



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States**  
**Monthly Message for the Monastic**  
**December 2022**

**Beauty of Repentance**

For the sake of wicked humanity our Lord undertook His path' in the world, indeed, to gather those who had wandered from His Father's house. He directed His way to sinners so as to bring them back, and He sought out the erring, that the lost might again be found. In His zeal He left the found and sought after the lost: He forsook the perfect and kept company with the repentant. People invited Him along with sinners, and He took delight in it. He was called a companion of tax-collectors and harlots; He carried bandages and showed love to none save the broken. The good Physician? did not come down to care for the healthy, since only the sickly were in need of His help. The one who is not dead has no need of resurrection, and superfluous is forgiveness to one who has not sinned. He who is broken asks that a bandage be applied to him, and one who is stricken calls a physician for healing. The medicine for ulcerous wounds is applicable only to ulcerous wounds; a prescription for disease is sought for by none save the diseased. Only the broken of heart have need of encouragement, and likewise, only for the grieved in spirit is consolation necessary. The one who has ulcers requires medicines, and with healing, he will have relief for his sores. The one who owes much loves Him to whom he is in debt, because his soul hangs upon forgiveness, of which he has great need. The medicine of mercy will usefully be applied only to the one whose soul has been stricken with iniquity and who suffers from the wound. The one whom sin has bitten and who laments prudently feels the need for the Doctor who will devise a remedy. The one whose members have been pierced by the arrow of wickedness seeks for mercy that would extract the arrow-head of his passion. The one upon whom sin has fallen like a lion, seeks for divine compassion which would rescue him from destruction.<sup>1</sup>

Who among us hasn't or doesn't fall in sin every day, willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, knowingly or unknowingly? Who has not angered the Lord, the infinite Truth and Love? Who has not been wounded by the blade of sin and has not felt the severity and sharpness of sin, a heavy embarrassment of the conscience, sorrow and distress, these common followers of sin? All of us, young and old alike, are sinners before God, and because of this are worthy of punishment and separation from God; and if the Lord, out of His infinite love and compassion toward fallen man, had not given him repentance and remission of sins for the sake of the sacrifice on the cross of His Only-Begotten Son, then all men would have descended

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<sup>1</sup> St. Jacob Of Sarug, Homily on Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

into hell, into the place of eternal torment. But, glory be to the All-good and wise God, Who gave repentance to sinners, and life eternal. A countless number of sinners have washed themselves through tears of repentance, have been justified and sanctified through the Most-Pure Blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God Who took our sins upon Himself and suffered for them all of the punishment that had been prepared for us, and now they rejoice with the angels in the mansions of the saints. All of you here present, sinners like me, do you treasure this priceless gift of the Lord, the gift of repentance? Do you sigh like the publican, do you cry like the sinful woman, do you wash your beds with your tears, like our forefather David? Do you return to the Heavenly Father with sincere and deep repentance, as did the Prodigal Son.

There is no other way for sinners to regain the grace and mercy of the Heavenly Father than the way of sincere and true repentance, together with the fruits of repentance. let us awake from the sleep of sin, let us walk properly, as in the day (Rom 13:13); let us leave the lusts of the flesh, let us care for our immortal souls, let us begin to perform the works of the Lord; and then let us delight in the peace of soul and the consolation of a pure conscience. How merciful and quick to hear is our Father, our Master and Judge, God! He immediately hurries with His abundant mercies to every sinner who repents sincerely, saving him from troubles, sorrows, and dangers that result from sin, giving him peace and openness of heart, turning sorrow into joy. Every sinner who has sincerely repented has experienced this.

To understand the power and beauty of repentance, we first have to explain the state of a sinner and how he feels. These are the general features characteristic of a sinner. The particular features of a man who has deprived himself of grace are presented as follows. Having turned away from God, a man becomes centered on himself and puts himself as the main object of his entire life and activity. This is certain, because after God there is nothing greater for a man than himself. Having received the fulness of grace previously' and having now become empty without God, he is in a hurry and concerned with how and by what means he can fill this emptiness which is inside of him. This emptiness, which was formed in him as a result of falling away from God, kindles in him an incessant craving that nothing can satisfy?

This craving is vague, but constant. A man becomes a bottomless abyss; he tries hard to fill this abyss, but he cannot. That is why for his whole life he is in sweat, toil, and great troubles. He busies himself with various things in hopes of finding satisfaction for this craving that consumes him. These things occupy his entire attention, all his time, and the whole of his activity. They are his highest good, to which he has devoted his whole heart. Hence it is clear why a man who sets himself up as the main object of his life can never be within himself. He is always focused on things outside of himself: on the things which were created or devised as a result of his own vanity in order to fill his craving.' He has fallen away from God, who is the fullness of everything. He is empty in himself. The only thing that remains is to spread himself among the endless variety of things and to live through them. So a sinner is thirsty, anxious, and troubled about many and various things which are apart from himself and apart from God. That is why the characteristic feature of a sinful life, when one is neglectful of his salvation, is an anxiety and trouble about many things

The nuances and distinctive features of these troubles about many things depend upon the kind of emptiness which is formed in the soul. The emptiness of the mind- which has forgotten about the One who is everything gives birth to a concern for excessive knowledge: for much scrutiny, curiosity and inquisitiveness. The emptiness of the will- which has deprived itself of the One who is everything-- produces numerous desires: striving to possess many things or even all things, so that everything could be in one's own power and according to one's own will. This is the love of worldly possessions" The emptiness of the heart which has deprived itself of real delight in the One who is everything generates a thirst for many and various false pleasures the searching and striving for those innumerable things in which one hopes to find sensory pleasure, both inwardly and outwardly. So, a sinner persists incessantly in his troubles and anxieties, and in his search for excessive knowledge, many possessions, and diverse pleasures. He is always delighting in outward things, constantly acquiring possessions, scrutinizing things and testing them. He whirls around in this circular process for his entire life. This inquisitiveness attracts and entices the mind; the heart hopes to taste sweet things; and the will is carried away.

And here comes the healing power of repentance, the soul is enlightened when it draws near to repentance, and it runs to attain its former beauty which had been corrupted, so when a sinner who turns towards God and repents: first he wakes up from the sleep of sin, then he comes to some determination to change (he is getting up), and finally he clothes himself in strength for a new life with the Sacraments of Confession and Eucharist (he is ready to act. In the parable of the prodigal son' these moments are indicated in the following way. First, he came to himself this means that he came to his senses and collected himself. Then he said, I will arise and go meaning that he intends to stop his former way of life. Then, he arose, and went to his father and said, I have sinned. This is his repentance. And then the father clothed him in his best robe and set the table for him (the Holy Eucharist). So, in the conversion of sinners to God, there are three movements:

1 awakening from the sleep of sin;

2 rising up, with the determination to leave one's sin and dedicate oneself to pleasing God;

3 the clothing of the sinner with strength from above for this matter of pleasing God in the Sacraments of Confession and Eucharist.<sup>2</sup>

Let us then take courage and rise up for we've a loving God, who does not wish the death of a sinner but repents and lives. Who would not love you, O Repentance beater of all good things, except Satan who hates you because you plunder his riches. You destroy his possessions and make him indigent. You torture him with the vain efforts of his works and you separate him from the heirs that were not his but were held captive by him. This one is truly your enemy and at every moment you oppose him. There is no one who has fallen into his hands, and once you have seized him did he become a prey again to Satan for food. There is no one who has called you while he was between Satan's teeth without you breaking his teeth and rescuing him. There is

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<sup>2</sup> St. Theophan the Recluse

no one whom Satan has swallowed and who has from his belly implored you, without your tearing open his belly and bringing him out. There is no one whom Satan entangled when you were not near and he called to you, without you having quickly cut his bonds and freed him. There is no one whom Satan snatched while you were far away, and he called to you, without you having immediately caught up and rescued him. Because of all of these things the devil hates you for you have hated him intensely. He hates you because at all times you stand against him; he hates you because he is the enemy of your Giver. And you oppose him as also your Lord Himself, his adversary, opposes him. There is no one who has sought refuge with you and then gone down into Sheol, nor has anyone gone up to heaven without being yours. Who has seen God without you? And who has caught hold of you and fallen into the hands of Satan? Who has been purified unless you have washed him? And who has drawn near to your basin and anything unclean was found in him? Who has not watered his seed from your rain without reaping a sheaf of joy from it? Who is he who has applied for your remedy and not been found far from all infirmities? Who is he who has not drawn near to your door and in whom there is a healthy place? Who is moistened at all times with your sprinkling and has not seen God in his heart? Who has not tasted your drink and whose heart has not become a source of darkness? Who has received his request without your speaking on his behalf? And who has received you through his petition and did not open thereby the door of God's treasures? There is no one who has taken you with him for battle without your having delivered his enemies to his sword. There is no one who has clothed himself in you before his Adversary without those who hate him being defeated before him. You delivered David who sinned. A rebuke was decreed against the Ninevites, but you acted mightily and rose up and saved them, you are blessed, O mother of pardon, you whom the Father full of mercies has given to us: He does not resist you when you entreat Him for He has placed you as an advocate to sinners. He does not close his door when you petition, for to you He has entrusted the keys of the Kingdom. Indeed, the Kingdom is at hand: repent This is the seal which the heirs of the Kingdom take with them: "Repent, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand! Take repentance along with you, lest you become strangers to the Kingdom!" To Him Glory from all, forever and ever!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> St. John of Dalyatha (The Spiritual Elder), On Repentance