



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States Monthly Message for the Monastic

February 2022

On Divine Love

The Spiritual Elder says “Those upon whom you shed a ray of your love could no longer bear to live among people. In search of their Beloved, they renounced every physical love, becoming foreigners to all. They gave up all the pleasures of this life, seeking the way of their Beloved in tears. They felt unworthy of his beauty; finding themselves on this blessed quest, they wept. . . They shook off every bodily pleasure and disdained all human joy. And instead, they loved the toil and fatigue which prompted the compassion of their Beloved. They abandoned father and mother, brother and friend, seeking him whose love is rich. They knew that in his heart much love, and therefore much comfort was stored for them, this love, this comfort surpassing any other. When they felt this passionate love for the Only Begotten, they could not bear to abide a moment longer in the pleasures of this world. And when they found that they owned nothing worth offering, in love they offered their own selves upon his altar. In joy they surrendered their own bodies to death, for by so doing they found something to sacrifice to their Beloved. They ran impetuously along the way of sorrows, bearing the torments of their own hearts. They crucified their members and passions contentedly. They drank the bitterness of gall with pleasure. Beloved! You robbed them of everything, even their own selves. They felt no longer alive, for it was you who lived in them . . . When hardships surrounded them on every side, they no longer sought to be exempted from them. Instead, they asked for more sufferings, they pleaded for the patience to endure them for their Beloved’s sake. These people were drunk with love. When they heard their Beloved say, “Blessed are those who mourn now,” they could not stop mourning. What mourning! The man’s heart would ignite with love, would explode with living water! When his knees could no longer support him in his prayer he fell on his face. Trying to stand up, he would fall down again. His eyes streamed with flaming tears, burning his cheeks with their fire and flowing down on the earth to purge it from its curse. How shall I describe you, divine love! You have elevated the human soul and seated her in the light of her Maker. You have washed her until she looked like her Master. The loving soul tamed the wildest beasts; they saw in her the image of her Maker, they could breathe his heavenly fragrance. It is not only wild beasts who submitted to the [saintly] human soul, but even demons were terrified at seeing her illumined with love. They fled when they saw in her the image of God’s authority.”¹

¹ Fr. Matthew The Poor, *Orthodox Prayer Life* (SVS Press), Chapter 2, PP. 66,67

These are the souls that have tasted God's love, they are no longer bound by anything earthly, if they were asked to sacrifice themselves hundreds of times a day for the sake of God's love they would. As monastics we are the brides of our Bridegroom, that means we must have an internal relationship with God. Just as iron or lead or gold or silver, if thrown into fire, will melt and be transformed from its natural hardness to a soft substance, and as long as it remains in the fire becomes all the more a molten liquid, losing its natural hardness because of the powerful heat of the fire, the same is true for the soul that has turned away from the world in its desire for the Lord alone. It perseveres in much searching of the mind, in struggle and labor. It awaits God, untiring in hope and faith. It has received that heavenly fire of the Godhead and the love of the Spirit. It is then truly freed from all attachment to the world and liberated from every evil affection. It rejects everything in its life and corrects all of its natural habit and hardness of sin. It considers all other things superfluous compared to the heavenly Bridegroom alone. It rests in his fervent and ineffable love. I tell you that even those brothers, loved in God, whom the soul thinks so highly of, if they are a source of leading it away from that love for God, it, I would say, would reject such. For that is its life and rest, namely, the mystical and ineffable participation of the heavenly kingdom. For if an earthly, loving participation of spouses can separate the pair from their fathers, brothers, mothers, and all other things become for them rather extrinsic in their way because of their deep conjugal love for each other—for it is said: "For this reason, let a man leave his father and mother and adhere to his wife and they will be two in one flesh" (Gen 2:24)—if, therefore, I say, earthly love can detach one from all other loves, how much more in the case of those who have been made worthy to enter into a true fellowship with that Holy Spirit, the heavenly and loving Spirit? They shall be freed from all worldly love. All other things will seem indifferent to them since they have been conquered by a heavenly yearning and have become totally one in that surrendered state. Therefore, O beloved brethren, since such good things have been offered to us and such wonderful promises have been made to us by the Lord, let us get rid of all obstacles. Let us renounce all love for the world and devote ourselves to that one good by a thorough seeking and yearning so that we may become sharers in that ineffable love of the Spirit about which St. Paul urged us to hasten after: "Seek after love," he says (1 Cor 14:1), so that we may be considered worthy to be converted from our hardness by the right hand of the Most High and reach that spiritual sweetness and rest, having been wounded by the love of the Divine Spirit.

The Lord, indeed, is the Lover of mankind, so full of tender compassion whenever we turn completely toward him and are freed from all things contrary. Even though we, in our supreme ignorance, childishness, and tendency toward evil, turn away from true life and place many impediments along our path because we really do not like to repent, nevertheless, he has great mercy on us. He patiently waits for us until we will be converted and return to him and be enlightened in our inner selves that our faces may not be ashamed in the day of judgment. If that seems difficult and troublesome to us because practicing virtue is hard, but, more so, because of the insidious suggesting of the adversary, still he is very full of compassion, longsuffering

and patient as he waits for our conversion. And when we do sin, he is ready to lift us up for he desires our repentance. And when we fall, he is not ashamed to take us back, as the Prophet said: "When men fall, do they not rise again? Or if one turns away, does he not return?" (Jer 8:4). We only have to have a sincere heart and live-in vigilance and be converted immediately after seeking his help and he himself is most ready to save us. For he looks for our ardent will, as best we can, to turn toward him. When we show good faith and promptness glowing from our desiring, then he works in us a true conversion. Let us then, O beloved, show, as children of God, diligence and be prompt to follow him, by casting aside all preoccupation, carelessness, and laziness. Let us not postpone day after day this work of preventing evil from controlling us. For we do not know the hour when we will have to leave this life. Great and ineffable are the promises held out to Christians, so great, indeed, that all the glory and beauty of heaven and earth and all the other attractions in such variety, the riches and comeliness, the delights of visible scenes, cannot measure up to the faith and riches of a single soul. How is it possible that in the face of so many exhortations and promises, we still refuse to accept totally to go to him and surrender ourselves completely to him? How can we refuse, as the Gospel says, to deny all other things, even our own soul (Lk 14:26), and to seek him alone with our love and give it to nothing else? But, look, all these things and such glory given! Look at all the loving dispositions of God manifested in the times of the fathers and the prophets! What promises! And what exhortations! What great mercy of the Lord has been shown us from the very beginning! Finally, in his own coming on this earth he has shown to us an ineffable kindness through his crucifixion in order to convert us and bring us into life. And yet, we do not will to give up our love for the world nor our evil tendencies and habits. In this way we show ourselves persons of little or absolutely no good faith. And in spite of all this, he still shows himself kind to us. He protects and cherishes us invisibly, not turning us over to the deceits of evil and the world. He, in his great compassion and long-suffering, watches from above, waiting for the time we shall return to him.²

Blessed is he who fixes his eyes on You constantly, O my paradise who appear to me within me! O tree of life, You inflame my heart every moment with the desire for You, and change my countenance by the power of Your love, holding my intellect in astonishment at the rays of Your beauty. Blessed is that one who seeks You in himself always. Blessed is the one who carries in his heart the remembrance of You at all times, for also his soul is inebriated with Your sweetness! Blessed is he who gazes upon You continually within himself, for his heart is enlightened so as to see hidden things. Blessed is the one who seeks You in his being, for his own heart grows warm with Your fire, and his flesh with his bones burns in it's purifying fervor. Blessed is the one whose thoughts silenced by reflection on You. Blessed is the one whose cheeks are burning with the tears of Your love, for by its drops the rational lands are moistened so that they might produce fruits of joy which those who consume them do not die. May His love be in you without interruption. Do you desire that this love be constantly

² St. Macarius, PSEUDO-MACARIUS THE FIFTY SPIRITUAL HOMILIES AND THE GREAT LETTER (Paulist Press), Homily 4, PP. 43-45

inflamed in your soul? Remove the love of the world from it. Do you yearn that your dwelling be with Him? Go out from the world as from the womb and behold from that time you will see the true world, for Christ is not able to dwell with this world. I beg you, listen to Him when He declares to you: I am not of this world. Do you desire to see reflections of the beauty of the Holy Trinity in your soul? Keep the commandments of Christ. For He says that when you keep my Commandments, my love is found in you, and at their fulfillment in the soul He says that He will come and make an abode with His Father and there He will dwell show himself. Also, of His friends He says that they are not of this world and the world hates them. Because the fulfillment of the commandments is the cross, that is, ignorance and forgetfulness of the world's pleasure, and eager longings and earnest desire for departure in the heart of love, as with St. Paul. With confidence towards my God, as one who trusts, I say indeed when the mind strips off the world, it puts on Christ; with its turning away from concern for the world's affairs, it meets God; with the soul's cutting off its worldly habits.

O Christ, whose pure blood has paid the debt which are foolish will owed, open the eyes of our minds that we may know where we are proceeding. May Your light, which like the sun enlightens the legions of Your holiness, Bring me unto You. May Your Spirit, my Lord place me among them even here below and in the world of light. And may Your Spirit teach me their language so as to extol with them inaudible praise of You. Create me, my Lord, as a new creature resembling Your beauty and may we forget and disregard our previous nature. Glory to the abundance of Your ineffable love! Your door is open, my Lord, and there is no one who enters. Your glory is manifest and there is no one who contemplates it. Your light shines in the pupils of the eyes and we do not want to see. Your right hand is stretched out to give and there is no one who take. You entice with compliments and we do not obey. You frighten us with terrors mixed with tenderness and we do not flee You. O our good God, have pity on our wretchedness. Our sweet creator, bind up our brokenness. Our father Full of mercy, you yourself persuade and compel us and draw us near to You; because of ourselves we are unwilling to beseech You. Lead out our soul from the prison in which we have imprisoned ourselves to your true light, even when we are not willing. May Your power, my Lord, prevail over us and draw us from the drowning for which we are headed! Remove, my Lord, from before our sight all the veils with which the view of our soul is obscured from seeing Your true light. In this light let us always stand with unveiled faces, and let us persist in the desire and in the delight of Your beauty and love, forever and ever. Amen.³

³ The Spiritual Elder