



Brief Patristic Messages



Genuine Courtesy

*His Eminence, Metropolitan
Cyprian of Oropos and Fili*

ONE of the more characteristic traits of the pious Christian is courtesy.

Of course, when speaking of courtesy—that is, refinement of manners—we do not confine ourselves to something external or to a display of sanctimonious smiles; rather, we are speaking about manners which constitute an expression of our holy inner life.

The pious person who unceasingly takes care to “be filled with the Holy Spirit” through the life in Christ, who has inner spiritual activity and recollection of God, and who is conscious that his neighbor is an image of God seeks to honor his brother, not to wound him, not to despise him, not to disparage him, and not to treat him boorishly.

The most saintly Elder Justin (Popovič) used to say, “Go to your neighbor with the feet of a dove”; that is to say, approach him as a dove—gently and softly, for our neighbor has his fears and his sorrows and already has enough of a burden—, lest he be weighed down further by us.

Although they lived far from the world, the holy Desert Fathers were very social; and with astonishing precision they teach us ways of showing good demeanor and genuine courtesy, which, when put into practice also by our lay brethren, give rise

to great spiritual benefit, edify one in Christ, and lead one to the way of salvation.

A great ascetic, who was, at the same time, also a great social teacher, is the God-inspired Abba Isaac the Syrian.

Let us see what that blessed bird of the desert advises us.

When you meet your neighbor, compel yourself to honor him more than he deserves. Kiss his hands and his feet. Hold them many times and with great honor. Press them to your eyes. Praise him for those things which he does not possess. When he has left, say every good and honorable thing about him.

In this way, you draw him towards the good and compel him to be shy of you for the salutation you have made to him. Thus do you sow the seeds of virtue in his soul.

And as for you, by means of this good manner of yours, you habituate yourself to it and acquire a good character and much humility, and without toil attain great virtues.

But if your neighbor has some shortcoming, in being esteemed in this way by you he will readily accept the therapy, being embarrassed by the honor that you have shown him.

Always maintain this manner. Greet each and every one affably and respect them all. Move no one to anger or envy, nor turn away from another person, not even because of his faith or his sins. Be on your guard not to criticize anyone or to condemn others about anything. We all have a Judge in Heaven Who is not a respecter of persons.

We believe that this truly God-inspired advice of the great Abba requires no elucidation.

The desert continually sends saving lights to the disorderly world, to societies barren of love and inner refinement.

† *Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, 16/29 May 2005*

