



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

**May 2022**

### **On Faith**

St. Isaac the Syrian says: “The man whose heart is upheld by the confidence of faith Will never be in want; and when he has nothing, by faith he possesses all, as it is written: ‘all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, you shall receive’; and again, ‘the Lord is at hand, have care for nothing.’”

It was written about Enoch that he pleased God and by his faith he was taken away so that he did not see death, because he pleased God. If we ask ourselves how did Enoch please God? It was by these two things: walking with God and having faith. The apostle Paul says that faith is believing in the things we do not see, not merely in the things we do see. When we place our future in God’s hands, we oblige Him to help us. Absolute trust in God is born of faith, with which we pray in secret and enjoy the fruit of hope. For a man can you make of his life a life in paradise, if he trusts God, praises Him for everything and acceptance Him as a loving father guarding his life. First comes faith and then love. One must believe in order to love. The greater our faith, the greater our hope and love and sacrifice for God and our brethren.

About this faith, St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, “without faith it is impossible to please him.” For when will an individual resolve to serve God, unless he believes that “He is a giver of reward”? When will a young woman choose a virgin life, or a young man live soberly, if they don’t believe that for chastity there is “a crown that does not fade away”? Faith is an eye that enlightens every conscience and imparts understanding. The prophet says, “And if you do not believe, you shall not understand.” Faith “stops the mouths of lions,” as in Daniel’s case, for Scripture says concerning him, “Daniel was brought up out of the den, and he was found to be hurt in no way, because he believed in his God.” Is there anything more fearful than the devil? Yet even against him we have no other shield than faith, an impalpable buckler against an unseen foe. For he sends forth various arrows and “shoots down in the dark night” on those that are not watching. However, since the enemy is unseen,

we have faith as our strong armor, according to the saying of the apostle, “In all things taking the shield of faith with which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” A fiery dart of desire to indulge one’s wicked instincts is often shot from the devil’s bow. But faith, suggesting a picture of the judgment, cools down the mind and quenches the dart. St. Paul teaches us saying that above all, to take with shield of faith with which we will be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one, as the shield protects the whole body, as if it were a sort of rampart, just so is this faith; for all things yield to it. Wherewith we shall be able, says he, to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. For this shield nothing shall be able to cleave asunder; for hearken to what Christ says to His disciples, If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to a place, and it shall remove. By the darts of the wicked one, he means, both temptations, and vile desires; and well does he add the label fiery, for such is the character of these desires. Yet if faith can command the evil spirits, much more can it also the passions of the soul. And unless we are armed with this shield, we will not have the strength to battle courageously and resist all these deadly powers. But with the protection of faith, we repel all these hits and whatever attacks come from the whole host of powers.

Because of faith the offering of Abel was accepted. Enoch was spared death because he was pleasing [to God] in his faith. Noah was protected from the flood because he believed. Abraham was blessed through his faith, and it was considered righteousness for him. Isaac was loved because he believed. Jacob was preserved because of his faith. Joseph was tested in the waters of controversy because of his faith and was delivered from his trial. His Lord established a witness in him, as David said, “He established a witness in Joseph.” Moses performed many amazing miracles through faith. Through faith he destroyed the Egyptians with ten plagues. Through faith he also divided the sea, made his people pass through, and drowned the Egyptians in the middle [of the sea]. By faith he threw a piece of wood in the bitter water and it became sweet. By faith he brought down manna and satisfied his people. And by faith he stretched out his hands and defeated Amalek, as it is written, “His hands remained steadfast until the sun went down.” He also went up Mount Sinai in faith, when he fasted twice, for forty days each time. And again, through faith he defeated Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites.

Famous among these forefathers was Enoch who did not experience death because God took him alive. We read about him in the Holy Bible that “Enoch walked faithfully with God, then he was no more because God took him away” (Genesis 5:24). Also, “by faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had

taken him away, for before he was taken, he was commanded as one who pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5). This is what distinguished Enoch from the others of his generation, that he walked with God. In other words, he pleased Him with his deeds and behaviors, so he was in a complete communion with Him, in constant prayers and uninterrupted contemplation. It is also a calling for Man to walk with God in order to win eternal happiness. Let us then seek to inherit the heavens since our Lord Jesus Christ invited us to follow Him carrying His cross without promising us rest in this life; quite the opposite, He clearly showed us that the path to the kingdom of God is very hard. This was the path He took for us. He promised us to be with us and He was called ‘Emanuel’ which means ‘God is with us’ (cf. Matthew 1:23). “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). How beautiful is the saying of the Psalmist: “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Psalms 23: 4). Walking with God protects us from the arrows of our enemy Satan. It saves us from both concealed and revealed enemies. It is a fence around us that protects us and grants us victory and comfort, serenity and security, and most of all peace. The righteous Joseph walked with God, and it was said about him: “the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did” (Genesis 39: 23). The secret to Joseph’s success in all of his life and his survival from temptations in his attachment to the Lord’s law and his reliance on Him, namely walking with God. How inspiring is the Psalmist describing the righteous man: “blessed in the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or standing the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (Psalms 1: 1-3). This is the man who walked with God, in the undeviating path. He remains away from sin and does not commit offenses. He is constant in the meditation on the word of God to better know His will and applies it and grows thus in grace, yielding spiritual fruits.

Let us take the righteous men of God and examples for us. They are those who mediate on the law of the Lord, day and night. They are content to be with God in constant prayer, individually and communally, private and public. Their pleasure is in talking to the Lord and listening to His words. They walk thus with him and do not desire anything in life but the Lord. They converse with Him along with the Psalmist saying: “how lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God...Blesses are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Blessed are those

whose strength is in you who have set their hearts on pilgrimage” (Psalms 84” 1-5). “whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you” (Psalms 73: 25). How magnificent is Moses’ prayer to the Lord: “if I have found favor in your heart, then let the Lord go with us” (Exodus 34: 9). “as God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people’” (II Corinthians 6: 16).

The book of Wisdom says about Enoch that he was pleasing to God having been made beloved, and living among sinners, he was transformed. He was quickly taken away, for malice could not alter his understanding, nor deceit beguile his soul. Truly his soul was pleasing to God. Because of this, he hastened to bring him out of the midst of iniquities. It is the same with us as monks, God has taken us from the world and its evils to be one with him. So also, in our monastic life we need faith and to walk with God for by these two we are able to continue our journey with joy and courage to the end, Let us therefore draw near to faith, since it has so many powers. For faith raised up [Enoch] to heaven, overcame the flood, caused the barren to give birth, delivered [people] from the sword, raised up [Jeremiah] from the pit, enriched the poor, released the captives, rescued the persecuted, brought down fire, divided the sea, split the hard rock, gave water to the thirsty, satisfied the hungry, revived the dead and raised [them] up from Sheol, calmed the waves, healed the sick, overcame armies, brought down walls, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the flame of the fire, humbled the boastful, and brought the humble to honor. All these powerful acts were brought about by faith. For a truly blessed is the man whose entire will is in the keeping of God’s law. Blessed is the heart that has ripened in the knowledge of God's will, that has seen “but the Lord is good”, that has acquired this vision by tasting of the Commandments of the Lord, and that has united it's will with the will of the Lord. Such a heart is the blessed man. Blessed is the heart that is afire with divine zeal! Blessed is the heart that burns with the insatiable desire to do the will of God! Blessed is the heart that sweetly suffers Beyond all endurance with the love of God! Such a heart is the place, home, bridal chamber, and the throne of blessedness!