



PI MONAKHOS THE MONK

ΠΙΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ

A monthly newsletter with monastic issues for today's youth

Vol: 5 Issue: 5

Baramouda 1727 / May 2011

Published by

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A Spiritual Person is an Obedient Person

By: H.H. Pope Shenouda III



The first thing is the blessing and obedience to the commandment of God. As it was said about Joseph the Upright in his prosperity: *"The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man"* (Gen 39:2). And that: *"The Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand"* (Gen 39:3). Search for the prosperity that comes to you from God, from God's fellowship with you in your work, or from God's gift for you, or as a reward from God for obeying His Commandments.

Remember the Lord's saying to Joshua the son of Nun: *"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success"* (Josh 1 :8).

The Spiritual Man makes God first in obedience. And says with the Apostle: *"We ought to obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29). The commandments of God first, then people's request, then our own wishes. The spiritual Man makes obedience to men in the bounds of his obedience to God. But, if they contradict, God ought to be obeyed first.

His spirit will find rest by obeying God and God will find rest in his obedience. God finds rest in the hearts that believe in Him, that love Him, that do His will and obey His commandments, like the angels *"Who do his word, heeding the voice of his word"* (Ps 103:20). The spirit of the spiritual man finds rest in the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14). So he does not do anything without having the communion of the Holy Spirit in it. Our spirit finds comfort when she says to God in every work: *"Let it be according to Your will"*. By that she rests and gives rest. How beautiful is what has been said about the Prophet Moses that he made all things according to the pattern shown to him on the mountain (Heb 8:5).

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The spiritual man controls himself concerning obedience. Obeying the parents, obeying the confession father, obeying orders, keeping time and before all, obeying God. He does not see that submission would lessen his dignity at all. Submission is an evidence of humility and humility is a virtue. The person who does not submit to anyone is definitely submitting to his pride.

(From: H.H. Pope Shenouda, *The Spiritual Man*, COPT publisher)

An Ecumenical Gathering



His Eminence, Mor Malatius Malki Malki, the Syrian Orthodox Bishop of Australia and New Zealand, Fr Patrick from the Serbian Orthodox Church, Fr Ferdinand Pathrose from the Indian Orthodox Church, Fr Pavlos Hanna from St Abanoub Coptic church have blessed our monastery by their visit. His Eminence has shared with us a heavenly Syrian hymn of thanks giving upon his arrival, we then shared a meeting of mutual love between sister churches. His Eminence has also promised another visit to the monastery with a group of youth from his congregation in the near future.



Obedience to Gods Command

By: Fr Anthony St Shenouda

“Unless a person keeps the commandments of God,
he cannot make progress even in a single virtue”
Abba Agathon

By studying the lives of Old Testament prophets, we are able to highlight a clear concept towards being a servant of God, which is being obedient towards God's commandments.



Originally I used to imagine that the life of a prophet living among the Israelites was such a prestigious position, since it is through the prophet that God speaks to his people. However after another read of the Bible, I quickly realised that such people were the most ridiculed figures among all of Israel. Prophets were chased about by kings and queens and made a mockery of by false prophets. Additionally, to become God's messenger a prophet must empty themselves of his/her will and follow the Lord's command regardless of the consequences.

Let's see some examples to illustrate.

Isaiah the prophet was given a command by the Lord to call his son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Hosea the prophet was commanded to marry a harlot, so that when people asked him, how can you do such a wicked deed? Hosea would answer: this is because “you have committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.” Another example is when God wanted to further reprimand the Israelites for going after other gods, He commanded Hosea to call his first child “Lo-Ruhamah” meaning “No Mercy”, for the Lord “will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel” (Hosea 1:6), and also to name his second child “Lo-Ammi” meaning (not my people) for Israelites are “not my people, and I will not be your God” (Hosea 1:9). I do not recommend you look for these names in any baby names book.

The Lord commanded Ezekiel the prophet to lie on his left side for three hundred and ninety days, so that when asked by the people he will inform them that these are the days of the house of Israel. God then commanded him to lie on his right side for forty days as a sign of the years of iniquity of the house of Judah, one day for each year.

In all these occurrences, the commands given to the holy prophets by God were never questioned by the prophet, even in such personal matters as to whom they are to marry and what names they shall give to their children. It should also be noted that the



people of Israel and Judea did not always respond positively to God's warnings that he sent through His prophets. Instead the people ridiculed the prophets for saying and doing what they did and often the prophets were pursued by the kings or rulers of the time for prophesying against them. In all the above accounts, we see that the prophets had no will of their own, but instead their will was to obey God's commandment regardless of how silly or harsh it may appear.

When St. Paul wanted to give an example to the Philippians of complete obedience that they should imitate, he could not have used a better example than Christ Himself who "emptied himself taking the form of a servant" and in His obedience to the Father He was "obedient to the point of death." (Php 2:7-8).

The monastic movement first started because of St. Anthony's obedience to the Gospel's command "sell all you have and follow me" (Matt 19:21) and it is this obedience to God's commandments that monks imitate. It was also for this reason that many monastic leaders such as St. Shenouda or St. Pachomius were titled by their biographers "our father the prophet".

St John of the ladder (Climacus) defines a monk as one who is guided only by the commandment of God and the word of God in every time and place and matter. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov (a Russian Orthodox bishop) in his great book, *The Arena*, he emphasises that the whole Christian life and especially the monastic life should be based on following the commandments of the Gospel.

"He who has based his life on the study of the Gospel and the practice of the commandments of the Gospel has based it on a solid rock. In whatever predicament he is placed by the circumstances of life his task is always with him. He is constantly active, constantly struggling, constantly progressing, although his activity, his struggle and progress are unnoticed and incomprehensible to others. Whatever troubles and trials he may encounter, they can never defeat him."

So it is vital if we are to call ourselves Christians to follow God's commandments which are in the Gospels no matter what the cost is. For some of us a good place to start would be to know what these commandments are, by reading them in the Gospels.



Right: A Group of boys from St Barbra Church



Mark the obedient

From: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

They used to say that Abba Sylvanus had in Scete a disciple whose name was Mark, and that he possessed to a great degree the faculty of obedience, he was a scribe, and the old man loved him greatly for his obedience. Sylvanus had eleven other disciples, and they were vexed because they saw that the old man loved Mark more than them. When the old men who were in Scete heard of this they were afflicted about it. One day when they came to him to reprove him about this, Sylvanus took them, went forth, and passed by the cells of the brethren. He knocked at the door of each cell, and said, "O brother, come forth, for I have need of you." He passed by all their cells, and not one of them obeyed him quickly. But when they went to the cell of Mark, he knocked at the door and said, "Brother Mark." As soon as Mark heard the voice of the old man, he jumped up straight way, and came out, and Sylvanus sent him off on some business. Then Sylvanus said to the old men, "My fathers, where are the other brethren?" They went into Mark's cell, looked at the quire of the book which he was writing, and they saw that he had begun to write one side of the Greek letter o (or w). As soon as he heard the voice of his master, he ran out and did not stay to complete the other side of the letter. When the old men perceived these things, they answered, and said to Sylvanus, "Truly, O old man, we also love the brother whom you love, for God also loves him."

Right: Youth from different churches who attended Hoy Week at the monastery.



Left: A Group of Boys from St Dymiana Church spending a retreat at the monastery



Concerning Obedience

By: St Silouan the Athonite



Rare are they who know the mystery of obedience. The obedient man is great in the sight of God. He follows in the footsteps of Christ, Who in Himself gave us the pattern of obedience. The Lord loves the obedient soul and affords her His peace, and then all is well and the soul feels love towards all men.

The obedient man has put his whole trust in God, wherefore his soul dwells continually in God, and the Lord gives him His grace; and this grace instructs him in every good thing, and gives him the strength to abide in goodness. He sees evil but evil does not approach his soul, for the grace of the Holy Spirit is with him, which preserves him from all sin, and he is at peace, and prays to God unburdened.

The obedient soul is beloved of the Holy Spirit, and soon knows the Lord and receives the gift of prayer of the heart. The obedient man has surrendered himself to God's will, wherefore he is given the gifts of freedom and rest in God, and he prays with mind distracted; but the proud and disobedient cannot pray with a single mind, however austere they may live. They know neither the manner of the working of grace nor whether the Lord has forgiven them their sins. But the obedient man is conscious without a shadow of doubt that his sins are forgiven him, because he feels the presence of the Holy Spirit in his soul.

The spirit of obedience is necessary not only in monks but in everyone else, too. Even the Lord was obedient. The proud and those who are a law unto themselves prevent the indwelling of grace and therefore never know peace of soul; whereas the grace of the Holy Spirit enters with ease into the soul of the obedient, bringing joy and quiet.

All men seek after rest and joy but few know where to find this joy and rest, or what is required to attain them. There is a monk I have seen for thirty-five years, soul ever glad and face ever pleasant, though he is old now. This is because he is devoted to obedience. His soul is given over to God's will, and he knows not a care in the world. Filled with love for the Lord, his soul contemplates Him. He who bears within him even a small measure of grace will submit joyously to all authority. He knows that God rules over both heaven and earth, over himself and his affairs, over everything in the world, and therefore he is always tranquil.

The obedient man has given himself over to the will of God and has no fear of death, for his soul is accustomed to live with God, and loves God. He has cut out his own will and so neither in soul nor body is he troubled by the conflict which torments the rebellious and self-willed.

The truly obedient man detests his own will and loves his spiritual father, and for this he receives freedom to pray to God with undistracted mind, and his soul is



free without hindrance to contemplate God, and rest in Him. On account of his humility and the prayers of his spiritual father he soon arrives at the love of God.

Why did the holy Fathers set obedience above fasting and prayer? Because feats of spiritual endeavour without obedience foster vainglory, whereas the obedient novice is simply doing as he is told and has no occasion to pride himself on what he does. Moreover, the obedient man has cut out his self-will completely, and only heeds his spiritual father, wherefore he is free from every care, and can pray with an undistracted mind. When a man lives in obedience, his mind is entirely taken up by God and the precepts of his elder; whereas the man who does not know obedience is concerned with all sorts of things and in mind is critical of his elder, and so cannot contemplate God.

I know a certain monk on whom obedience had laid a heavy burden. He had the gift of the prayer of the heart, and the Lord gave him tears to weep for the whole world; and the Abbot told him: 'This is given to you because of your obedience.' Obedience preserves a man from pride. For obedience he receives the gift of prayer and the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is why obedience ranks above fasting and praying.

Had the angels (the fallen angels) observed obedience, they would have continued in heaven, ever singing the glory of the Lord. And had Adam not disobeyed, both he and his seed with him would have remained in paradise. But even now it is possible to regain paradise through repentance. The Lord loves us dearly, despite our sins, if only we will humble ourselves and love our enemies. But he who loves not his enemies will never find peace, even though he were to be set down in paradise.

(From: St Silouan The Athonite, By Archimandrite Sophrony)



A Group of boys from St Abanoub Church spending a retreat at the monastery



Obedience till the End

From: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

A certain brother was engaged in a war against Satan, and he told the matter to Abba Herakles and wishing to strengthen and confirm him the old man told him the following story, "There was a certain old man who had a disciple, and he had been very obedient to him for many years, and when the war came upon him, he made a request to his master, saying, 'I beseech you to make me a monk.' The master said to him, 'Seek out a place for yourself, and we will build a cell for you, and you shall become a monk.' The disciple went and found a place, which was distant from his master about one hundred paces, and he made himself a cell. Then the old man said to that brother, 'Whatever I say to you, that do. When you are hungry, eat and when you are thirsty, drink and sleep, but you must not go out from your cell until the Sabbath Day, when you shall come to me.' Then the old man went back to his cell. The brother did according to what the old man told him for two days, but on the third day he became dejected, wearied, and he said, 'What has the old man done for me, seeing that he has not commanded me to make prayers?' Then he rose up and sang more Psalms than usual. After the sun had set he ate his food, he rose up, went, laid down upon his mat and he saw, as it were, an Ethiopian who stood up and gnashed his teeth at him. The monk, by reason of his great fear, ran quickly to his master, and he knocked hastily at his door, saying, 'Father, have mercy upon me, and open to me immediately.' Now because the old man knew that he had not kept his commandment he refused to open the door to him until the morning. When he opened the door in the morning, he found him there, and as the brother entreated him to be allowed to enter, the old man had compassion upon him and brought him in. Then he began to say to the old man, 'I beseech you, O father, to believe me. When I went to lie down to go to sleep, I saw a black Ethiopian on my bed.' The old man said to him, 'This happened because you did not keep my words.' Then he laid down a rule for him which was suitable to his strength and to the monastic life, and dismissed him, and little by little he became an excellent monk.



Fr Benedict (Second from Left) a Macedonian Orthodox Monk visiting the monastery from Macedonia.