



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

Bless, O Lord, the Promises of My Mouth

Daily ought we to renew our vows, and to stir up ourselves to greater fervor, as though this were the first day of us entering the monastery; and to say: "Help me, my God, in this my good purpose, and in thy holy service: and grant that I may now this day begin perfectly; for that which I have done previously is as nothing."

Bring to mind more often the first inspiration which made you come here, abandoning your family, kinsfolk, and hopes. Remember how your soul was burning then, how you were thinking that, having entered the monastery, you would only pray, that you would be in a state of prayer in your cell, in church, spending time thinking of God, in soul-profitting conversations or in reading spiritual books- that you would live in seclusion, not giving yourselves to vanity, that you would be at peace with all, that you would be in unquestioning obedience to the abbot and elders. Of course, sincere were such desires of yours. And so, bring this to your mind more often, this first inspiration, and it will be renewed in you even now, in a similar way to how the air in rooms is refreshed through letting in new air from outside. To this exciting contemplation, add also this: renew in your memory, as much as you can, examples of zeal drawn from the lives of the saints. Read "Lives of Saints" and collect in your memory how people of God tirelessly labored- men and women, not sparing their strength, not even their lives. with all their labors of inward asceticism. Remember them not idly but add to that memory the indispensable conviction that all of you, too, should be like them, like these venerated saints. And every such thought will be a segment of help and encouragement for the future relay.

As in a race one runner encourages the intensity of another, or as you yourselves work together, one before another, hastening not to lag behind, so also will your thoughts of great labors zealously accepted by holy ascetics increase your own zeal. Aside from that, encourage one another by counsel and example. When you have talks together, what is the subject of your

conversations? Do not talk about anything other than the main reason for which you have entered the path. With good monasticism show yourselves to be worthy of His election. Remember what indications the Lord gave you for this, in order for you to leave the world and to choose precisely this and no other place. Watch out, therefore: do not waver in doubt, as if the place you chose was not from God, and do not be fainthearted when it seems that the Lord has turned His face away from you. Remember how many labors were required in the beginning in order to enter the Monastery, and how many hindrances have been overcome. Watch out: do not make these labors fruitless after having already achieved that which you sought, and do not lay down the armor of warfare.

In a monastery, this is even more needed. Here you have everything necessary for a successful monastic life, but monasticism itself is not acquired for free. How much it demands--sweat and pain, both inward and outward! This you know, but you also know the consolations which fall to the lot of the laborers, and you clearly see the end to which everything leads. Do not grow faint. God will not forget your labor, as He did not forget that of others who labored for the glory of His name. Having renounced the world, people enter the monastery and begin a difficult life of fasting, prayer and patient obedience, with rejection of their own will.

This is the practice of monastic life and the test of skill in remaining in it. Entering the monastery, one renounces the world; in the monastery, one has to reject oneself, renounce one's own life through resistance of the flesh, renounce one's own wishes through surrender to patient obedience, renounce all one's thoughts--restricting the gaze of one's mind to the one God and casting everything out of it in prayerfully submerging oneself in God. You know that this comprises the entire life within the monastery walls. Each of you leads this life according to one's strength and zeal; according to one's strength and zeal one fasts; according to one's strength and zeal one prays in church and at his cell. According to one's strength and zeal one obeys and is vigilant in the monastery.

May the Lord bless your labors. Labor! But don't think that having fulfilled such things once or a few times, you are through with them. No--you have to do them continuously, and to keep going up and up without stopping until you reach the measure of perfection.