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Life experiences-A message from Gerondissa Thekla



Having entered the fourth week of quarantine, and in view of the coming of the Holy days of Pascha, being pressured by the stress and fear that is being imposed on us; with the pressure developing from trying to govern the monastery under such circumstances and with deep sadness filling my heart from the pain and sadness of the people around us, due to their lack of certain basic necessities but mainly due to the deprivation of the consolation and strength offered by the church attendance and the strongest medicine, Holy Communion, brought me to seclusion and prayer. I implored and I continually implore God to send His ineffable mercy to the world, to heal the sick to strengthen them, to comfort the elderly and those that are struck by loneliness and are living difficult situations.

I was somehow feeling guilty because we at the Monastery, at these times are comforted by the sacramental life, where on the contrary our brethren are lacking this, and I was looking for a way to comfort them. Then I heard a voice telling me; “Remember what you used to do?” Then, as if my mind opened, I saw and believe

me, I relived (in feeling) those unique moments.

When I first entered the Monastery in 1975 (forty five years ago), it was at a time that the Holy Monastery of Philotheou on Mount Athos did not number many monks and there were very few priests. Therefore there were not enough priests to serve the Metochia. Our Monastery was a Metochi (dependence) of the Monastery of Philotheou, so for many years we did not have a priest to serve our needs. Someone would come, (very rarely), throughout the year, but never on Great Feasts: i.e. the Nativity of Christ, Pascha, Annunciation, Pentecost…, we were always left on these holy days with no priest.

If such a situation would take place at a Parish, the parishioners would complain, would yell, use indecent words, maybe even curse and the only one happy from all of this would be the "tempter" with his angels.

For us it would be the opposite. We would fast as if preparing for Holy Communion, we would gather together in our chapel which was an extension to a hallway, (¼ of the size of our Monastery's church here). We would read the services and at the end, our Most Holy Gerondissa Makrina would "commune" us by giving us Great Holy Water and Holy Bread. She would always counsel us that, "If we would be as we should be spiritually, then it is possible noetically to receive Holy Communion from Holy Angels, just like we have read many times in the lives of the Saints."

Believe me, back then we lived many heavenly moments which we never encountered again even after when we had a permanent priest and would serve forty day liturgies. Now I realize that due to the deprivation but also to the great zeal and patience we had, the Lord would bless us with grace that accompanies martyrdom.

The chapel would be fragrant as if someone had sprinkled it all over with myrrh. Our eyes would stream with endless tears. Our heart would leap from the Grace of God. On the days that we supposedly "communed", without even realizing it, we would speak softly because we felt as if we had partaken in some sacred ceremony. Saying the prayer, our mouth would taste as if we had taken a very fragrant candy. We would feel the presence of Holy Communion, even though we had not received it, and throughout the day we would be cautious not to spit, nor chew gum and throw it out. So great was the sense of the presence of Holy Communion. No matter what I write, it is not possible to describe the feeling of Christ's grace that we lived back in those days of deprivation, because there are not words to express this. A few years later, at the Holy Monastery of Philotheou, the number of priests grew and we no longer had a problem needing a priest;

everything found its place in our monastery.

After 19 years, when obedience brought myself and sister Ephraimia here to Canada, we again encountered the same problem; the lack of priests. For 7 years, our Monastery did not have a priest. But now it was not so bad because the priests here had the order from the Archbishop to come during the week and serve the Divine Liturgy, so that we would commune. However, again Saturdays and Sundays and feast days we would not have a priest. The priests had to serve at their own parishes and communities. So, we would read the services, on our own, decorate the icons, the Cross for the Elevation of the Holy Cross, and for the Sunday of the veneration of the Cross during Great Lent; we would bring out the Lord's Cross on Holy Thursday; and we would try to raise the morale of the young novices, who had complete inexperience of these things.

These, along with so many more are now a wealth of experiences that exists inside of us and whenever it is needed we open the "treasure box" of experiences and we choose whatever is needed depending on the circumstance.

Then suddenly, as if my nous opened and I relived all of this spiritual state very intensely, as it being an answer to my prayer; the message being that whoever prepares themselves with humility, without grumbling and protesting, but with much prayer and faith in the Providence of God, and receives Holy water and Holy Bread in replacement of Holy Communion and contemplates that theoretically "God did not permit me to receive Holy Communion, as being "unworthy and unprepared", then this person will be filled by God's grace of endurance of martyrdom, of which Saint Luke the doctor would say: "I loved much the grace of martyrdom, which so wonderfully cleanses the soul".

The tempter wanted to close the churches; let us make our homes into churches. He shut 11 churches; let us open 11 thousand. May each home become a church; let prayer be raised like a torch of fire towards heaven; let the incense fragrance all the neighbourhoods; may the candle and the vigil lamp always be lit. Let us attend the services through electronic correspondence, praying together, and not lying down, or eating, or smoking. If we do this, instead of closing down the churches, they will grow and spread and whole cities will become churches. Then God will give His blessing, and seeing our repentance and our faith He will cast away this evil plague and give us the freedom along with our churches to live many years working for Him.

I wish you a Blessed Holy week, a spiritual ascent, a double well-being of spirit and soul, patience and unwavering trust in God's Providence, so that the light of the

Resurrection will shine forth in our hearts and replenish us with the gifts of the Most Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Blessed and Bright Resurrection!”

With infinite love in Christ

The least in Christ,

Abbess Thekla & the sisters
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