



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

**“He who changes evil words into good, and spreading peace among his brethren,
gains life for himself” The spiritual elder St. John Saba**

There was an anchorite highly gifted in discretion who wanted to reside at The Cells; but he could not find a cell for the time being. There was, however, an elder there who had a cell for one person nearby. The elder invited him, saying: “Come and live there until a cell is found”, and he went there. People came to him as a newcomer, bearing welcoming gifts, to benefit from [his presence] and he received them as his guests. The elder who had provided him the cell began to grow jealous and to speak evil of him, saying: “How many years have I lived a rigorous ascetic life here and nobody comes to see me; yet how many come to this impostor after he has only been here a few days!” He said to his disciple: “Go and say to him: ‘Leave this place, for I need the cell.’” The disciple came and said to him: “My abba says: How are you?” “Let him pray for me,” the other replied, “for I am afflicted in the stomach.” The brother went and said to the elder: “He says that he has got his eye on a cell and is leaving.” Two days later [the elder] said to him again: “Go and tell him that, if he does not leave, I am coming with my staff to throw him out.” The brother came and said to him: “My abba has heard that you are unwell and is very grieved. He has sent me to visit you.” “Tell him that, through his prayers, I have got better”, said the other to him. [The brother] went and told the elder: “He said that he would be gone by Sunday, God willing.” When Sunday came around and he had not gone, seizing a staff, the abba set out to beat him and chase him away. The disciple said to him: “I will go ahead in case there are any people there who might be offended.” He went ahead and said to the elder: “My abba is coming to console you and to take you into his cell.” When he heard of the elder’s concern for him [the anchorite] went out to meet him. While still at a distance from him, he prostrated himself, saying: “I am coming to your holiness, do not trouble yourself.” When God saw what the young [disciple] had done, he pricked his abba’s conscience so that he threw away the staff and ran to embrace [the anchorite]. He embraced him and led him to his cell as though he had heard nothing. The elder said to his disciple: “You didn’t say to him any of the things I told you to say?” “No”, he replied; the elder rejoiced exceedingly, realizing that his jealousy had come from the enemy, and he

put the [other] elder at his ease. Then he fell down before his disciple saying: “You are my father and I am your disciple; for, by your action, both our souls have been saved.”

Moses the Lawgiver fashioned the sacred Tabernacle for the Israelites according to the pattern which God had shown him on the mountain. Whatever was contained within the sanctuary was pure and sacred; but its innermost part was inaccessible and was called the Holy of Holies. I think this more emphatic appellation shows that the sacredness of this part was not the same as that of the others; but inasmuch as something that has been duly consecrated differs from what is common and profane, the Holy of Holies is of purer holiness than the sacred places around it. This I believe also to be the case with the Beatitudes that have been shown us on this mountain. All that the Divine Word has so far laid down is indeed perfectly holy. But what we are now invited to contemplate is truly Holy of Holies, and the Holy of Holies. For if the blessedness of seeing God cannot be surpassed, to become the son of God transcends bliss altogether.

Now a peacemaker is a man who gives peace to another; but one cannot give another what one does not possess oneself. Hence the Lord wants you first to be yourself filled with the blessings of peace, and then to communicate it to those who have need of it. Let us first consider what peace is. Surely it is nothing else but a loving disposition towards one's neighbor. Now what is held to be the opposite of love? It is hate and wrath, anger and envy, harboring resentment as well as hypocrisy and the calamity of war. Do you see for how many different diseases this single word is an antidote? For peace is equally opposed to every one of the things mentioned, and wipes out these evils by its own presence. Just as illness vanishes when health supervenes, and as no darkness is left when light begins to shine, so also when peace appears, all the passions connected with its opposite are eliminated. I do not think it is necessary here to elaborate in detail how great a good this is. You can think over for yourself what kind of life those lead who treat each other with jealousy and hatred. Their conversations are unpleasant; their mouths make no sound, their eyes are turned away from each other, and their hearing is blocked to the voice of him who hates and is himself hated. Whatever is dear to the one is not so to the other, and conversely, whatever is hated and detested by the one is acceptable to his enemy. Therefore, He wants the grace of peace fully to abound in you like the pleasant scent of sweet spices that fills the air around it with its own fragrance, so that your life may heal the sickness of others.

St. Athanasius says that St. Anthony “gained from God the gift of reconciling people who are at odds among themselves” For if there is an opportunity to make peace, it is when discord, enmity, or conflict prevails. Blessed are those who are not satisfied with having peace for themselves and within themselves, but rather strive to spread peace around them so that they may obtain for others the good that they enjoy. One sees that there are people in the wilderness who are not devoid of personal sensitivity, but they compete in patience, meekness and humility in order to keep peace among themselves and to re-establish it when necessary. For example,

Father Paul the lived with his brother Father Timothy, and they often disagreed with each other. Father Paul said: "How long will we continue in this state?" Father Timothy said to him, "I suggest that you take my side when I disagree with you, and I in turn take your side when you oppose me." And so, they spent the rest of their days in this way one may perceive that when Satan becomes angry at the sight of brothers living in peace, he may sometimes intervene in order to plant his tares. It happened that in the wilderness there were two brothers in the body, and the enemy came to separate them from one another. And it happened that the younger brother lit a lamp, then the lamp was turned on by the enemy's intent and was blown out. The older brother got angry and hit him, so his brother apologized to him, saying: "Be patient with me a little, while I light the lamp again." And when God saw his endurance and patience, he punished the enemy until morning. Satan told the chief of demons that. This was revealed to one of the priests of the idols, so he left everything and became a monk, saying: "Humility can destroy all the power of the enemy"

Therefore, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Who are these? Those who imitate the Divine love of men, who show forth in their own life the characteristic of the Divine energy. The Lord and Giver of good things completely annihilates anything that is without affinity and foreign to goodness. This work He ordains also for you, namely to cast out hatred and abolish war, to exterminate envy and banish strife, to take away hypocrisy and extinguish from within resentment of injuries smoldering in the heart. Instead, you ought to introduce whatever is contrary to the things that have been removed. For as light follows the departure of darkness, thus also these evil things are replaced by the fruits of the Spirit, by charity, joy, peace, benignity, magnanimity, all the good things enumerated by the Apostle. How then should the Dispenser of the Divine gifts not be blessed, since he imitates the gifts of God and models his own good deeds on the Divine munificence? But perhaps the Beatitude does not only regard the good of others. I think that man is called a peacemaker par excellence who pacifies perfectly the discord between flesh and spirit in himself and the war that is inherent in nature, so that the law of the body no longer wars against the law of the mind, but is subjected to the higher rule and becomes a servant of the Divine ordinance.

St. Isaac the Syrian says if you cannot be a peacemaker at least avoid being a troublemaker, let us sow peace among ourselves for our Lord came down from heaven to reconcile the earthly with the heavenly. When we sow peace among our brethren and live in unity and love we will be like an stringed instrument attuned by the Holy Spirit always praising and blessing God as we sing together in the morning doxology For truly if we are peacemakers, we will have the blessing of being the sons of God.