



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States**

**The Monthly Message
to the Fathers, the Priests**

June 2024

Deceases in Spiritual Leadership (3)

Fear & Hesitancy

With God's grace we will continue our discussion concerning spiritual ailments making "Fear and Hesitancy" the topic of this month; referring to certain important points that pertain to these ailments a "spiritual leader" may suffer from in his spiritual service and which may inadvertently influence it in a negative way.

Firstly, let us hearken to St. Paul's advice to the Corinthians, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love" (1 Corinthians 16:13-14). St. Paul's advice to "be brave, strong" is not directed differentially to one gender over the other. Rather, he wants to specifically connote valor in bearing the responsibility and power in facing hardships binding this courageousness with steadfastness in faith reiterating the Lord Jesus Christ's teachings concerning faith, trust and His ultimate care for us. "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not

one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31).

Therefore, determination and self-trust have truly sprung from resolution and trust in God Who gives genuine power necessarily needed in service and testimony as said by our Lord Jesus Christ. "Therefore, settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist" (Luke 21:14-15).

Secondly, fear and irresolution reflect the weakness that exist in the relation with God and with His words. That is clear in the definitive admonition in God's message to Jeremiah. Despite Jeremiah's young age, God ordered him to be strong and adhere to His words relying on his strong relationship with God, deriving power from it with which to stand against his opponents. God warned Jeremiah that any reluctance and fear on his side would add to his hardships. Thus God wanted to assure Jeremiah not to fear any external opposing factors against service since God Himself is in charge of supporting and protecting His word, children and servants. Hence, were God's directive words to Jeremiah loud and clear, "Therefore prepare yourself and arise, and speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before their faces, Lest I dismay you before them. For behold, I have made you this day a fortified city and an

iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you,' says the Lord, 'to deliver you.'" (Jeremiah 1:17-19).

Thirdly, God understands fully well our weak human nature that sometimes, in its frailty, reaches the point of fear and subsequent doubt in God's supporting power. However, because of His love, God remains patient growing us in faith and trust till we reach the state of complete, wholehearted reliance on Him. That is why in the story of Gideon, (the Holy Book of Judges), we come across a wonderful example of God's patience, longsuffering, and love till we become strong enough to faithfully fulfill God's mission. When called by the angel, Gideon was troubled wondering how he and his small, insignificant tribe would collaborate with God in order to deliver God's people from the tyranny of the Medianites who by all measures were stronger than Gideon and his people. Through the signs given to Gideon, "So Gideon said to God, 'If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said— look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.' And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the

fleece, a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.' And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground" (Judges 6:36-40). The result was ultimate victory to Gideon and his tribe against the pretentious power of the enemy.

At the onset of his calling, Gideon's fear sprang from the absence of feeling of God's presence with him. As soon as his faith became strong, seeing the work of God's hand, his anxiety disappeared, no longer suspecting victory even with the minimum number of three hundred men, and the scarcity of weaponry.

Fourthly, fear and irresolution can easily drag a priest to the abyss of becoming people pleaser altering decisions to fit the sizes of comments, criticisms, personal desires, preferences and much more. Consequently such a priest would dangerously fit the description offered by St. James, "For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:7-8).

It is remarkable how St. James arrived at describing the "double- minded man" as lacking faith, missing the fortifying wisdom and knowledge that would enable him to discern, understand and decide. Such faculties were granted to

Solomon at the beginning of his reign when he asked for them from God in order to be able to govern and lead his people. "On that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, 'Ask! What shall I give you?' And Solomon said to God: 'You have shown great mercy to David my father, and have made me king in his place. Now, O Lord God, let Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?'" (2 Chronicles 1:7-10).

Lastly, the steadfast, unwavering courage in decision making does not mean stubbornness, haughtiness, inflexibility or single-mindedness; such characteristics that might entangle a priest with the fear of being described as weak or lacking knowledge. Solomon, calling himself "a little child" offers a wonderful example in his prayer for wisdom, "Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:7-9).

That little, unskilled child had become the wisest leader of all times. Therefore, let no leader fear his weakness or need for experience and growth. Such requisites are not faults but are

main causes and reasons for urging towards spiritual growth, cognitive development and trained knowledge. It is not a defect nor a disadvantage to listen to advice coming from good people such as older or even younger priests and individuals. Then, through hearing, seeing and observing it is then left to a leader's own wisdom and discretion to benefit from all the feedback he receives which will in the end accumulatively lead to wisdom, discretion and certainty in leadership in his service.

We all know how destructive it was to the whole nation when Rehoboam led a life opposite to that of his father Solomon, disregarding wisdom while listening only to the voices of arrogance, egoism and selfishness. Therefore, it behooves us to say that asking for advice and counsel are not signs of weakness. On the contrary, they exhibit signs of self-control and micro management of emotions and the self when issuing certain decisions free of personal agendas or gains.

The Lord is capable of freeing us from all fear, granting strength to our faith and fortitude to our hands to serve in His field. May His words and promises remain always before our eyes remembering the Lord's encouraging words to His disciples when they were fear ridden, "But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.'" (Matthew 14:27).

"I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25).