

“Perfect Christians, who are considered worthy to reach a degree of perfection and to come close to the King, are continually dedicated to the cross of Christ. Just like the anointing in the times of the prophets was considered absolutely a most precious thing, since kings and prophets were anointed, so also now spiritual persons, who are anointed with a heavenly anointing, become Christians by grace, so that they too become kings and prophets of heavenly mysteries. Indeed, these are sons and lords and gods, bound and held captive, plunged deeply, crucified and consecrated. For the anointing with oil, a thing which came from a material plant, a visible tree, had so great a power that those who were anointed obtained a dignity beyond questioning (for it was decreed that they were thus made kings). David was anointed and immediately was exposed to persecutions and afflictions, and after the seventh year was he made king. How much more do all who have been anointed in mind and the interior man with the sanctifying and joy-giving, heavenly

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<sup>3</sup> Saint Macarius of Egypt, adapted from the translation by Evelyn Underhill in *The Mystic Way* (Atlanta, Ga.: Ariel Press, 1994).

and spiritual "*oil of gladness*" (Heb 1:9), receive the sign of that kingdom of imperishable and eternal power, namely, "*the pledge of the Spirit*" (2 Cor 5:5), the Holy Spirit and Paraclete? Understand by Paraclete the one who consoles and pours out joy upon all who are heavily burdened."<sup>4</sup>

When our Lord was speaking to Nicodemus told him "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*" (John 3:5-8) "You have received the Holy Spirit through baptism, you are no longer stranger to the crucified one! But victory and triumph over the devil are yours, but as for falling and being weak this is just an exception. You have gained a new and strong nature which you are able by the Crucified One to subdue all the powers of darkness."<sup>5</sup>

Back then in the Old Testament the Spirit of God was leading them walking with them but now we are sons of light the Spirit of God not only walks with us but dwells in us, leads us, comforts us, helps in our weaknesses, makes intercession for us, gives us wisdom and understanding. "*the mountains skipped like rams, The little hills like lambs.*" (Psalm 114:4) let us rejoice because we are born of the Spirit, in one of the prayers said during baptism "receive the Holy Spirit, receive the Spirit of God which fills you with a good pleasure, Jesus Christ the son of God the Father, has filled you with power and grace, receive the spirit of comfort, in the heavenly blessing, receive mercy, hope, faith, and grace, receive the spirit of joy through the powerful king, receive the Spirit of rejoicing through Immanuel our God, and the seal that cannot be loosed. Receive the spirit that is full of glory. You have become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit" Shouldn't we jump for joy, let us accept this truth we've been sealed with His Spirit, for God has made our hearts and body the dwelling place of His Holy Spirit, "*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us*"(2CO 4:7) during baptism the priest says an unction of the grace of the Holy Spirit amen, An unction of the pledge of the kingdom of the heavens amen, An unction of participation in the eternal and immortal life amen, A holy unction of Christ our God, and a seal that shall not be loosed amen, the perfection of the grace of the Holy Spirit and the breastplate of the faith and truth amen. May you be blessed with the blessing of the heavenly in the blessing of the angels. May the Lord Jesus Christ bless you. And in His name receive the Holy Spirit and be a purified vessel, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Being born of the Spirit, it's the garment of incorruption and the grace of the sonship. We become partakers in the eternal life and immortality just as our Lord Jesus Christ promised that if we are born of water and the Spirit, we may be able to enter the kingdom of the heavens. Let us not sadden the Spirit, let us not quench the Spirit, let us not resist the Spirit. That is why when we fall into sin or any works of the flesh, we lose our peace and we feel weighed down, that means the Spirit is working in us trying to tell us you've been freed how can you put yourself into bondage again. All we have to do is to listen to the Spirit and repent and not resist Him when He

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudo-Macarius The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and The Great Letter (Paulist Press), Homily 17, P.135.

<sup>5</sup> St. Shenouda the Archimandrite. (Holy Spirit & The Cross)

calls upon us to correct our way. Trust me it's a Grace from God that we lose our peace when we fall lest we remain in our fall and to know that we will only find our peace back in God.

*“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if we live according to the flesh we will die; but if by the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body, we will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together”.* (Romans 8:12-17)

“So, it is necessary at first for one coming to the Lord to force himself thus to do good and, even if he should not in his heart be so inclined, he must constantly await his mercy with unshaken faith and push himself to love, even if he does not have love. He ought to push himself to meekness, even if he has none, to mercy and to have a merciful heart. He must force himself to be disregarded, and when he is looked down upon by others, let him rejoice. When he is made light of or dishonored, let him not become angry according to the saying: *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves”* (Rom 12:19).

Let us subdue the works of the flesh to our spirits so that we may bring forth incorruptible fruits. Let us push ourselves to prayer even when we do not possess the prayer of the Spirit. And so, God, seeing us striving so and pushing ourselves by determination, even if the heart is unwilling, gives us the authentic prayer of the Spirit, gives us true charity, true meekness, *“the bowels of mercies”* (Col 3:12), true kindness, and, simply put, fills us with the fruits of the Spirit.”<sup>6</sup>

“We’ve been ground together as seeds of wheat under the millstone. Then the water of baptism came upon us and we were kneaded together as bread, but not as bread without fire. The fire came by the unction of Myron which is the confirmation by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit which came as tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost, that Spirit inspires and moves us to love, makes us inflamed for the sake of God, and to despise this world. This fire (The Holy Spirit) comes after the water, and we become bread which is the body of Christ, and this unifies you with one another.”<sup>7</sup>

The Holy Spirit makes us stand in front of our Lord Christ the humble and we become humble, makes us stand in front of the True Light and we become the light of the world, makes us stand in front of the Holy One and we become sanctified, makes us stand in front our Lord Christ the pure and chaste and makes us chaste. we need to empty ourselves repent, and humility so the Holy Spirit can work in us *“for a broken and humbled heart God shall not despise.”*

“For such a tear, that truly is shed out of much sorrow and anguish of heart in the knowledge of the truth and with the burning in the bowels, is food for the soul, supplied by the heavenly Bread of which Mary preeminently partook as she sat at the feet of the Lord and wept, as the Savior himself testified. For he says: *“Mary has chosen the better part*

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudo-Macarius The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and The Great Letter (Paulist Press), Homily 17, P.147.

<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine.

*which will not be taken from her*" (Lk 10:42, 7:38). Oh, what precious pearls, those contained in the flowing of blessed tears! Oh, that immediate and prompt hearing! Oh, what a strong and wise mind! Oh, the intensity of the love of the Lord's Spirit that moves powerfully toward the spotless Bridegroom! Oh, what a concentration of desire in the soul toward God the Word! Oh, what intimate communion of the bride with the heavenly Bridegroom! Imitate her, O child, imitate her, I say, who saw nothing but him alone who said: "*I have come to cast fire on the earth and how I desire but that it be already kindled*" (Lk 12:49). For there is a burning of the Spirit which puts hearts on fire. For that reason, the immaterial and divine fire enlightens souls and tests them as pure gold is tested in the furnace. But it burns out any evil, as if it were thorns and stubble. For "*our God is a consuming fire*" (Heb 12:29), "*taking revenge on those who do not know him in flaming fire and who do not obey his Gospel*" (2 Thess. 1:8). This fire exerted its power over the Apostles when they spoke with tongues of fire (Acts 2:35). This fire surrounded Paul in the voice that enlightened his mind while blinding his sense of sight (Acts 9:3). For it was not in the flesh that he saw the power of that light. This fire appeared to Moses in the bush (Ex 3:2). This fire, in the form of a chariot, caught up Elijah from the earth (2 Kgs 4:11). The blessed David, while seeking out the power of this fire, said: "*Search me, Lord, and try me. Burn out my reins and my heart*" (Ps 26:2). 10. This fire inflamed the heart of Cleophas and his companion when the Savior spoke to them after the resurrection. From the same source also angels and the ministering spirits partake of the shining fire according to what has been said: "*Who makes his angels' spirits and his ministers a flaming fire*" (Heb 1:7). This fire burns up the beam in the interior eye; it renders the mind pure so that recovering its natural power of seeing, it may constantly gaze on the wonderful works of God according to him who says: "*Open my eyes and I will ponder the wonders of thy law*" (Ps 119:18). This fire also drives out demons, takes away sins, and has the power of resurrection. It develops immortality, the illumination of holy souls, and the strengthening of the rational powers. Let us beg that this fire come also to us so that, constantly walking in the light, we may never for even a moment "*dash our feet against the stone*" (Ps 91:12), "*but shining as lights in the world,*" we may "*hold forth the word of eternal life*" (Phil 2:15), so that, enjoying ourselves among the saints of God with the Lord, we may find rest in life, glorifying the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whom be glory forever. Amen."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Pseudo-Macarius The Fifty Spiritual Homilies And The Great Letter (Paulist Press), Homily 25, PP.163,164.