



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

September 2023 On Poverty

Once a brother was leaving the world, and though he gave his goods to the poor, he kept some for his own use. He went to Abba Anthony, and when Abba Anthony knew what he had done, he said, " If you want to be a monk, go to the village over there, buy some meat, hang it on your body and come back here." The brother went, and dogs and birds tore at his body. He came back to Abba Anthony, who asked him if he had done what he was told. He showed him his torn body. Then Abba Anthony said, "Those who renounce the world but want to keep their money are attacked in that way by demons and torn in pieces."

St. Moses the strong says " The love of possessions disturbs the mind" It was written about our Lord He had nowhere to lay His head, the creator of this whole entire world had nowhere to lay His head, the one that this whole earth is His footstool had nowhere to lay His head. Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9) and how about our cells, the cell, or room, is a man's private abode; its furnishings should necessarily correspond to the needs of the owner's position and occupation. The cell of a monk or nun is the place of his or her private struggles, prayers, fasting, night vigils, and the like. The cells of the ancient monks and nuns were usually established in dens, caves, and in mountains, as the Apostle enumerates: They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth, being destitute, afflicted, tormented (Heb. 11:37-38). Nowadays monks are not satisfied with having their cells in incomparably more convenient locations; they also expend great effort to disfigure their interior furnishings, making them no longer "cells" but simply beautiful rooms, which encourage temptation rather than edification. Anyone entering a monastic's cell expects to find it furnished in a monastic way that is, with holy icons, books, simple furniture, and the like but instead of this, his glance often encounters decoration which is far from being of the humblest kind: soft and sometimes even luxurious furniture, paintings,

mirrors, and all the same things he is accustomed to seeing in worldly dwellings.

The deep meaning of poverty is to be detached to earthly things and to be attached to what is heavenly. "The poverty of a monk is resignation from care. It is life without anxiety and travels light, far from sorrow and faithful to the Commandments. The poor monk is lord of the world. He has handed all his cares to God. If he lacks something he does not complain to his fellows and he accepts what comes his way as if from the hand of the Lord. In his poverty he turns into a son of detachment and he sets no value on what he has. Having withdrawn from the world, he comes to regard everything as rubbish. Indeed, he is not genuinely poor if he starts to worry about something. A man who has embraced poverty offers up prayer that is pure."

Everyone who enters a monastery and takes upon himself Christ's easy yoke, must without fail remain in poverty, content with absolute necessities and guarding against all superfluity in clothing, cell accessories or belongings, and money. The possessions, riches, and treasure of a monk should be our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him the eyes of our mind and heart should be constantly turned and directed; on Him our hope should be concentrated;

in Him we must put all our trust; by our faith in Him we must be strong, energetic, and vigorous. Such a state of soul it is impossible for a monk to maintain while retaining possessions. The commandment concerning poverty is given us by our Lord Himself: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth," He tells us, "Where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." Having laid down the commandment, the Lord explained the reason why. He said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." If a monk has money or some things that are dear to him, then by some inevitable and irresistible law and necessity his hope and trust descend from God to his possessions. He puts all his trust in his goods. He sees power in his money. In his money or property, he sees the means to avoid the influence of those changes he may meet with in the course of his earthly life. On his possessions are concentrated his love, his heart and mind, his whole being. And his heart becomes attached to material things, hard and dead to all spiritual feeling or sensitivity, like a hard and unfeeling material object. The accumulation of money and other possessions for a monk is the worship of an idol, according to the definition of the Apostle Paul.

Bring to mind, the first days of your entrance into the monastery, when your heart burned with love towards Christ and was ready not only for every

privation, but even for the greatest poverty for His sake. Whoever wishes to concentrate his hope and trust and love on God must endeavor to remain in poverty. Any money, valuables, or property that comes to him should be used for obtaining riches in eternity. The beginning of all spiritual blessings is faith in Christ and the Gospel, a living faith that is proved by the fulfillment of the Gospel commandments in deeds, in life. Naturally "the love of money," which uproots faith from the heart, "is a root of all kinds of evil."

Amma Synkletike was asked is voluntary poverty always a good thing? And she said "it is entirely good to those who are capable. For those who endure it suffer in the flesh, yet receive comfort in their souls. Just as durable clothing is washed and whitened when one beats and scrubs it, so the strong soul becomes even stronger through voluntary poverty. So one could say that voluntary poverty is the most valuable treasure, since it restrains bodily sins like a bridle. The enemy is also soundly defeated by those who practice poverty; for he has no means to harm them. Voluntary poverty is certainly then the greatest setback against the enemy and an invaluable treasure for the soul. Our monastic life is rooted in a communal spirit, and poverty plays a profound role in fostering this sense of unity. When we share our resources and live simply, we become stewards of one another's well-being. Abba Serapion wisely advised, "The monk should be poor in means, but rich in the spirit." This richness of spirit, born of poverty, binds us in Christ's love and supports our journey toward salvation together." Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.