

Monasticism – the perfect path to serving God and Theosis.

If a person loves God, and God calls that person to serve Him, this calling should be accepted.

St. John Climacus teaches: “In this world when a king summons us to obedience, we leave everything aside and answer the call at once without delays or hanging back or excuses. We had better be careful then not to refuse, through laziness or inertia, the call to the heavenly life in the service of the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the God of gods. Let us not find ourselves unable to defend ourselves at the great tribunal of judgment. Someone caught up in the affairs of the world can make progress if he is determined. But it is not easy. Those bearing chains can still walk. But they often stumble and are thereby injured. The man who is unmarried and only bound by the affairs of the world is like a person with only his hands tied. Thus whenever he wishes, he can without trouble make haste toward the monastic life. But the married man is like someone chained hand and foot” .

In the life of ***Saint Andrew of Constantinople***, who revealed to us the Intercession of The Most Holy Theotokos (Pokrova) at the beginning of the 10th century, we can find a example worthy of our attention which

further explains to us God’s calling to monasticism. “Once during prayer St. Andrew found himself in spirit, in the royal palaces of Heaven. The King of Heaven called him and said: ‘Do you wish to serve me? If so, I will make you one of the nobles of my palace’. St Andrew replied: ‘Does anyone exist who would not wish your favor, Master? As for me, I deeply desire this’. Christ said: ‘If you wish it, taste of my Kingdom’. The King said: ‘Narrow is the road that leads to life. That road lies between the sweet and the bitter. The bitter is labor, struggle and sweat; but the sweet and delicious is refreshment, rest and rejoicing, given by the All-Merciful Father to those who endure sufferings and witness for My sake. The bitter alternates with the sweet’. The King gave Andrew something that was very fragrant and said: ‘Take, Eat’. Andrew took and ate, and experienced a wonderful aroma, brightness and divine sweetness. Andrew fell at the King’s feet and begged: ‘Have mercy on me, Kindest Master, accept me to serve you, because I understand very well, that serving you is very pleasant’. The King answered: ‘Believe me, of all my treasures, this is the least and most insignificant! Now you will go back to earth... And if you serve me sincerely and with self-denial the rest of your life, then all I have will be yours!’”

In the same way the Lord calls those who are able, to follow a life of monasticism. This call can be expressed in diverse forms but its

meaning remains always the same. The call to monasticism is a great blessing and great opportunity which is not a calling for all people.

The monastic life offers one many advantages:

1) ***An opportunity to learn to love God and to know Him*** as much as we can.

2) ***A way of life*** organized, dedicated to serving God.

3) The best opportunity to fulfill one’s aspirations ***to live out God’s commandments as completely as possible.***

4) The best opportunity for a person who is conscious of his sinful past life and who wishes to ***“go now and leave the life of sin”*** (John 8:11), to cleanse his sins.

5) ***The finest path of life for those who hope in the reward of the Heavenly Kingdom.***

6) The ***possibility for inner personal growth by having a true elder-teacher*** who will assist one towards unity with God, through prayer and its fruits.

7) An opportunity to fulfill a desire ***to assist those who need help*** in many ways. One can feed the hungry, give drink to those who are thirsty, clothe the naked, and give shelter to those who have no place to lay their heads; visit those, who have fallen ill and have no one to assist them even with their smallest needs; visit the imprisoned who need to be supported (Mt. 25:31-46). We can help poor children through their desperate troubles;

light a ray of hope and faith for those, who can not find their way out of difficult circumstances; teach those who wish to learn about Christ and His teaching; to be one who represents Christ and His Mission on earth so that everyone knows they can find help and support in you.

8) **Peace for the soul**, every human being of whatever religion or world view is born with a sense of conscience which accuses or approves. We can have peace in our soul if our conscience through prayer, good deeds and understanding, acquires peace with God and people.

St. Siluan of Athos thus describes the rewards a monastic receives from God: “**First**, a quiet conscience. **Second**, peace from the Lord for soul and body. **Third**, he loves God, and, contemplating Him, reflects that the Lord loves us. **Fourth**, because of his love for God he loves his neighbor too, as himself. **Fifth**, the soul finds rest in God and contemplates the greatness and compassion of God. **Sixth**, he walks the earth and works with his hands, but his mind is attached to God and in contemplation of Him forgets the earth, for the love of God draws the soul to love the Beloved. **Seventh**, in the thoughts of his soul he feels the grace of God. **Eighth**, he is aware of grace in his heart. **Ninth**, he feels the grace of God in his body, too. **Tenth**, because of his love of God, the Kingdom of Heaven is revealed to him, and through the Holy Spirit he knows what our Lord is like”.

Monasticism is a perfect way to serve God and to achieve theosis. The Lord says: “If you want to be perfect... come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21), “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life, will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:34-38).

-Sr. Bohdanna (Bakay)

¹ Преподобного отця нашого Іоана, ігумена Синайської гори, Лівшиця.- Jordanville, Holy Trinity Monastery, 1963.- с. 7.

² Αναγνωστοπουλος Κ. Στεφανος. Εμπειριες κατα την Θεια Λειτουργια.- Πειραιας, 2003.- σ. 277-279.

³ St. Siluan the Athonite. Archimandrite Sofrony.-New-York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1999.- p. 501.

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- come follow Me»
(Mt. 19:21)*