



**Published by**

Saint Shenouda  
the Archimandrite  
Coptic Orthodox  
Monastery  
Sydney, Australia

**Address**

8419 Putty Rd,  
PUTTY, NSW 2330

**Phone/Facsimile**

(+612) 65 79 7093

**Email**

pimonakhos  
@copticmail.com



# PI MONAKHOS THE MONK

## ΠΙΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ

A monthly newsletter with monastic issues for today's youth

Vol: 1 Issue: 3

Hator 1724 / Nov 2007

## Monasticism and Silence

In the early stages of monasticism, monks were silent because they were occupied with God. Through their prayers, contemplations, and spiritual occupations, talking would only distract them from worshipping God. A holy old monk once said, "The monk who speaks too many words is empty inside", which means that when he speaks, his inner self is empty, because he is distracted from his prayers and contemplations. This is why St. Arsenious the Great always remained silent. He wouldn't even speak to his elderly fathers. On one occasion, St Macarius of Alexandria asked St.



Arsenious about this, whereby he answered saying, "God knows that I love you all, but I am not able to speak with God and people at the same time."

When monks conversed while coming out of church, St. Macarius would say to them, "Flee my brothers, flee!" Out of astonishment from his remark they would ask, "Father, where shall we flee to, we have already escaped the world by coming to this desert," He then would cover his mouth with his hands and answer saying, "From this escape from speaking, it does not only distract you from your prayers, but it also makes you vulnerable to the sins of the tongue." St. Arsenious said concerning silence, "Many times have I spoken and regretted it, but never have I regretted my silence."

The sins we commit by speaking are not only of the tongue, but of the heart as well. This is because the Lord said, "From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." "A good man out of the good treasures of his heart brings forth good, and an evil man out of the evil treasures of his heart brings forth evil." (Luke 6:4,5) This is why there is no deeper sayings than this, "For your speech betrays you." (Matt. 26:73)

People do not know what a silent man holds within himself, but when he speaks he reveals his heart and thoughts. And by speaking he may reveal a lack of knowledge or an impure heart... Therefore the Bible truthfully states that, "Even a fool is counted wise and perceptive when he holds his peace and shuts his lips." (Proverbs 17:28)



Our fathers the monks learned to speak through their silence. Should they say something, they think before they speak, "would it be better for me to speak or to remain silent". If speech was a necessity, they would pray before they spoke so that God would bestow upon them the wisdom of speech.

Their words were scarce, yet very beneficial. People travelled across lands and seas just to listen to one of the monks as he spoke a word of wisdom. A word which not only had depth in it's general meaning but also in it's spiritual meaning. If the monk wished to remain silent, the people would benefit even from his silence. It is a great loss for a monk to speak words provoking sin rather than words of wisdom. A listener wonders, while thinking, 'this is not monasticism'. We read in the Paradise of the Holy Fathers that a monk's speech should portray delicacy and politeness and should never contain words that might pierce the listener's ears.

Saint Or once told his disciples, "Hear this my sons, do not allow a strange word to enter your room." By this saying he meant any word far from the life of the Lord.

By: H.H. Pope Shenouda III



H. G. Bishop Tadros visited the monastery on 25 of Sept-07 and prayed the Divine Liturgy with the Monks of the Monastery and V. Rev Fr Tadros and V. Rev Fr Samuel



## A BRIEF WORD ON CELIBACY

From the holy voices of the Fathers of the Church we have been taught, time and time again, that celibate life is a calling and it is not for all. Saint Paul, himself a great lover of the celibate way, affirms nothing less when he says: 'I wish that all men were even as I myself'—that is, that all could be celibate. But then he quickly adds, 'But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that' (1 Cor 7:7). Only those to whom God has given this gift may truly possess it, and only such a one should endeavour to embrace it personally. Just as a man who has not been given the gift of prophecy will never be a prophet, and as a woman who has not been given the gift of visions will never be a seer, so the individual who has not been given the gift of celibacy will never truly be a celibate. It is a holy way of life, but it is not the exclusive way of life. It is a gift given to some through the love of God, which neither debases nor exalts them in relation to their brethren to whom God has given the gift of the call to marriage. God's gifts are not to be 'rated'. All are holy blessings.

In appreciating this reality of celibacy as a spiritual gift, we are able to address and to suppress in our hearts many of the concerns the world bears toward this life. First, and perhaps the most insidious among the views of the world, is the belief that the way of celibacy stands in judgment of the way of marriage. There is fear in our contemporary culture, that an acceptance of the notion of celibacy equates to an acceptance of a tacit devaluation of marriage—that the celibate man looks spitefully on his married brother and the celibate woman scorns her married sister. But it is the world, not the holy Church, which approaches our topic with such an 'either / or' attitude; for how can one who truly views both the married and celibate ways as gifts of one and the same loving God, set one in opposition to the other? How can he be serious of his faith, who would receive one gift from Christ, but call another evil? No, the value and sanctity of all things is in the Giver, who by His radiant energies makes all gifts holy. Celibacy and marriage both have their essence in Him who draws all things to life. How striking to our expectations that some of the most poignant phrases ever composed in support of and love for the married way, have come from the pens of celibate monks, nuns and Apostles. Such individuals know how deep, convicting and abiding God's gifts may be within a human life, and how precious can be that embodiment of Trinitarian love that is made manifest in the gift of Christian marriage. But they magnify a gift they know is not their own. Their own life is rooted in a different gift, another way, and it is this gift that receives the personal love of their own hearts.

Secondly, our understanding of celibacy as a gift helps us to appreciate the fact that this life is not a negative, but a positive calling. All too often is celibacy described in terms of negation: the celibate is one who 'lacks' a spouse, who 'goes without' marriage, who 'suffers the absence' of a partner. But gifts are not matters of negation, they are rooted in the active receipt of otherwise un-possessioned blessings. Celibacy is only a negative state when viewed from one, specific angle. How often does modern man stop to think of celibacy, even attempt to think of celibacy, as the embracing of a different kind of positive? Perhaps never, certainly not often; and yet this is the very message of celibacy as gift. The celibate man may live without a wife, but he possesses the great gift



of being wed solely to Christ, of having none for the object of his intimate love than his own Creator. She who lives in celibate devotion to God vests herself in the same manner of life embraced by the Son who walked on this earth with neither spouse nor mate, yet wed Himself to all the world as the perfect Bridegroom for a waiting bride. Are not such things positive, not states of deprivation but of rich fulfilment? The celibate does not see his life predominantly as one of 'going without', but one of going with Christ in a different way. Yes, there are sacrifices made, oftentimes severe in form and nature, but this is no less true in a holy marriage. In the requirement of great sacrifice, the callings are the same. Their distinction lies in the manner, not the quantity, of the offering. Only when we are truly, deeply biased, do we fail to see that both gifts require tremendous personal sacrifice, yet from and through this sacrifice grant many rich blessings.

The celibate's call is to walk toward Christ in a different manner than his married brother. Due to the unsearchable wisdom and love of God, he is called to a type of journey into the Kingdom that is more socially solitary—but he is never alone. The celibate, too, believes that 'it is not good for man to be alone'; but let us not be so naive and closed-minded as to think that marriage is the only way to be 'together'. The celibate joins himself to the world in a relationship of no single intimate union with another, that through his one union with Christ, and through Him the Spirit and the Father, he may be lover and companion to all. It is a very different call than to the blessed state of marriage; but a call is always, by its nature, social.

Many receive the gift of the married vocation, and to those the richness of union with God comes, in part, through that gift's actualisation in a holy and sanctified marriage. Not to embrace the gift is to wage battle with God, who knows better than man what life is most suited to him. And this same concept is equally true of him who has received the gift of celibacy: only in the gift's embrace will such a person ever truly know the richness and fullness of life as God has set it before him. No other way shall ever satisfy the longing in his heart, even if that other way is that which brings fulfilment and union to a hundred million others. It is not his way. To live a celibate life is, for the one who has received this gift, the context of his journey into union with God.

We must find in ourselves the light of Christ which calls us toward Himself, and see through its illumination the path by which He calls us to His side. Whether it be by the celibate or married way, our response should be only joy—and great joy at this. How can we do anything but rejoice when our Maker shows us the road which He has fashioned especially between us and Him? Shall we once again take from the Tree of Life the fruit that seems sweetest to our senses, rather than the food sprung forth specifically for our growth and sanctification? May our societally-induced 'preferences' never cause us to scorn our gift through longing for another. May God give to us the patience and the openness to discern which gift we have been given; and when we have found it, to follow Him in that gift. If we are thus faithful to Him and Him alone, surely our wise Lord will bless our lives with richness beyond imagining and fullness beyond expectation; for He is a good and loving God who knows and desires what is best for His children.

From: Monachos.net



Year 9 group from St Marks Church during their bible study



Year 11 & 12 Group from St Marys Church after spending a spiritual day at the monastery

Abba Olympius of the cells was tempted to fornication. His thoughts said to him, "Go, and take a wife". He got up, found some mud, made a woman and said to himself, "Here is your wife, now you must work hard in order to feed her". So he worked, giving himself a great deal of trouble. The next day, making some mud again, he formed it into a girl and said to his thoughts, "your wife has had a child, you must work harder so as to be able to feed her and clothe your child". So, he wore himself out doing this, and said to his thoughts, "I can not bear this weariness any longer". They answered, "if you can not bear such weariness, stop wanting a wife". God, seeing his efforts, took away the conflict from him and he was at peace.

Abba Olympius  
The Sayings of the Desert Fathers



## The Anchorite's Truly Authentic Christian Characters

In the three vocations of Antony, Amoun and Macarius, we find the same progressive retreat from the world which culminates in the creation of fervent centres of monastic life in the heart of the desert. The decisive step involves leaving the "near desert" to reach the "interior desert". This was the major event which occurred in Egypt at the beginning of the fourth century in monastic circles. It isn't a simple phenomenon, a news item, but the beginning of what can be called a true epic, due to its heroic character and immense impact. When we take into account the revulsion felt by Egyptians for the desert, already noted, we can sense how it must have taken truly powerful motives to drag them into these arid and desolate spots. And they weren't just taking off for a limited time, but had the firm intention of spending their entire lives there. In Antony's case, his biographer says he was advised by "a voice from on high" to go "into the interior desert." But heavenly inspiration came only after Antony had decided to move, because he "could not live in solitude as he wanted, and was afraid of boasting about what the Lord was doing for him." For the same kind of motive, Macarius also went to live in Scetis.

Historians have put forth all kinds of reasons to explain this withdrawal to the desert: economic, political, sociological., and while it is possible that, in the long run, these reasons did influence the vocations of certain men, in the case of the three great pioneers we're talking about, nothing leads us to suppose that such motives prompted them to completely and definitively leave the world. The reasons for such a radical making up of one's mind could only have been religious, like those which led them to renounce marriage. It is remarkable that Amoun and Macarius, like Antony, were already living in chastity and asceticism before deciding to depart for the desert. They left the world in order to carry out, in a better way, the renunciation they've embraced. The evolution of the meaning of the word "monk" well conveys the ongoing discovery of all the requirements of monastic renunciation. After giving the word "alone" the meaning of "single," it also expressed the desire to unify one's heart and life by getting rid of everything that distracts and divides, that is to say, all earthly goods and human concerns. And it is, finally, this desire to remove oneself completely from the world's grasp so as to fully belong to God that led the monk to the solitude of the faraway desert.

There had certainly been precedents in pagan and Jewish Antiquity. Greek philosophers, notably the Stoics, had advocated a certain ideal of solitude and withdrawal in order to achieve wisdom more easily. Some Jewish ascetics, contemporaries of Christ, the Essenes, had come together on the banks of the Dead Sea, living chaste and austere lives, all taken up with praising God and praying. During the same era, Philo tells us about a community of "*Therapeutae*," meaning "servants of God," who lived in the suburbs of Alexandria, away from the noise and bustle of business, so as to devote themselves to contemplation of the divinity, yet nowhere else but among the Christian anchorites does one see such a complete break with the cultured and inhabited world. And what is also completely new and unique to Christian monasticism is that the exodus to the desert isn't undertaken for an abstract and distant god but for God incarnated in Christ, the intention being to better respond to the immense love that God showed us by sending his Son, who became human like us, suffered and died to save us. With-



out the Incarnation of Christ, the departure of the monks to the desert makes no sense at all, and never could only a few individuals ever have drawn thousands of Christians to follow in their wake. This unusual step, this separation from the ecclesial community, could have been seen as a desertion, an exaggeration, even an aberration, and yet in no time at all it became admired, praised, exalted as the summit of virtue and saintliness. St Athanasius himself, the great bishop of Alexandria, who was the ardent defender of Christ's divinity against the Arians, turned out to be a fervent apologist of the monastic life. By composing and publishing the *Life of Antony*, this eminent theologian in a way authenticates via the seal of his authority this singular innovation. In his hero he gives us not only a role model for monks but a beautiful example for all Christians and even an eyewitness account that would touch the pagans. And soon, from all sides, people turned towards the deserts of Egypt, going there on pilgrimages with the same fervor as to the Holy Places in Palestine, spreading a thousand anecdotes about the Desert Fathers, spreading their words with almost as much zeal as that devoted to the Gospels. For Christian people, this amounts not only to a canonization of these saintly personages, but to an implicit approval of their lifestyle, of what was most original about it, this withdrawal to the desert which they had initiated.

By: Lucien Regnault  
The Day to Day Life of the Desert Fathers

---

### Abba Gelasios:

It was said of Abba Gelasios that he possessed a book worth eighteen gold coins for it contained the entire Old and New Testaments. This book was placed in the Church, so that any of the brothers who wanted might read it. On one occasion, a brother from another monastery visited the Elder, and, when he saw the book, coveted it, stole it, and departed. The Elder, although he realised what the brother had done, did not pursue him. The thief went to the city and sought to sell the book; when he found a buyer, he asked sixteen gold coins for it. The man who wanted to buy it said to him: "Let me examine it and I will give you whatever you ask." On receiving the book, he took it to Abba Gelasios to examine, having told him the price that the seller was demanding.

After examining it carefully, as if he did not recognize it, the Elder said to the man: "Buy it, because it is beautiful and worth the price that he told you." When the buyer returned to the seller, he said something different from what the Elder had told him, for he said: "Look, I showed the book to Abba Gelasios, and he told me that you are asking a very high price for it and that it is not worth so much." When the later heard this, he asked the buyer: "Did the Elder tell you anything else?" "No," the man replied. The seller was moved to compunction by the Elder's forbearance and said to the man: "I no longer want to sell it." After taking the book, he went in repentance to the Elder and begged him to accept it; but the Elder did not wish to keep it. The brother told him: "If you do not take it, I will have no peace." "If you will not be at peace," the Elder said to him, "I will take it back." This brother remained close to the Elder until his death, benefitting from the Elder's conduct.



## Questions & Answers

I am thinking about Monasticism but I am always afraid to take a positive step?

While a person may feel that he/she has a desire to monasticism, and that this lifestyle is the most suitable for him/her, they are faced with some obstacles and difficulties, such as:

1. **Fearing the Unknown Future:** In spite of visiting the monastery frequently and spending a great deal of time there, the monastic life remains a great mystery to many. This problem may be solved by spending more time at the monastery, meeting with spiritual fathers who are able to explain everything in a monk's daily life, monasticism and its philosophy, etc.

2. **Fearing the loss of one's initial love for monasticism:**

To think in such a way is considered as displaying a lack of faith in God's power and grace. A person who feels the invitation to monasticism should submit his/her life into God's hands, as only He is capable of remaining with him/her till the end: "*With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*" (Matthew 19:26). The apostle also says: "*For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*" (2 Timothy 1:12). Moreover, the Lord comforts the soul that leaves everything and is seeking His love and community.



### Further Readings:



Benedicta Ward, "***The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the early Christian Monks***", Penguin Classics.

This edition makes freshly accessible the most influential Latin collection of sayings of the desert fathers. The new English translations follow the original Latin organization around themes important to the monks, such as charity, fortitude, lust, patience, prayer, self-control and visions.



Archbishop Chrysostomos "***The Evergetinos: A Complete Text***", Centre for traditionalist Orthodox Studies.

One of the classic collections of Orthodox spiritual writings, the *Evergetinos* is a source of inspiration, spiritual guidance, and insight into the lives of men and women who, during the first few centuries of Christianity, attained to the highest ideals of the spiritual life. In the spiritual laboratory of the Egyptian deserts. This is an eighth volumes series which is available in the English-language