



PI MONAKHOS THE MONK

ΠΙΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ

A monthly newsletter with monastic issues for today's youth

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Concerning Those Who Imagine That they are Justified by Works

By: St Mark the Monk



The Lord, wishing to show that every commandment is obligatory but that sonship is a gift bestowed on human beings by means of his own blood, says, "When you have done everything that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves, we have done only what we ought to have done'" (Lk 17.10). Thus the kingdom of heaven is not a reward for works but is rather a master's gift prepared for his faithful servants.'

A slave does not demand freedom as a reward, but rather satisfies his master as someone who is indebted to him and who waits for his freedom as a gift.

"Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:31), and to those who serve him well he gives freedom as a gift, for he says, "Well done, good and faithful servant; since you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come share in your master's joy" (Lk 25:21).

The person who relies on mere knowledge is not yet a faithful servant; no, the faithful servant is the person who puts his faith in Christ by obeying what he commands.

The person who honors his master does what the master orders; when he makes a mistake or disobeys, he patiently accepts what is coming to him as something he deserves...

Some, without keeping the commandments, think they are keeping the faith, while others, keeping the commandments, expect to receive the kingdom as a reward owed to them. Both are deprived of the kingdom.



A master has no obligation to reward his slaves, nor, on the other hand, will those who are not faithful servants receive their freedom.

If “Christ died for us in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3) and “we do not live for ourselves but for him who died and was raised for us” (2 Cor 5:15), it is clear that we are obligated to serve him until our deaths. How then can we consider sonship something owed to us?

Christ is Master by essence and is Master by divine dispensation, because he has brought into being those who did not exist, and with his own blood has redeemed those who were dead in sin (Jn 1:3) and has given the gift of grace to those who thus believe (Rom 5:9; Rev 5:9).

When, therefore, you hear Scripture say, “He will reward each person according to his works” (Ps 62:12; Mt 16:27), it does not say that works deserve hell or the kingdom, but rather that works are done out of faith or lack of faith in him. Christ repays each person not as a businessman fulfilling his contracts but as God, our Creator and Redeemer.

We who have been considered worthy to receive the washing of regeneration (i.e. Baptism) offer good works not as repayment, but as a means of preserving the purity that has been given to us...

The person who does good and looks for a reward is not serving God but his own will. It is not possible for a sinner to escape retribution” except through repentance commensurate with what he has done.

Some people say, “We cannot be good unless we clearly receive the grace of the Spirit,” but those who are inherently disposed to seek pleasures always decline to do what lies within their power, because they say they are helpless to do differently.

Grace has been mystically bestowed on those who have been baptized in Christ and becomes active in them to the extent that they keep the commandments. Grace never ceases to secretly help us but it is up to us, as far as it lies within our own power, to do good or not to do good. Grace first rouses the conscience in a manner that conforms to God’s wishes; that is how even evildoers have repented and come to please God. Again, grace may be hidden in a neighbor’s advice. There are times when it also accompanies one’s thoughts when one is reading and, as a natural consequence, teaches the mind the truth about itself. If, therefore, we do not hide the talent that has in consequence been given to us (Mt 25:20-25), we shall without a doubt enter into the Lord’s joy.

The person who seeks out the activities of the Spirit before he keeps the commandments is like someone who sells himself into slavery: As soon as he is bought, he seeks to be given his writ of Freedom – along with his purchase price.



Why Monasticism?

By: Fr Anthony St Shenouda

“Acquire a peaceful spirit, and around you thousands will be saved.”
Saint Seraphim of Sarov



Visitors to our monastery, usually from non-orthodox background, sometimes have a burning question to ask. “Why monasticism? isn’t better if the monks use their energy to go out and *make disciples of all nations*(Mat 28:19)?”, “The monastic life is just a cop out from real life in the world”, “monks go to monasteries to laze around and get out of work?” Once a non-orthodox visitor came with his Orthodox friend who brought him for a retreat, and after spending some time with the monks and learning that they mostly had

University degrees and had good jobs prior to coming to the monastery, told his Orthodox friend this flattering remark, “*these monks can actually make it out there*”

While these comments are usually said with great love yet they show a lot of ignorance of the Bible and its commandments. The monastic life from its inception was a life according to the commandments of the Gospels. St Anthony the first monk went out to the desert following the Gospel commandment “*If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.*”(Mat 19:21), therefore the monastic life is a life of *perfection*.

The monastic life by its mere existence is the greatest witness to the Christian life. Mission work is usually associated with going out and building hospitals, schools, and churches, which are all great works of the missionaries, yet a prerequisite to all this missionary work are knees bowed down in prayer for the service and the spread of the Word of God. In the story of Mary and Martha, Jesus praised not the “active life” but the prayer life; “*Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.*”(Luke 10:42). This pure and inner prayer life is more than enough for mission and evangelism. In fact in our Orthodox tradition, monks are considered to be the number one evangelists.

In the life of St Mary we never hear of any “active service” of preaching or any kind of philanthropic work, yet in our Praise to her we say: “you have brought, unto God your Son, many people, through your *purity*” (*Sunday Theotokia*). It was not her words of wisdom or her active service that brought people to Christ but it was her *purity*.

In a sermon by Bishop Raphael, he once said that the servants were once trying



very hard to bring one of the youth who lived two blocks away from church to attend the liturgy, but without any success. One day this young man went to St Anthony monastery in a church-organised trip, and to the servants surprise the young man after hearing the life of the saint during the bus trip, he eagerly went all the way up the steep mountain that leads to the cave of St Anthony, which took at least 40 minutes of uphill walking on the hot desert sand. The servants were amazed at how despite their sincere efforts to bring this young man to church, they were not as effective as the life of this great evangelist who lived alone in the desert away from any kind of civilization, and as it seems to us, he refused to “actively” serve others, yet his virtuous way of life has been a magnet to all who have heard of him for the last 1700 years.

Therefore to say that monasticism is not important to the church and Christian living, is to say that prayer life is not important, because monasticism is a life of prayer. If we think that building hospitals and homes for the poor are the aim of a Christian life then we certainly are not attuned to the meaning of the Christian life, but we have made the church into a mere humanist organisation. That is not to say that these activities are wrong, after all the first hospital started in a monastery. Monasteries for many centuries have also become a center of learning (*i.e. Universities*). The same emphasis on the contemplative or “inactive” life not in the monastery but in the life of service in the world is embodied in the life of a contemporary saint, Pope Kyrillos VI, who’s answer to many of the church problems was not according to some strategic administrative skills, but it was simply “it is better not to speak but rather to pray.” This does not in any sense undermine the great achievements of this great patriarch. One only needs to read recent history (rather than his numerous miracle books) to realize the revival that the church went through during his time. Pope Kyrillos’s attitude echoes St Gregory Nazianzus’s (who was also a Patriarch) answer to St Basil expressing his great regard of contemplative life, saying: “for me the greatest action is inaction... so proud am I of my inactivity that I think I might even be a standard for all of magnanimity in this regard.”

The Other argument is that monks are egoistically escaping the “real world” and are not contributing to the society they live in. Such accusations have no solid ground. Monks do not leave the world to escape the world but they leave the world for the world. This is very clear in the life of St Paul the first hermit who lived for 70 years in the desert without seeing a man. St Jerome records that when St Anthony visited him, his first questions to St Anthony where “Tell me, I pray you, how is the human race? Are new houses rising in the ancient cities? By what emperor is the world governed? Whether there are any left who are led captive by the deceits of the devil (idol worshipers)?” These questions are not of someone who hates the world and not contributing to it but it is of someone whose subject of prayer during these 70 years is the prosperity of the world. St Anthony himself when needed he went down to Alexandria to support St Athanasius in his fight against the Arian heresy.

Monasticism, therefore, is a way of first and foremost saving once self *for the world*. When one is successful in working out his own salvation, St Seraphim of Sarov tells us, thousands around him will be saved.



The Monastery has received Fr Joshua Takla, a newly ordained priest to spend the 40 days in the monastery



St Abanoubé year 12 group spending a retreat at the monastery



The Fathers with some of the youth



What did the Desert Fathers meant by "being saved"

By: John Wortley

Most of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* are in the form of question and answer, a clear indication of their didactic purpose: a junior "brother" approaches a senior "elder" or father, *abba* and asks him a question. The question is often no more than a simple request for "a word": "Say something to me", meaning: "Give me something to think about". Not infrequently, however, a specific question is asked about some aspect of the monastic life, of which a surprisingly large number concern one's personal salvation: "How can I/we be saved?" or "What should one do to be saved?". The object of this present exercise is to discover, insofar as the answers given in the *Apophthegmata* might permit one to do so, what exactly those early monks meant by salvation in this context.

Although it is often an anonymous brother who asks an unnamed elder how he is to be saved, this is by no means always the cases. And even if it is usually a relatively junior monk who poses the question, salvation is by no means a matter of concern only for juniors, nor is the question of how it is to be attained asked once only: it was clearly an on-going concern.

From one point of view the monks' obsession with the quest for salvation is only what might be expected of those who were taking their religion seriously. Most people would agree that, in the Christian tradition, the goal for which the faithful aim, secular or monastic, indeed the whole object of the Christian endeavour, is precisely to attain salvation. For it is the will of God that "all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1Ti 2:4) and it was to make salvation accessible for all that the Incarnation took place: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Hence it is not in the least surprising that monks were concerned about their eternal salvation.

A monk, is sometimes defined as "one who is concerning himself with his own salvation". This clearly indicates that in this context "salvation" means something other than one's eternal destiny, for entry into the Kingdom was by no means guaranteed to monks. On the contrary, they are frequently and categorically warned that they have no monopoly on reaching heaven and that many secular persons may well enter the eternal abode ahead of them. "It were a shame for a monk to leave all his possessions and go into exile for the sake of God, then afterwards to go to damnation" one father remarked. Hence there is no necessary connection between salvation in the usual sense of the word and its apparently different meaning in the dialectic of those early monks.

This duality of perception concerning salvation which appears to be inherent in early monastic thought is addressed by John Cassian in the first of his *Collationes* "The goal and end of the monk". In an attempt to state it rationally, Cassian says that everybody has what later fathers would call "the



hope of glory", salvation in the commonly accepted sense of the word: attainable (through faith in Christ) in the world to come. This he designates the hoped for *finis* or end of every human life. Then he goes on to speak of the *destinatio*, the "goal" which is the destiny of those who have embraced the monastic life, meaning something to be aimed at in this present life.

There is an anecdote concerning Antony the Great in the earliest extant stratum of the Apophthegmata where it is clearly Antony's immediate, not his ultimate, salvation which is in question:

"Once when the holy Abba Antony was residing in the desert he was overcome by *accidie* (boredom) and a cloud of black thoughts. He said to God: "Lord, I want to be saved but my thoughts will not leave me alone. What am I to do in my affliction? How can I be saved?"; Going outside his cell a little way Antony saw somebody similar to himself sitting working, then standing up to pray, sitting down again to work at rope-making, then standing to pray once more. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct Antony and to encourage him. He heard the angel saying: "Act like this and you shall be saved". He was greatly cheered and encouraged on hearing this and by doing as he was told he was saved."

Although Antony uses more or less the words of the jailor at Philippi here, he is not using them in the same sense. But then neither are the verb and its cognates always used in the jailor's sense throughout the Scriptures. In fact often (indeed always in the Old Testament) they have a meaning other than that one's ultimate destiny. Such words occur with greater frequency in Psalms than in any other book of the canon and, coincidentally, Psalms is the second most frequently cited book (after the First Gospel) in the apophthegmatic literature. This is hardly surprising because, whereas some monks knew amazingly large tracts of Scripture by heart, even more could recite the entire Psalter. Indeed, it was in the words of the Psalmist that the monk usually prayed". This means that the verb and its cognates were frequently on his lips and in his mind.

In the New Testament too (especially in the Gospels) the verb is not always used in the sense of conferring of eternal life, but rather to mean "making whole", e.g., the many times when Christ having accomplished a healing says to the patient: "Your faith has made you whole/has saved you". Jairus asks Jesus to lay hands on his daughter "so she may be saved and live"

When, in the passage cited above, Antony says he wants to be saved, he is using the word in both senses, the Psalmist's and of the Evangelist's. He is asking both to be rescued from and to be cured of the affliction of *accidie*. In this way he prays to be delivered from the wreck of his monastic endeavour which his *accidie* might well entail if it continued too long.

(From: John Wortley: What the Desert Fathers meant by "being saved", In ZAC 2008 vol 12)



Prayer Program for December and January

Kiahk Praises:

Sat 10th Dec 2011
 Sat 17th Dec 2011
 Sat 24th Dec 2011
 Sat 31st Dec 2011
 (New Years Eve)



Vespers: 5:00pm – 6:30pm
 Midnight Tasbeha: 11:00pm – 3:00am
 First Liturgy: 4:00am – 6:00am
 Second Liturgy: 10:00am – 12:00pm

Glorious Feast of Christmas:

Fri 6 th Jan 2012	Paramoun Liturgy	9:00am – 12:00pm
	Vespers	8:00pm – 9:00pm
	Feast Liturgy	9:00pm – 12:00 am



A servants preparation class from St Mary's Church during a spiritual day at the monastery



St Mark's church youth group during their visit to the monastery