



**THE COPTIC ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE
ST. GEORGE AND ST. RUEISS CHURCH
SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM**

GRADE TWELVE

Revised Edition 2021

PREPARATION AND WRITING

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Παποστολος

Πασιος

Μαρκος





THE THRICE-BLESSED POPE SHENOUDA III
OF BLESSED MEMORY



HIS HOLINESS POPE TAWADROS II

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate

FROM H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III

Deir Anba Ruciss, Ramses Avenue, ABBASSIYA,

CAIRO, EGYPT.

CABLE: ELANBARUEISS, CAIRO.

ΠΡΟΣ ΗΓΑΓΡΙΑΡΧΗΣ ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΗΡΙΟΥ
ΚΑΙ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΗΣ

ΠΡΟΘΕΣΤΟΣ

Πατριαρχية الاقباط الانثوزكيتين
Date | / / 19
| / / 17

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الى الدينيه المباركيه القوم مرقس الياس عبد المسيح
والذين تآدرسون يعقوب ملكي

سلام رحبه وبعد ،
زارني ابننا د. محفوظ وسعه المنهج القترح لدارس
التربية الكنسية بالمهجر . وقد درست معه الخطوط الاساسية
للمنهج ، دوره الدخول في التفاصيل . وابدت له بعض ملاحظات
من جهة مناهج العقيدة والحقن : وفي الواقع انه الجهد المبذول
جهد كبير جداً يتوجه الشكر . ومع ذلك تحتاج دروس الكتاب
المقدس الى زيادة . وسأرسل لكم ملاحظات اخري بالتفصيل بمشيئة
الرب .

تليبارك الرب كل ما قام به ابننا محفوظ من جهود في اعداد
المنهج ، وفي جميع المادة ، وفي عمل الترجمة . وتليبارك الرب
أيضاً كل من اشتركوا في العمل ، وفي المراجعة
وليكنه صدقنا هو ما نتطلع الوصول اليه من كان على قدر
امكانياتنا . ويمكنه تزويد المنهج أيضاً بالصورة المناسبة والتي
تقرها كنيستنا من النواحي العقيدية والطقسية والتاريخية
الرب معاً ، كونوا بخير

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سيد القديس اعزلك

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate

FROM H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III

Deir Anba Ruciss, Ramses Avenue, ABBASSIYA,
CAIRO, EGYPT.

CABLE : ELANBARUEISS, CAIRO.



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To my blessed two sons: Hegomain Fr. Marcous Elias Abdel Massih and Hegomain Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty.

Peace and love be with you.

Dr. Mahfouz has visited me and brought with him the suggested Sunday school curriculum for the land of immigration. I have studied with him the basic topics of the curriculum without getting into details. Although that I have pointed out some concerns on the doctrine and dogma curriculum, it is clear that the amount of work spent on preparing the curriculum is huge and worth thanking. Nonetheless, the Bible study part of the curriculum needs to be increased. God willing, I will also send you additional details on this curriculum.

May the Lord bless all the effort that our son Mahfouz has done in preparing the Sunday school curriculum, in collecting the relevant topics, and in performing the translation of subjects. May the Lord also bless all those who have joined him in preparing this project and those who revised the topics.

Let our goal be performing our best to try and arrive at perfection given what we have from abilities. Lastly, I would also suggest the addition of different recognized pictures according to our doctrine, dogma and history to the Sunday school curriculum.

May the Lord be with you. Be in peace.

Signed

Pope Shenouda III
22 August 1986
The feast of St. Mary





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INTRODUCTION TO

THE Sunday SCHOOL

IMPORTANT RULES FOR TEACHING THE YOUTH IN THE LAND OF IMMIGRATION

Our youth in the land of immigration are influenced by the society and the culture they live in, this is considered perfectly normal and inevitable.

Despite the similarities in the content of the Sunday school curriculum and the youth meeting topics across all the churches in the world, the difference lies in the presentation of the topic and the ability to tailor the content to fit the audience's background, culture and spiritual needs. This would greatly increase the topic's comprehension and its receptiveness.

In Saint Paul's sermon to the Jews (Acts 13: 16-41) he spoke to them regarding Moses the arch-prophet and gave an account of their experiences with our Lord throughout their history. Moreover, in another instance, he spoke to the Greek philosophers (Acts 17: 18-33) in a manner that suits their cultural background. In both cases the content is equivalent, both sermons aim to convey the message of salvation that our Lord Jesus Christ granted us on the cross.

Therefore, whether the Sunday school / youth servants are first generation immigrants or are born in the land of immigration, it is important to observe the following guidelines in conveying the topic:

1. Correctness of the language and its clarity...the servant must prepare the topic in an accurate, clear & coherent language. This language should be the audience's preferred first language
2. Organization...Our children live in a society where organization and punctuality are governing characteristics, hence, it is imperative to adopt those characteristics to portray to our children that our services and our churches are adhering to the norms of the society.
3. Respect...mutual respect is the prevailing trait in the western societies, as a result respect ought to be maintained at all times between the servant and those being served. This is manifested in good communication skills such as listening without interjecting and using appropriate words depicting respect.

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4. Dialogue...constructive discussions and valuing each other's opinions are fundamental in the western societies. Dialogue often leads to persuasion and mutual love as opposed to just giving orders.
5. Give pertinent examples from the children's day to day life...during the topic we must reference examples that are suitable and related for emphasis and clarification.
6. Questioning everything said or heard...Due to all the strong intellectual movements in the society, we as servants must be cognizant of any new infiltrating thoughts, this is achieved through research and analysis to be in a position to answer our youth's questions in a convincing intellectual dialogue.
7. Love between the servant and the children...our children often yearn for compassion and love in our fast pace materialistic society. Thus, it is extremely important that the servant uses expressions of love, affection and harmony.
8. Establish and maintain the bond between the children and the mother church...this is essential to our unity and there ought not to be any division or separation of any sort from the mother church nor its beliefs, holiness, saints, organization or any other matter.
9. We ask all Sunday school / youth servants to abide by the orthodox faith and dogma in all the topics and to use ample biblical examples and references.
10. We ask all Sunday school / youth servants to establish a good spiritual relationship with all those being served.

INTRODUCTION TO

THE Sunday SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

Principal Goal of Christian Up-Bringing.

The child had and still has, first as a person and second as a child, a special importance to our Lord Jesus Christ. He called the children and considered them models of perfection, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:3-5).

Therefore, children are the beloved ones to Christ and are His friends because of their simplicity and purity of heart. Christ called them, blessed them and asked His Disciples and Apostles after Him to take care of bringing up children and preparing a suitable environment for their spiritual growth.

St. Paul advises parents saying, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged", (Colossians 3:21). From a Christian point of view, the general principal goal of religious up - bringing is the formation of the perfect man of God who is following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Also, our Lord said, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

Hence, a Christian upbringing is not merely an education to be had or a curriculum to be taught, but rather, it is a life that is given through example and behavior through teaching and discipleship. The saintly Fathers of the church have emphasized this fact. St. John said about his practice of life with the Lord "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).

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The same fact was emphasized by St. Paul when he talked to his disciple Timothy: "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium ... But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:10-15). Also in the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians 3:17 he writes: "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." Therefore, the principal goal of the Christian upbringing is to change the life of our children to the life of Christ in them, i.e. to a life based on the work of Christ in them as true Christians and not just religious persons who fear God but deny Him.

The Starting Point in Achieving the Goal of Religious Upbringing.

The teacher should not start with the student from power Zero. The student comes equipped with many social and religious experiences. His religious experience, although it is limited, has a strong basis that is ready for spiritual growth. In the Sacrament of Baptism, the student has already obtained the spiritual birth i.e. he became spiritually re-born. After his baptism he was anointed with the Holy Myroun (Chrism) and the Holy Spirit dwelt in him. St. John said "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you; and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him" (1 John 2:27).

Therefore, by obtaining these two Holy Sacraments and the Sacrament of Eucharist, the student becomes a member in the body of the Lord and a living part of the body of the Holy Church. This means that religious upbringing is not something foreign to the student. The student is a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in him. This means that it is not the teacher who makes the student live a life for Christ, but it is the inside work of the Holy Spirit that makes the whole difference. The role of the teacher is to make the student aware of the effect and the work of the Spirit. In this sense the student becomes aware of the secret grace inside him and as a result the divine word inside him grows as the seed grows inside the earth.

The Difference between Religious Education and Religious Upbringing.

INTRODUCTION TO

THE Sunday SCHOOL

We should not aim at providing lessons in the form of giving information, i.e. a mere religious education. In this case religious experience will never exceed the circle of the mind and will never affect the heart and practice of the student. If we consider religious education as an element in religious bringing-up, we are in this case following Christ's plan in the development and building of the Christian personality. Christ with His example and His perfection gave us a model which should be followed and achieved. As for His teachings, they are meant to clear the way for us in order to follow them as examples and models.

The Need in our Church for a Coptic Orthodox Sunday School Program.

There is one basic difference between Eastern and Western theology; the latter depends on study, analysis and using scientific means, whereas Eastern theology is based on experience and depth which mainly leads to true Christian life. The Eastern Church respects the role of the mind but it works under the supervision of faith.

The majority of recent Western Sunday School programs follow a pure analytical way of explaining the Bible. For example, miracles are explained through psychological and scientific factors. The man of God must accept miracles and believe them as they are. St. Athanasius said, "Our knowledge must not control (or have authority over) the word, but the word itself must have the control and authority over the mind".

Another basic difference is that our traditional Church uses the rites in education as a key in the process of living what is being taught.

Over and above what was mentioned before in relation to the basic differences in religious education between Eastern and Western churches, there are also basic differences in the various beliefs and the way Christianity is lived in daily life.

We, as parents, teachers and clergy, are responsible in front of God to bring up our children according to the same spiritual Orthodox principles that we received from our saintly Fathers who shed their blood to perpetuate the perfect Orthodox faith. Therefore, our children must learn from the same source from which we learned before them.

The Sunday School program in your hands is a fruit of love granted by our Lord Jesus Christ to our children and a gift from Him to them. This program is purely

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Coptic Orthodox. All its references without exception are Coptic Orthodox (please review the reference list at the end of the book. In this manner all the information that is in this book (as well as all the books in this series) can be used with total confidence as it is devised according to our glorified church. The spirit of the lessons is indeed the same spirit of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

About the Books in Your Hands.

These books in your hands are integrated series of books which were written for children from age 4 to 18. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, if the child at age 4 follows this series of lessons until age 18, he will obtain an all-rounded spiritual background. The books (covering the teachings from preschoolers to grade 12) cover a study of most of the major Biblical subjects of the Old and New Testaments, the celebrations of the church of our Master's feasts, the life of the Saints and their feasts, the divine liturgy with its rites and spirituality, the true Christian life and Christian behavior, church sacraments, fasting, prayers, the creed and its explanation, the Ecumenical Councils, the difference between the various major Christian sects, the Christian family, the history of our church, the major personalities in the Holy Bible, ... etc. The program is indeed comprehensive and it covers all the key areas of our Orthodox church. If these lessons were given in the spiritual way that was emphasized before, great results will be expected with the work of the Holy Spirit.

General Rules and Principles to be followed by the Sunday School Teachers.

- 1) The teacher must know the stage and the characteristics of growth of the children that he or she is teaching. A child who is 12 years old is different from a child who is 8 years old. The teacher must know the level of his/her students, their abilities to receive information, and the differences between the various abilities in the same class.
- 2) The positive participation of the students is very important during the lesson and the effectiveness of teaching. One of the key incentives for the student is to give importance to the lesson and have an effective communication with the teacher and, above all, to define clearly the purpose behind it and present the lesson in the form of problems that attract their attention.

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THE Sunday SCHOOL

- 3) The teacher must follow a psychological order of the facts he is presenting. Our Lord Jesus Christ used effectively the psychological method of teaching through His parables. The parables in their simplicity are drawn from the daily life of the people. We must emphasize here that the psychological method is not the only method of spiritual teaching. We should mention this method as one of the methods used. It is quite important to note that spiritual teaching must be imparted with certain goals in mind which are connected with the life of the children and related to the problems they face. We should provide guidance that is mostly needed for them.
- 4) The teacher must present the lesson and illustrate it with relevant information and present it as a coherent unity without ambiguity or contradiction. He/she may use illustrations to help him explain what is meant.
- 5) Application of Christian principles to the actual social life must be emphasized in every lesson. The teacher should use stories (from the Old or New Testaments or from church history or church books) to attract the attention of the students and show the Christian principle in an applied manner. The teacher also may divide the subject into stages or small subjects. A good practice is to summarize the lesson or better still, ask the students themselves to summarize it.
- 6) The manner of expressing the lesson to the students is also very important. A teacher who is living by what he/she teaches will definitely be more effective in giving his/her message across. A teacher who is teaching under spiritual influence with compatible emotions to what he/she teaches will be much more effective than a teacher who is simply just passing along the information.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From someone who is not capable, and does not know anything, was taken and lead by hand, step by step, from the smallest to the largest thing for this work to be done.

“He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.” Isaiah 40:29

“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” John 1:3

On behalf of the Coptic Orthodox children and youth, who are going to benefit a great deal from this revised Sunday School Program, I would like to express a word of appreciation and gratitude to:

The Thrice-Blessed Pope Shenouda III of Blessed Memory

This program leans quite heavily on the writings of His Holiness the Late Pope Shenouda III. The majority of the contents of the lessons and their attachments are based on His Holiness' writings. This is a very bright and important aspect of this program. In 1986, during the time in which there was no Coptic Orthodox Sunday School program in the land of immigration, His Holiness reviewed the general contents of the program, commented and modified many key subjects, and then authorized the use of this program in all churches outside of Egypt, on a preliminary basis.

I can safely say that, if it was not for His Holiness the Late Pope Shenouda III's support, wisdom, and writings, these series of books would not exist. The whole generation is in debt to His Holiness the Late Pope Shenouda III, not only because of his great teachings and writings, but also because of his love and leadership.

His Holiness Pope Tawadros II

I had the blessing of meeting His Holiness in 2013 in Austria and I suggested to him about updating and revising the previous version of the Sunday School Program. His encouragement, wisdom, and follow up were key to the development and completion of this program.

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His Grace Bishop Reweiss has been behind us all the way with his love and guidance. He wrote the forward for our previous version of the program in 1986.

His Grace Bishop Moussa

His Grace Bishop Moussa has provided constant support and encouragement in the completion of the previous program. Of course, His Grace's writings for the youth have been utilized in all the subjects directed towards the youth, in this book.

Fr. Tadros Malaty and Fr. Marcos Marcos

These Beloved Fathers reviewed thoroughly all of the contents of the first six books of the earliest version of the program. Their dedication, experience, and wisdom have been an important factor in the quality of all the material. They contributed greatly towards setting up the lessons, in that sense. Father Tadros Malaty's deep writings, without any doubt, have been a key reference in the majority of the lessons.

Dr. Fayek M. Ishak

Dr. Fayek Ishak (head of the English Department at Lakehead University) reviewed the first six books of the earliest version of the program. He contributed, immensely, towards the setup of the lessons.

Fr. Makary Silwanis

This beloved father's computer skills were utilized in many functions related to this Sunday School Program. His love and encouragement were key factors to the progress of this program.

Tassoni Ragaa

The continuous support and encouragement of Tassoni Ragaa played an essential role in the write-up of the previous version of the program, as well as in this revision. One of the aspects that kept this program centered and on track was her continuous reminder that this program is for generations to come and every effort is worthwhile for the sake of the upbringing of the children and youth.

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The Youth of St. George and St. Rueiss Coptic Orthodox Church

A main contributor to this project was Monica Gad, who valued and recognized the importance of having a Sunday School program.

Comments and proof-readings of many of the youth are greatly appreciated.

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**TEACHER'S GUIDELINES:
HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM?**

1. The teacher should realize that each lesson has been prepared to cover a specific point; starting from the title of the lesson to its end.
2. The teacher should read all the materials referred to in the lesson (i.e. the Holy Bible as well as any articles attached to the lesson), and then proceed by emphasizing all the points.
3. The teacher should enlarge the picture ahead of each lesson and use it as a visual aid as he or she is teaching the lesson.
4. The teacher should discuss the practical applications as he or she proceeds with the lesson.
5. The teacher should summarize the main points of the lesson with the students and give prizes.

Effective teaching in Sunday School:
by Fr Rueiss Awad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbf9zEPULdU>

FEATURES OF THIS

Sunday SCHOOL

FEATURES OF THIS SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

A COMPREHENSIVE SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

1. This Sunday School program was the very first program to be written in the lands of immigration. This work was initiated in 1974, and the first version was published in 1986. We thank our heavenly Father, Who has given us the opportunity to extensively revise and improve it, in 2005.
2. In this version of the program, any repetition that was in the previous program, has been removed, all lessons were upgraded in both coverage and depth. Moreover, a whole new book, on contemporary issues, has been added.
3. The contemporary issues book covers subjects that are important for children and youth in today's world. These lessons are optional. For churches with regular youth group meetings, these issues would best be discussed during those meetings. On the other hand, for churches that do not hold regular youth group meetings, those issues could be discussed as part of the Sunday School program.
4. This version of the program also includes lessons, which form a basis for a missionary service, a service that should in the ideal situation be practiced by every member of our congregation. The objective is that each child, every youth, and in the long run each Coptic individual can behave and act in a way, which is an embodiment of the teaching and tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church. In other words, our congregation members would become role models in their communities, who attract people to our Lord Jesus Christ through their good practices: sincerity, commitment, hard work and dedication, tolerance, forgiveness, and all the other good qualities that differentiate a good practicing Christian from those who merely have a Christian education.

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5. In this Sunday School Program, we depended heavily on the writings of H.H. Pope Shenouda III as a reference for most of the presented material.

6. The lessons in this version of the program have already been tried in Sunday School classes, reviewed, improved and tried again. This ensures that the lessons are relevant and suit the level of the students.

7. In this version of the program, efforts were put forth to ensure that every aspect of the Christian life in the Coptic Orthodox Church is covered.

8. This Sunday School Program is not merely about providing specific education on Christianity to our children and youth, but it is rather an attempt to deeply affect their feelings and spirituality. It is believed that such an approach will facilitate the practical application of the various aspects involved so that Christianity becomes a way of life for the individual, with deeply rooted Christian values, that are manifested as behavior and attitude.

9. All copyrights of other Sunday School programs, and other writers, have been fully respected.

10. In this version, each lesson comes complete with pictures and songs that are suitable for the lesson.

11. This Sunday School program comes in various formats for convenience. In addition to being available on this website for widespread use, it is also available, upon request, in hard copy format or on CD.

12. It is our strong belief that this Sunday School program will play a vital role in the spiritual upbringing of our children. May the Lord bless this Sunday School program and all other programs, for the growth of His Kingdom in us.

THE PREPARATION OF

Sunday SCHOOL

THE PREPARATION OF SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

A. What is a Sunday School Lesson?

1. It is not a record of events that we convey to the students with the hopes of appearing to satisfy the required preparation process in front of other people. Neither is it a lecture that we deliver to our audience or student regardless of their interest in the matter.

2. However, it is, on one hand, a fruit of the live reaction between the servant and the lesson and, on the other hand, between the servant and the students. The Holy Spirit matures this fruit and directs this service towards the salvation of the students and towards the glory of God.

For if the servant who teaches the people does not teach himself, the voice of the Lord rebukes him saying, "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself ? " (Romans 2:21), and again in James 3: 1: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."

Therefore, the servant should engage himself in the lesson through prayers, relevant spiritual readings, and practical application, so that when the servant speaks with his students from experience and true knowledge, he says, with St. John the Beloved, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-" (1 John 1:1)

If a servant is not aware of the spiritual level of his students, he may burden them with instructions and lessons which they cannot handle nor apply and this, in turn, may cause the students to go astray and lose their eternal life. Therefore, it is crucial for the servant to establish a healthy, trustworthy, and fruitful relationship with his students, as well as to share in their joys and cheers, and their sadness and fears, all towards Jesus Christ. This is what St. Paul refers to in his epistle to the Gal. when he says, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you..." (Gal. 4:19). This close relationship with the students allows the servant to choose the most appropriate lesson that applies to their needs.

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Hence a Sunday School lesson is:

A live mixture between the personal lives of the servants and the students through the lesson; the Holy Spirit creates this mixture and allows it to result in the bearing of fruit.

B. The Requirements for Sunday School Lessons

1. Humility in prayer before God.

God said, "...for without me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

My beloved brethren, sit down in peace and tranquility with the Lord and talk to Him about your personal need for Him in your service. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and pray saying, "Guide me dear God. What would you like my students and I to learn this week? "Be obedient to His voice. It would be suitable to maintain a prayer time which equals that of the lesson.

2. Accurate knowledge of the meanings contained within the lesson.

This is achieved through:

a) Occupying yourself throughout the week with understanding the new lesson, beginning from the end of the previous lesson until the beginning of the new one. It is wise to use your free time, time before sleep, and time with fellow servants to increase and enhance your understanding of the lesson.

b) Resorting to spiritual and religious references and literature to help you develop the right understanding and concepts behind the lines.

c) Resorting to general educational references and literature to embody this understanding and these concepts, making them clear in the minds of your students.

3. Presentation Aids.

It is important that you transform your understanding of the lesson into a simple and clear presentation. It has been stated and proved that 85% of knowledge acquired is acquired through the sense of sight and visual

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learning as opposed to the 10% that is acquired through the sense of hearing. The rest of the knowledge acquired is done so through the other three senses.

In reality, the least effective way of transmitting knowledge to others is by merely talking; this has the weakest influence on the students. In contrast, the most effective way to teach is to use the "Learning by Doing" method, which requires enough time as well as sound experience.

What differentiates between the effectiveness of the two means of presentation are the tools used in the presentation. These tools aid the students in effectively understanding and retaining the purpose of the lesson by engaging both senses of sight and sound. These tools may include audio-visual devices such as pictures and movies, spiritual trips and outings, role-playing during class, intellectually stimulating games, etc.

C. Recording the lesson.

It is recommended that the servant records the following during the preparation of the lesson:

- Date of the preparation of the lesson.
- Date of the delivery of the lesson.
- Title of the lesson.

Purpose of the lesson.

- References.
- Preface.
- Lesson.
- Inference.
- Bible verse.
- Homework.
- Aids of presentation.
- Other points for memory.
- Songs.
- Personal reflections of the servant.

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Purpose of the lesson:

It is necessary for the servant to clearly understand the purpose of the lesson at the beginning of his preparation. It is also necessary that the purpose of the lesson should agree with the maturity level of the students. For example, it is more appropriate for children to learn about God's Love. On the other hand, learning about the power of God in their lives and in the lives of the saints is more appropriate subject matter for youth. As for young adults, learning about Christian virtues and spiritual practices is most appropriate. Most importantly, the purpose of the lessons should agree with Coptic Orthodox Christian teachings, whether in specific occasions or in general.

References:

References could include:

- a. Stories, examples, verses, etc. from the Holy Bible.
- b. Spiritual books and literature.
- c. General educational books and literature.

Recording the references is very useful for the servant because it helps the servant to refer back to them, if forgotten.

Preface:

The preface is the background of the lesson. It cultivates the thoughts of the students and directs their thoughts towards the lesson. This allows the lesson to be implanted in their minds and to, eventually, bear fruit.

It is important that the preface remain simple, short, and concise. The introduction could be in the form of focused questions, but should not be in the form of stories. Several stories in one lesson may deteriorate its effectiveness.

The Lesson:

The lesson could be divided into the following sections:

1. Introduction - it should be quick and concise and related to the preface. It should introduce the lesson smoothly without interrupting the chain of thoughts.
2. Body of the lesson - it contains the principle subject of the lesson, and follows these guidelines:

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- a. You must be accurate and careful when explaining theological concepts.
- b. You must be careful when relating events and examples to elucidate the subject of the lesson, in order to properly guide the students' imagination without restricting it.
- c. You must diligently expose the Coptic Orthodox doctrine in the lesson.
- d. You should not use more than one story during the lesson and the story used should be relevant to the subject matter.

3. Focal Point - the point during the lesson at which the purpose of the lesson is clearly defined. (Examples: The Lord responds to the prayers of a needy person, or the angels come to give the saints their heavenly crowns and take them to heaven after many trials and persecutions.)

4. Conclusion - it should be, like the introduction, short and concise. It can summarize the purpose of the lesson, without introducing any new concepts.

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Inferences:

Inference is a method used to determine how much the students have absorbed and retained from the lesson. It should be in the form of questions with the following guidelines:

They should clearly show the purpose of the lesson.

- a. They should suit the maturity of the students.
- b. They should be simple and direct.
- c. They should link to each other.
- d. They should not be `Yes' or `No' questions.
- e. They should each have one correct answer.

Bible Verse:

The memorization of a Bible verse is an excellent way to help the students remember the purpose of the lesson. The chosen Bible verse should meet the following guidelines:

It should show the purpose of the lesson clearly.

- a. It should be short which allows it to be easily memorized.
- b. Children can easily memorize, as well as understand it.

Homework:

The height of your diligence in preparing the lesson is in choosing the proper and effective homework or application. The homework should have the following characteristics:

- a. It should contain practical applications that apply to everyday life.
- b. It should suit the maturity level of the students.
- c. It should help in mastering the comprehension and retention of the lesson.
- d. It should not include more than one instruction, in order to simplify the application of the lesson.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Grade 12

INTRODUCTION TEACHING GRADE 12

- 1) By definition, adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood. The potential intellectual ability reached during this period is equal to that of adults. Adolescents go very rapidly through a period of physical changes, which causes awkwardness, self-consciousness and increased emotional instability.
- 2) One of the main characteristics of this period is the young people's **sensitivity** and dissatisfaction. They are dissatisfied with themselves, with their families, with their own appearance (wherein lies the cause of infatuation with any fashion of the day). Adolescents go through a period of painful dissatisfaction with their social life too. All these traits, though they often seem negative and painful, are part of a positive process. What adolescents are trying to do is to discover themselves, and to discover their relationship to others - to adults, to their peers of their own sex as well as of the opposite one.
- 3) The rapid growth of technological civilization during the last decades has made our children much more knowledgeable about sex, about social problems, race, crime, violence, science and technology. They are not more mature than adolescents used to be, but they know more, even though they often lack the maturity to digest this knowledge.
- 4) What then is the task of the Church in dealing with our adolescents? Basically, the Church has to offer them **meaningful values** that young people can consciously accept out of their own free choice at this special level of maturity and insecurity. The Church has to give them an image, a taste of what life should be, of what is meant by holiness, what is truth, faith and loyalty. The Church is where they can find forgiveness, understanding and love when they have done wrong and are confused and mixed-up. Adolescents need security-in-freedom.

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- 5) Our adolescents urgently need two aspects of religious education in order to help them gain maturity. They need the opportunity to make religion a part of their own experience of life, their own thinking, and their own motivation, through very informal free discussions, through participation in church work and through friendship. They also need to acquire information that will allow them to think intelligently, and will, at the same time, provide some material for evaluation and judgment.
- 6) All the teaching they need to acquire about the Bible and about the Church will be better assimilated if they feel a need for it. Thus teaching should be structured around questions and problems that are real to young people. The information must be presented as a means of finding answers. This kind of approach is very demanding on the leader, not only because he must be well informed, and must know where he can find information, but also because he must be flexible and sensitive to what takes place in the students' minds. Basically adolescents need information in the same areas that shaped our program for younger grades .doctrine, liturgies, Bible study, church history, spirituality and ethics.
- 7) Most important of all is the kind of relationship that is established between the adult leader and the young people. The leader should earn their trust as a friend, with understanding and sympathy, yet with firmness in his own convictions and genuine interest in their adolescent problems.

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**SEPTEMBER
FIRST SUNDAY**

**THE HISTORY OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX
CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA (I)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the first lesson in a series of two lessons about the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. The focus of this lesson is the roots of the church and its main features.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. The Foundation of the Church in Egypt

The only place that Our Lord Jesus Christ visited, outside the area of Palestine, was the land of Egypt. That was not a coincidence because the flight of the Holy Family from King Herod could have been to a nearer place. It was not necessary to cross the vast distance from the land of the Jews to the land of Egypt. His entry into Egypt had a very important reason which was to found the Christian Church there, so that it might flourish as a powerful center for Christianity in the whole world.

More than 700 years before the coming of Christ, Isaiah the prophet said, “The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst.” Isaiah 19:1.

He goes on talking about the church in Egypt saying, “In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border.” Isaiah 19:19.

He concluded by saying, “Blessed is Egypt My people”, Isaiah 19:25.

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Therefore, when Our Lord Jesus Christ visited Egypt and spent His childhood in it, Egypt was privileged with a special blessing.

St. Mark was born to a Jewish family in the city of Cyrene in Libya. He emigrated with his family to Palestine shortly before the birth of Jesus Christ. The Lord chose him to be one of the 70 Apostles and his home was a resting place for the Lord and His Disciples. Many important events took place in that house, like the washing of the Disciples' feet and the Last Supper. In the same house, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Disciples on Pentecost. St. Mark came to Alexandria between the years 48 to 55 A.D. He established the Christian Coptic (i.e. Egyptian) Orthodox (i.e. straight) Church on the faith he received from Our Lord Jesus Christ.

As St. Mark was walking on the streets of Alexandria preaching, his shoes tore. He went to a shoemaker called Aniannus to repair them. The needle pierced his hand and it started bleeding. The man cried out "IS THOSAS" meaning "The One God". St. Mark healed him with the power of the Lord Jesus, who used to support the preachers. He taught him all about salvation through Christ and baptized him and his household. When St. Mark was crowned with martyrdom in the year 68 A.D. in Alexandria, Aniannus was the Pope of all the churches of Egypt. The church had a solid foundation on the true faith which was passed from the Lord Jesus Himself to the saints.

St. Mark established the first Catechistic school in the world. It had different departments. As the years went by, this school became an international center for faith, written interpretations, and true Christian life. Some great theologians who graduated from this school of Alexandria include St. Clement, Origen, St. Cyril, and St. Athanasius among others.

The route of Christianity in Egypt was very rough. The Copts suffered persecution throughout the ages. The church of Alexandria sacrificed a lot of martyrs in order to preserve the faith. The persecution was at its worst at the time of Diocletian. The Copts considered the year 284 AD to be the new era and called it the year of martyrs. What does this martyrdom mean through the ages? It is a sign of strong faith. It is a sign of the connection of the heart with heaven. It is a sign of not fearing those who can kill the body. It is a sign of holding on to the faith. It is a sign of a longing for the heavenly crowns more than anything else is. Those martyrs like St. Mina, St. Demiana and many others watered the land of Egypt with their blood and kept the faith. Martyrdom was the Lord's means to spread

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Christianity. Every time a person received martyrdom thousands of people flocked to the church.

B. The Main Features of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria

Briefly mention the following:

1. The foundation of the Coptic Orthodox Church is built upon the teachings of the Holy Bible, Both Testaments and upon the traditions that were received from the Apostles and their Disciples. These were copied, unchanged, from generation to generation until this present day.
2. The church believes that God is one without any partner. He has 3 hypostases: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These 3 hypostases are in the One God.
3. The church believes that our Lord Jesus Christ as a person has one nature based on the unity of the divinity and humanity without mingling or mixing or changing and not separating for a single moment nor a blink of an eye.
4. The Holy Spirit is emanating from the Father only as the Lord Christ said, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all the things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." John 14:26.
5. The Holy Virgin Mary is the mother of God (Theotokos) the Logos. She was born of Anna and Joachim naturally. She is a great saint above all the heavenly hosts because she gave birth to the Eternal Logos. She is the Mother of the Savior. After her death, her body was taken to heaven and the Disciples saw it.
6. The church believes in the work of the Holy Spirit through the seven sacraments that the Lord Jesus had founded Himself. It is a way for the faithful to receive the exuberance of the Holy blessings: Baptism, Anointment with Holy Chrism, Holy Communion, Repentance and Confession, Priesthood, Marriage, and Anointment of the sick.
7. The church believes that a person receives salvation through his faith and his deeds, meaning his faith in our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior.

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8. The system of worship in church is based upon the elevation of the heart towards heaven without missing actual human and daily life. It is a contemporary Apostolic church. It supplies the person with the Apostolic life without any misinterpretation, So that he will find a life in it and the depth, tenderness and spirituality built upon unceasing prayers and much fasting.
9. This Holy Universal Apostolic Church lived throughout the ages and will continue to the end of time. Though it endured heresies and persecutions yet, “No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me, says the Lord.” Isaiah 54:17.

Therefore, it is the true Mother Church, but many have deviated and have gone astray and were distanced from the true faith. Of those St. John says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.” I John 2:19.

Let us now concentrate on the historical aspect of all these deviations that occurred in the churches of the world when they were far from the Orthodox way, the faith of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.

C. The Coptic orthodox church of Alexandria in history

1. THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.

It was one church and one faith. Four main centers were established for the church: Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome and Alexandria. In this century St. Peter the Apostle was martyred as well as St. Paul, St. Mark, St. James, and most of the Disciples. The church suffered persecution in every place from the Roman Empire and the Jewish nation.

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2. THE SECOND CENTURY A.D.

After the martyrdom of the Apostles in the first century, their Disciples, who were called “the Apostolic Fathers “preserved the same faith. During this century the School of Alexandria flourished and led the whole world.

3. THE THIRD CENTURY A.D.

The Romans enforced the persecutions in all the countries they occupied, especially Alexandria because it was the strongest in the Christian faith. We have already mentioned the era of Diocletian and the Coptic reformation and the year of the Martyrs 284.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Our Lord Jesus visited Egypt and spent His childhood in it. This was the solid foundation on which our church was founded.
- (2) St. Mark established the first catechistic school in the world.
- (3) The church sacrificed the largest number of martyrs in the world to maintain the faith.
- (4) With its faith, our church lived through ages of persecution and will continue, thus defeating all forces against it.

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Church Fathers - School of Alexandria

Name	Time Frame	Achievement	Writings
1. Athenagoras - Apologist	Converted to Christianity in 176	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studied the Scriptures to criticize Christianity but ended up defending it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Presvia" or intercession, defending Christians against false acquisitions. A treatise on the resurrection of the dead, using philosophical arguments to rove the <u>dogma</u>. He interpreted the whole Bible, but nothing remained from his writings except for the few excerpts mentioned in St. Clement's books
2. Pantaeus - Philosopher	Dean: 181	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coptic Alphabet. Bible translation to Coptic. Preached in India, Ethiopia, Arabia and Yemen. 	<p>Trilogy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protrepticus - Exhortation to the Greeks (attack on paganism and invitation to salvation) Paedagogus - The Tutor / Instructor (practical instructions for the Christian conduct) Stromata - Miscellaneous Studies (Christian faith vs. Greek philosophy) A treatise on the salvation of the rich person. Commentaries on passages of the Old and New Testaments.
3. Clement of Alexandria - Gnosis (Knowledge)	Born: 150 Dean: 190 Died: 215	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confronted the ideas of his time with Christian doctrine. Christianity offers the perfect knowledge (Gnosis) and truth in Christ. Supremacy of Christian gnosis: contemplation; carrying out the commandments; instructions by righteous men. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> translations. Interpretations of the Five Books of Moses, the Song of Songs, Job, the Major and Minor Prophets, Joshua and Psalms. "The Principles" contained the majority of the flaws attributed to him. On prayer: part on the prayer in general; part on the Lord's Prayer (Ancient Christian Writers). On the Resurrection (Easter).
4. Origen	185-254	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> St. Eiphanius (315-403) stated that Origen had 6,000 manuscripts. His friends and admirers described him as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Prince of the Bible Interpreters. The Prince of Christian Philosophy. The Teacher of Bishops. There is no human mind that can absorb all what he wrote. 	
5. Heraclas	Dean: Pope: 232-249	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student of Origen. His people loved him so much and called him "Papa" in Coptic, or Pope, which means "Father". 	

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<p>6. St. Dionysius</p>	<p>Born: 190 Dean: 232-249 Pope: 249-270</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Athanasius called him "Teacher of the Universal Church". • Faced issues of persecutions, baptism by heretics, and the earthly kingdom (millennium). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Nature: refutes the Epicurean materialism view of the universe. • Apology: on the Trinitarian doctrine • Letters: quoted frequently by Eusebius
<p>7. Theognostus</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athanasius appealed to his writings in the struggle against Arianism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogmatic work "Hypotyposes" in seven books followed the doctrine of Orig en.
<p>8. Pierius</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jerome called him "Origen Junior". • He suffered during the persecution of Diocletian. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the Prophet Hosea • Logio (concerning the Logos) • On the Gospel of St. Luke • On the Mother of God • The Life of St. Pamphilus, martyred 309
<p>9. St. Peter, the Seal of Martyrs</p>	<p>Pope: 293-303</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He faced persecution as well as heresies (Arius) and divisions within the Church. • Jailed and beheaded under Diocletian. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly Paschal and other letters as well as some quotations preserved in the proceeding of the Council of Ephesus and in other manuscripts.
<p>10. St. Athanasius, the Apostolic</p>	<p>Born: 297 Pope: 326-372</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council of Nicea in 325. Severe persecution (303 - 311). Frumentius (Abbot Salama) as the first bishop of Ethiopia in 330. Exiled 5 times because of his opposition to Arianism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologetic: Against Arians; Apology to Constantius; Defense of the Nicene Council and of His Flight. • Dogmatic: On the Incarnation; Doctrinal Letters. • Letters: Festal or Easter Letters; Personal Letters; Episcopal Letters. • Ascetic: Life of Anthony; Life of Syncretica;; Treatises on Virginity. • Exegetical: Commentary on Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Genesis and Luke.
<p>11. St. Didymius</p>	<p>Born: 313 Dean: 346-398</p>	<p>Lost his sight at age 4. Invented the engraved writing. Attracted people only by his teachings but also by his asceticism. Visited by St. Anthony several times and by Palladius four times.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exegetical work: he interpreted many books of the Bible; a large number of quotations from his work still existing. He followed Origen in the allegorical method of interpretation and textual criticism. • On the Trinity: 3 books written between 381 and 392; still existing. • On the Holy Spirit: the Greek original lost; the Latin translation still existing. • Contra Manie: still existing in 18 short articles. • Other works: quoted in his and other's writings.

SEPTEMBER

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School of Alexandria

- St. Mark, inspired by the Holy Spirit, established Catechism as the only way to give the new Religion a firm foundation in this city of multiple cultures, multiple philosophies, and many powerful schools. Thus Christianity penetrated the School of Alexandria turning it into a catechistical school.
- It became the oldest center for sacred sciences in the history of Christianity. In it, the first system of Christian Theology was formed and the Allegorical (symbolic) method of Biblical exegesis was devised.
- "The most renowned intellectual institution in the early Christian world was undoubtedly the Catechistic School (Didascaleion) of Alexandria. Its primary concern was the study of the Bible, giving its name to an influential tradition of spiritual interpretation. The preoccupation of this school of exegesis was to discover everywhere the spiritual sense underlying the written word of the Scripture." Dom. D. Rees
- Its program was not limited to theology, but was encyclopedic.
- Produced numerous spiritual and well-known Church leaders along the years. Many of them were fit for the throne of St. Mark.

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1. Athenagoras - Apologist

- He read the Holy Scriptures to criticize Christianity, but he was so powerfully seized by the Holy Spirit that he became a defender of the faith.
- He was converted to Christianity in 176 A.D. and wrote a plea (called "Presvia" or intercession) on behalf of Christians in 177 A.D.
- He defended Christians against the false accusation of atheism, cannibalism and Oedipedeian incest. He drew the attention to their faith in God and to their peaceful and blameless life.
- He also wrote a treatise on the resurrection of the dead. It is the first attempt made to prove this dogma using philosophical arguments. He states that the resurrection of the dead is proved by God's omnipotence and is based on man as a rational being is destined for eternal survival; necessity of retribution; eternal bliss cannot be found on earth.

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2. Pantaenus - Philosopher

- He embraced Christianity at the hands of Athenagoras and succeeded him as dean of the Theological School in 181 A.D.
- He introduced philosophy and sciences into the School to gain the heretics and educated pagans.
- He introduced the Coptic Alphabet by using the Greek Alphabet and adding 7 letters from the ancient Demotic language. The Holy Bible was translated to Coptic under his guidance.
- In 190 A.D., Pope Demetrius sent him on a mission to preach in India. He also preached in Ethiopia, Arabia and Yemen. According to the traditions, he brought back the Hebrew original of St. Matthew's Gospel.
- He interpreted the whole Bible, but nothing remained from his writings except for the few excerpts mentioned in Saint Clement's books.

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3. Clement of Alexandria - Gnosis (Knowledge)

- He was born in 150 A.D. and traveled extensively to seek instructions from the most famous Christian teachers.
- Attracted by the lectures of Pantaenus, he settled in Alexandria and was ordained a priest, then a dean of the School in 190 A.D.
- He had to leave Egypt in 202 A.D. due to the persecution by Septimius Severus, and died in 215 A.D. (probably in Palestine or Syria).
- He was the first Christian writer to confront the ideas of his time with Christian doctrine. He believed that there was no enmity between Christianity and philosophy. The ancient philosophy, in his view, was unable to achieve more than glimpses of the truth, while Christianity offers the perfect knowledge and truth in Christ.
- Throughout the first two centuries, a heresy appeared under the title "Gnostics" in various forms. The word "gnosis" in Greek means "knowledge". A fundamental Gnostic claim was that the soul can reach the Supreme God through knowledge rather than faith.
- St. Clement showed the supremacy of Christian gnosis: contemplation; carrying out the commandments; instructions by righteous men.
- His main work was the Trilogy:
 - Protrepticus - Exhortation to the Greeks (attack on paganism and invitation to salvation) - Paedagogus - The Tutor / Instructor (practical instructions for the Christian conduct).

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- Stromata - Miscellaneous Studies (Christian faith vs. Greek philosophy).

- This Trilogy outlines his theological system that the Word of God, the Logos, invites mankind to abandon paganism through faith, then He reforms their lives by the commandments, and finally, He elevates them to the perfect knowledge of divine things. In short, the Logos converts disciplines and instructs.
- This concept of the Divine plan for our salvation influenced the program in the School of Alexandria. It focused first on conversion to Christianity, then on commandment practicing, and finally on instructing Christians to attain perfect knowledge of doctrine.
- He had several other writings; e.g. a treatise on the salvation of the rich person and commentaries on passages of the Old and New Testaments.



4. Origen

- His friends and admirers described him as:
 - The Prince of the Bible Interpreters.
 - The Prince of Christian Philosophy.
 - The Teacher of Bishops.
 - There is no human mind that can absorb all what he wrote.
- He lived from 185 to 254 AD; i.e. 69 years: Pope Demetrius (12), 191 AD; Pope Heraculus (13), 224 AD; Pope Dionysius (14), 241 AD.
- He was born to a righteous Christian family. His father, Leonides, was a righteous, scholar and saintly man who was martyred for his Christian faith during the persecution of Septimius Severus, 202 AD. While his father was in jail, Origen wrote encouraging him to face martyrdom.
- He used to rent libraries overnight to read their books. St. Jerome praised his love of reading and said that Origen read while eating, walking, resting, etc. Thus his knowledge extended beyond measures and his intellectual superiority was undisputed. He worked in teaching.
- When Pope Demetrius (12) heard of his fame, he appointed him dean of the School of Alexandria. He increased its fame and thinking and became a teacher of many bishops and priests, as well as many men, women, young and old. First, he rented halls to hold the school, but when he was chased from one place to another, he held his lectures outdoors (in the open or beside the river).

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- He was famous in allegorical interpretation. Example, his interpretation of the Song of Songs. (Differentiate from St. Basil's school of literal interpretation.)
- He was imprisoned and tortured for his Christian faith. He was courageous, ascetic and a man of fasting and prayer. He exaggerated in his asceticism by castrating himself (defended his action by saying that he was protecting his chastity).

His Writings

- St. Epiphanius (315-403) stated that Origen had 6,000 manuscripts. He wrote in Greek (Petrologia Grika). Some of his writings were translated to Latin during his life and some were translated after his death; e.g. Rufinus' translation which contained many flaws.
- Mainly intellectual: textual criticism, exegetic, apologetic, dogmatic, and practical.
- "Hexapla": 28-year study of the Bible manuscripts and translations; 6 columns:
 1. The Hebrew text of the Bible.
 2. The Greek pronunciation of the Hebrew text.
 3. The Septuagint (c. 250 AD).
 4. Simakhos' translation (end of 2nd century).
 5. Aquilla's translation (c. 128 AD).
 6. Theodore's translation (c. 180 AD).
- Interpretations of the Five Books of Moses, the Song of Songs, Job, the Major and Minor Prophets, Joshua and Psalms.

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- Against Celsus the heretic: "Contra Celsus"
- "The Principles" contained the majority of the flaws attributed to him.
- Exhortation to encourage martyrdom.
- On prayer: part on the prayer in general; part on the Lord's Prayer (Ancient Christian Writers).
- On the Resurrection (Easter).

Dispute with the Church

- Pope Demetrius held a council that excommunicated Origen due to his theological mistakes and because he accepted ordination in Palestine by other than his bishop.
 - Some accused St. Demetrius of jealousy due to Origen's fame. This can be refuted based on the facts that:
 - Pope Demetrius is generally accepted as a Church saint.
 - Pope Demetrius was the one that appointed him a dean based on his fame.
 - Judgment was passed through a council (not alone) and later confirmed by others.
 - There are clear theological mistakes in Origen's writings.
- He spent the rest of his live in Palestine where he established a famous & significant theological school. He led a Gnostic man named Improsius to the correct faith.

Theological Mistakes (Origenism).

- He was affected by the Greek philosophy; e.g. Plato in some of his mistakes.

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- Exaggerating the allegorical interpretation; e.g. Adam's sin.
- The salvation of Satan. The salvation of evil doers after their death.
- Spirits created before the bodies then sent down to unite with the bodies (Plato).
- Christ's soul united with His Divinity before uniting with the body in St. Mary's womb.
- Redemption was made to satisfy the devil.
- Resurrection: in new spiritual bodies, not the original earthly body.
- The righteous people will turn to stars.
- God created other worlds before and after our own.

Defense by His Proponents

- Mistakes were due to dictation / transcription.
- He had other writings contrary to the cited flaws.

His Opponents

- Pope Demetrius (12th Pope of Alexandria)
- Pope Theophilus (23rd Pope) - Dispute with John Chrysostom; "The Tall Brothers"
- St. Epiphanius (Bishop of Cyprus) - End of 4th and beginning of 5th century: managed to convince Jerome but could not convince Cyril of Jerusalem.

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- St. Jerome - Dispute with Cyril (book against Cyril) and Rufinus
- Mephopius (Bishop of Olympa, Cilicia) - beginning of the 4th century' book against Origen
- St. Augustine in the 5th century

His Proponents

- Gregory the Wonder Maker
- St. John Chrysostom - "The Tall Brothers"
- Gregory of Nyssa, 4th century (brother of Basil the Great)
- Pamphilus, priest and martyr (309 A.D.)
- Rufinus - Translated some of Origen's works
- Dionysius (14th Pope of Alexandria) - It was said that he defended Origen and requested him to return to Church of Alexandria.

5. Heraclas

- He was a student of Origen and succeeded him as the dean of the School of Alexandria.
- He loved philosophy and studied the Greek books as much as he could.
- When Abba Demetrius discovered his spiritual abilities and knowledge, he ordained him as priest and used him for preaching. He attracted many unbelievers to the faith.

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- He was chosen to succeed Abba Demetrius as Bishop of Alexandria in 224. His people loved him so much and called "Papa" in Coptic, or Pope, which means "Father".

6. St. Dionysius

- St. Athanasius called him "Teacher of the Universal Church"
- He was born in Alexandria in about 190 from pagan parents. He was not Christian until an old Christian woman sold him some scripts of St. Paul's letters. After reading them, he came back for more and she led him to the Church where he learned about and converted to Christianity.
- He succeeded Heraclas as the dean of the School of Alexandria (231-246)
- He was chosen as the Pope of Alexandria in 247
- He faced the challenge of preserving his Church in the midst of persecutions: Decian 250 and Valrian in 257. He showed leniency to heretics or apostates who repented.
- Issue of those who were baptized by heretics - Cyprian of Corthage vs. Stephen of Rome.
- Issue of earthly kingdom (millennium) - Nepos, Bishop of Arsinoe (in Fayoum).
- **His writings**
 - On Nature: refutes the Epicurean materialism view of the universe.
 - Apology: on the Trinitarian doctrine
 - Letters: quoted frequently by Eusebius.

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7. Theognostus

- Little is known about him except through citations in the writings of, Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa.
- His dogmatic work "Hypotyposes" in seven books followed the doctrine of Origen. Athanasius appealed to his writings in the struggle against Arianism.

8. Pierius

- Jerome called him "Origen Junior"
- He suffered during the persecution of Diocletian.
- His work is mentioned by others:
 - On the Prophet Hosea
 - Logio (concerning the Logos)
 - On the Gospel of St. Luke
 - On the Mother of God
 - The Life of St. Pamphilus, martyred 309.

9. St. Peter, the Seal of Martyrs

- His father (Theodosius), a priest in Alexandria, and mother (Sofia) a pious Christian.
- His mother had a vision of St. Peter and St. Paul, on their feast day, promising her a son. On the same day the following year, she had the baby and named him Peter.

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- He grew very close to the Church and was ordained priest at age 16; he was then selected to become the dean of the School of Alexandria.
- Pope Theonas instructed the people to choose Peter as his own successor. Thus he became the 17th Pope of Alexandria.
- He faced persecution as well as heresies and divisions within the Church.
- He had a dispute with Meletius, Bishop of Asyut, who took a hardline with repenting Christians who denied the faith, as well as ordained priests outside his jurisdiction.
- He ordained Arius, who was of Libyan origin, deacon then priest in Alexandria. When he noticed his unorthodox teaching about the Divinity of Christ, he held a council to examine his teachings and finally disposed of him.
- St. Peter was jailed under Diocletian either due to his writings against paganism, or because of a complaint from the father of two children whom he baptized upon their mother's request.
- While in jail, Arius sent to ask his forgiveness, but he refused based on a vision he saw of the Lord Jesus with torn clothes and warning that Arius was tearing the Church apart.
- Finally, he offered himself to martyrdom in secret to spare his people who gathered at the jail to save him. After a prayer requesting the persecution to end, he was beheaded.

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- His writings: mainly Paschal and other letters as well as some quotations preserved in the proceeding of the Council of Ephesus and in other manuscripts.

10. St. Athanasius, the Apostolic

- He was born in Upper (Southern) Egypt in about 297.
- According to Rufinus, Pope Alexandros was impressed by the child Athanasius when he was acting out the baptismal rites with other children. Pope Alexandros ordained him a reader in 312, then a priest in 318 and appointed him as his personal secretary.
- He lived through the period of severe persecution (303 - 311) and knew many of the martyrs and confessors in Alexandria. He learned from them the true meaning of fighting for the faith.
- He lived in the desert practicing an ascetic life under the guidance of St. Anthony.
- He accompanied Pope Alexandros to the Council of Nicea in 325. His courage, zeal and logic earned him the admiration of the 318 bishops in attendance and the envy of the heretics.
- He was chosen to succeed Pope Alexandros in 328 becoming the 20th Pope.
- He ordained Frumentius as the first bishop of Ethiopia, under the name of "Abbot Salama I" in 330.

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- He presided over the Church for 46 years, of which over 17 years were passed in exile because of his opposition to Arianism which had the support of some emperors:
 - Under Constantine (335 - 337) to Treve (Treveri).
 - Under Constantius (339 - 346) visited Rome; and (356 - 362) in the Egyptian desert.
 - Under Julian (362 - 363) in the Egyptian desert; and Valens (365 - 366) in the Egyptian desert.
- **His writings:**
 - Apologetic: Against Arians, Apology to Constantius, Defense of the Nicene Council and of His Flight.
 - Dogmatic: On the Incarnation; Doctrinal Letters.
 - Letters: Festal or Easter Letters; Personal Letters; Episcopal Letters.
 - Ascetic: Life of Anthony; Life of Synctetica;; Treatises on Virginity.
 - Exegetical: Commentary on Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Genesis and Luke.

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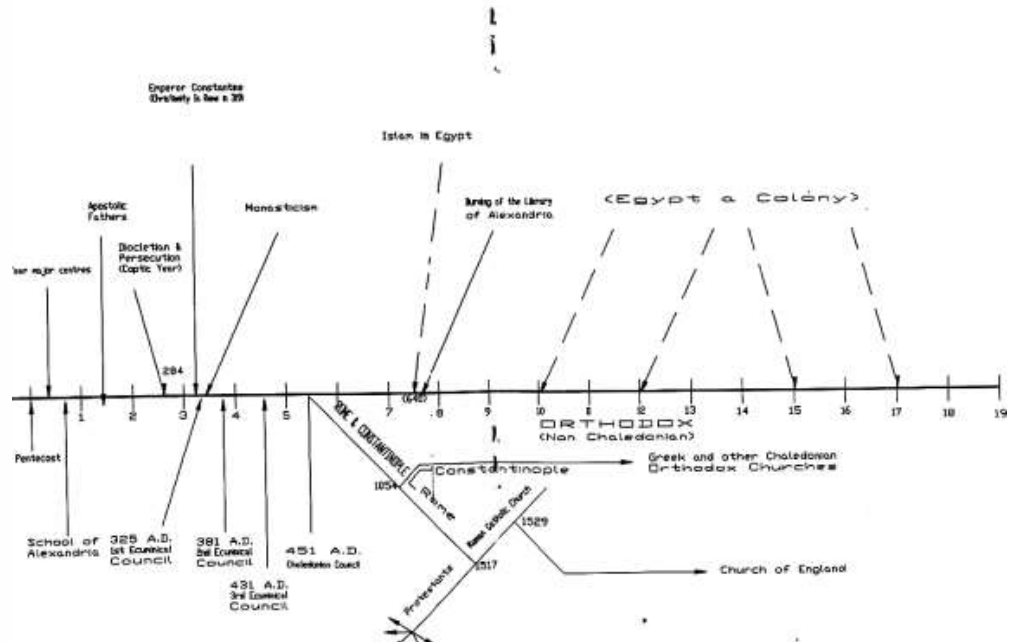
11. St. Didymius

- He was born about 313 A. D. and lost his sight at age 4.
- Through his eagerness for education he invented the engraved writing.
- St. Athanasius appointed him dean of the School of Alexandria (346-398 A.D.)
- Among his students / friends were Gregory Nazainzen, Jerome, Rufinus, Palladius.
- He attracted people not only by his teachings but also by his asceticism.
- He was visited by St. Anthony several times and by Palladius four times.
- **His writings**
 - Exegetical work: he interpreted many books of the Bible; a large number of quotations from his work still existing. He followed Origen in the allegorical method of interpretation and textual criticism.
 - On the Trinity: 3 books written between 381 and 392 A.D.; still existing.
 - On the Holy Spirit: the Greek original lost; the Latin translation still existing.
 - Contra Manie: still existing in 18 short articles.
 - Other works: quoted in his and other's writings.

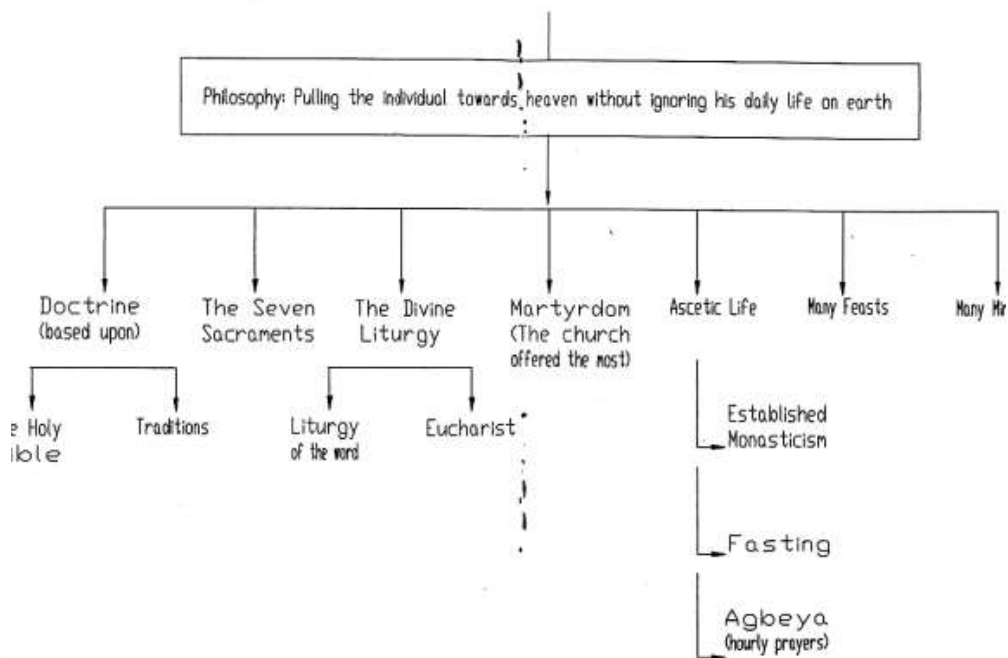
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FIRST Sunday

OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH



MAIN FEATURES OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA



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**SEPTEMBER
SECOND SUNDAY**

**THE HISTORY OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX
CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA (II):
A BRIEF SYNOPSIS**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a series of two lessons about the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. In this lesson the focus is on the history of the church from the fourth century on.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and then continue as follows:

4. **THE FOURTH CENTURY A.D.**

Diocletian, who caused the church much suffering, was followed by King Constantine. He saw the sign of the cross in the sky and heard a voice saying, "with this you will win." He remained Christian and his mother was St. Helena. In 313 A.D., King Constantine declared the victory of Christianity over heathenism and the end of the epoch of martyrdom. The heathen temples were converted into Christian churches. In 381 A.D., Christianity became the official religion of the Roman government itself. What was this great diversion? The gates of Hell will never have power over the church.

As the era of martyrdom ended, Monasticism started. All the Monastic system in the world started in Egypt. The programmer of the Coptic Church became known internationally as the way of prayer, worship, devoutness and solitude for the sake of God.

In 325 A.D. the Ecumenical Council was held in the city of Nicea in Asia Minor to deal with the Arian heresy, which stated that Christ was created

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and not born, and that God the Father was greater than God the Son was. Emperor Constantine invited 318 Bishops from all over the world to this council. Pope Alexandros attended on behalf of the Church of Alexandria, and presided over the council, together with 20 bishops including the deacon Athanasius. Athanasius was the hero of that council who dumbfounded Arius and his followers. The results of this council was the excommunication of Arius and his followers and the issuing of the first part of the Creed “We believe in one God, God the Father, the Pantocrator, Who created heaven and earth and all things, seen and unseen. We believe in One Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light, True God of True God; begotten, not created; of One essence with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, and became man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried; and on the third day He rose from the dead, according to the Scriptures; ascended unto the heaven; He sits at the right hand of His Father; and He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit.”

After the death of Pope Alexandros, Pope Athanasius succeeded him as the 20th Pope. He kept the faith safe and if it was not for him, it could have been effaced. That was why the church named him “The Apostolic.”

In 381 A.D. the second Ecumenical Council was held in the city of Constantinople. The Emperor Theodosius the Great invited about 150 bishops from all over the world. This Council was held to deal with the Macedonian heresy by which the divinity of the Holy Spirit was denied. Pope Timothaous of Alexandria was presiding over this council. The result of this council was the excommunication of Macedonius and his followers and the publishing of the second part of the Creed. “Yes we believe in the Holy Spirit; the Lord, the Giver of Life; who comes forth from the Father, Who, with the Father and the Son, is worshipped and glorified.”

5. FIFTH CENTURY A.D.

In 431 the third Ecumenical council was held in Ephesus with the invitation of King Theodosius the Junior. 200 Bishops attended. St. Cyril the Great, who was called the Pillar of Religion, presided over this council. It was held because of the heresy of Nestorius, who divided Christ into two separated personalities: the Son of God and the Son of Man. He also said that the Virgin Mary is the Mother of the physical part of Christ so she should not be

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called the Mother of God. He was excommunicated by the Council and the introduction of the Creed was written. “We exalt you, the Mother of the True Light. We glorify you, O Saint and Mother of God ...”

N.B. We notice that the church of Alexandria had the leadership of the world in the three universal councils, in spite of the weak political position of Egypt because it was under the Roman rule.

In 451 A.D. the Chalcedonic Assembly met. Before this meeting the church was one and the presidency of the church in the universal assemblies was for the Pope of Alexandria. Pope Leo the first wanted to take the leadership of the Christian world from the Pope Dioscorus of Alexandria. To achieve that, he accused Pope Dioscorus of harshness in his letters and insulted him, the latter did not say any bad words to him. Apparently, the Chalcedonic Assembly was partial to Pope Leo. But in fact, this assembly was held without the presence of Pope Dioscorus and its aim was to destroy the leadership of the Church of Alexandria. The result of this Council was the rejection of the heresy of Eutyches. The council stated that Christ had two natures united; they called themselves the “Dioophysites”.

6. THE SEVENTH CENTURY A.D.

The Arabs invaded the land of Egypt in 640 A.D. and took it by force. The Coptic people continued their belief in our Lord Jesus Christ and maintained their traditions and true faith. What was the positive side of the Arabic rule in Egypt? It was the isolation of Egypt from the rest of the Christian world which made the people conserve their faith exactly as it was received from the Apostles without any change; while the other Christians throughout the world started to divide, as we will see further on, and to be distant from the basic faith.

7. FROM THE FIFTH CENTURY TO THE TENTH CENTURY A.D.

The Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria continued on with the true faith and the churches of Rome and Constantinople were together since they deviated from the true faith in the Chalcedonic Council in 451 A.D.

8. THE ELEVENTH CENTURY A.D.

The Church of Rome accepted the principle of the Holy Spirit coming forth from the Father and the Son and not only from the Father. It added this to the Creeds of the councils of both Nicea and Constantinople. This led to another division in 1054 A.D. between the church of Rome, known as the

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Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Constantinople, known as the Greek Orthodox Church together with the rest of the Orthodox churches of the Chalcedonic Council.

9. THE ELEVENTH TO THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY A.D.

There were 3 groups: the group of the Coptic Orthodox Church continuing on with the true faith, the group of the Greek Orthodox churches with the Russian and Slavic Churches and the Roman Catholic Church and its followers.

10. THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY A.D.

In 1517 there was a division in the Church of Rome because of Martin Luther. He started by rejecting Priesthood and many beliefs of the Roman Church which included: The Pope of Rome was the Pope of the world, the deeds of forgiveness, and many others. The Protestant sect was formed. It too deviated from the original faith and continued dividing into many other sects, each with its own beliefs.

In 1529 the Church of England separated from the Roman Catholic Church and became known as the Anglican Church. This was due to taxation issues and the desire of king Henry VIII to divorce and remarry, along with many other reasons.

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY A.D. TO THE PRESENT

There are approximately 2600 Christian groups, but the churches could be divided as follows:

The Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria and with it four churches, Syria, Armenia, Ethiopia and India. These are called the Eastern Church group, the Non-Chalcedonian. Those of the one nature.

- The Greek Orthodox Church with the churches of Russia and the Slavic nations (Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, etc.), known as the Eastern Orthodox Chalcedonic churches, those of the two natures.
- The Roman Catholic Church with the Pope of Rome as a head, followed by many Catholics of the world.
- The Protestant groups which have divided into thousands of derivative groups.

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- The Anglican Church and its leadership in England.

WHAT DO WE BENEFIT FROM THIS BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH?

- (1) We are members of a precious church whose faith is 100% correct. The church was able to maintain and preserve this faith throughout the centuries in spite of the many pressures from society, governments and the other sects.
- (2) We should stick to our church and our beliefs despite all the pressures of the world. We should know that we have a role to glorify the name of our Lord in the society we live in. Our church is not struggling against the world, but her duty is to set a good example to the world so that she can elevate her heart towards heaven and the true faith.

Our aim is to attract others towards our Lord Jesus Christ through invisible services, not for the increase of the Orthodox group, but for the salvation of souls through love and faith.

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For the success
Of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

In his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

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SEPTEMBER THIRD SUNDAY

WE MUST HAVE A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW (I)

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about the need for us to have a Christian worldview. In this lesson we learn about: (a) the natural person and (b) the person who is Christian by name only.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Is your spiritual life weak?

One might say

- I am Christian but I have lost my peace...
- My spiritual life goes up a little then goes down...
- I find difficulty understanding the Bible.
- My prayers are weak ...
- I fall in sin, repent, and then fall again...
- How long shall I live in this weakness?
- How can I lead a pure life?
- How can I conquer sin and live while enjoying the peace of Christ which He promised me?

The answer is to live for Christ, or in other words, to have Christ live in me through the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, who allows me to have Christ living in me. I will continue to live in my weakness as long as I depend on my weak self to control my life.

The Christian life that God desires for us is to have a personal relationship with Him. This relationship cannot exist except through the great sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ in Person. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other

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name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Therefore, the aim of the Christian person is to have a close relationship, even a complete unity with the Lord Jesus personally. Then He will have the features and mind of Christ. This is outlined in the following verses:

- + “Abide in Me, and I in you...I am the vine you are the branches...If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you...As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love...These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15).
- + “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal. 2:20).
- + “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:3).

Therefore, Christian life is not a set of laws that should be followed, neither is it a set of traditions, systems and obligations in our daily life that God ordained as conditions for our salvation. In a Christian life we become the children of God, Who loved us and said: “I will not call you servants, you are beloved ...” He did not want to stay away from us but was incarnated and became the eldest among many brothers ... He became one of us ... He took our likings in everything except sin ... He blessed our nature ... He chose us and set us up to bring forth fruit ... He came so that we could have life and so that we could become better ... to obtain extreme joy above all conception ... to have complete peace within us ... to be ultimately self-sufficient.

Three Types of People:

The First Type: The Natural Person...Non-Christian

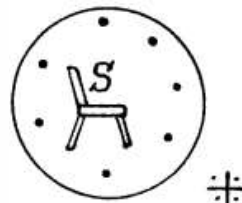
The Bible says about this type, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” 1 Cor 2:14.

If you search this individual’s life, you could draw a simplified diagram of it:

A Life led by SELF

S = Self sitting on the life control chair

+ = Christ outside the Circle of life



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o = Personal concerns centered by selfishness

The person who leads such a life:

- + Lives in sin fueled by the love of self - like Cain who killed his brother Abel;
- + Lives away from the life of blessings and fullness - like Esau who sold his birthright for a plate of lentils.

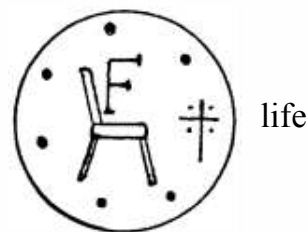
The Second Type: The Christian Person by Name Only - Carnal man

A life led by the flesh and its desires.

F = Flesh and its desires sitting on the life control chair

+ = Is present as one of the other things but not on the control life

o = Concerns that occupy man's/woman's time are directed by flesh



This type of person is a Christian only by name. He/she goes on with his life depending on his/her poor human resources to fulfill accomplishing bodily desires. He would not mind Christ being in his life, goes to church, reads the Bible, and prays but what applies to him is what the verse says, "People honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me." This person is not convinced of spiritual matters or even absorbs them; Christ is just another thing he/she is concerned with.

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it and even now you are still not able for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, you are not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Cor 3:1-3).

The good news is that this non-Christian has the ability to become a spiritual person if he gives the Holy Spirit a chance to work in his heart and transform him into a pure individual bearing the characteristic of a true Christian.

This type of person, however, depends on himself to achieve his desires and this is because:

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- + He forgets God's love and forgiveness: "But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).
- + He forgets the power of God despite St. Luke's statement: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." (Acts 1:8).

As a result, the non-Christian does not benefit from the power of God in his life and is weak in spirit, unable to understand himself; wanting to do the right thing but mostly fails. "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" (Rom 7:15).

- + If you search in the insides of these people you will find:
 - + Disbelief ... disobedience to the word of God ... no love towards God and people ... weak prayers ... no desire to read the word of God.
 - + Impure thoughts ... envy ... guilt ... despair ... feeling edgy towards all matters ... boredom, loss of goal...
 - + They lead a difficult, unhappy life ... A weak life where the person thinks he is a Christian but in fact he does not have the power of Christianity: "He who says he is in the light [meaning a true Christian life], and hates his brother, [meaning false Christian life] is in darkness until now" (1 John 2:9).

Examples: The prodigal son left his father's house and chose a life that fulfilled his physical desires; he was hungry and in need because he was far from the source of power and blessings.

Also, like anyone whose father opens for him a large account in the bank but instead does not use it but depends on his weak resources and lives poorly.

Like Peter when he said, depending on himself, "If they all deny You, I would not deny you."



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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Christianity must be manifested in our daily lives in the world, in our thinking, in our choices ... etc. This is because “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” Gal. 2:20.
- (2) The natural man is very weak, miserable and leads a sinful life.
- (3) Christians by name only are also inconsistent in their lives. They do not enjoy Christianity as it is supposed to be.

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SEPTEMBER FOURTH SUNDAY

WE MUST HAVE A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a two-lesson series about the need for us to have a Christian worldview. In this lesson, we learn what a true Christian would look like in this life.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and discuss with the students the various aspects of (a) The non-Christian person and (b) The Christian by name, then proceed.

The Third Type: The True Christian - the Spiritual Person.

This person lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Although every Christian has the Holy Spirit of God within them since receiving Him in baptism, not all Christians enjoy the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The true Christian, with the blessings and power of the Holy Spirit within him, is able to live a pure life away from sin in a type of life similar to that of Christ Himself. No one can say that Christ is God except with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself teaches us and reminds us of everything that Christ told us. The Holy Spirit takes from what is Christ has and tells us about it.

Accordingly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and its power--with the power of God and its work in man==the self can be diminished and the bodily desires have no control over man. The person changes and grows gradually with the blessing of the Holy Spirit to eventually reach the fullness of Christ. He possesses the mind, the way of life of Christ and his internal life becomes this shape:

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Christ takes control of my life in place of self and the Flesh. This is done by the power of the Holy Spirit and its work in me.

S,F = Myself, my flesh, and my desires are under the control of Christ.

o = All my concerns are according to what pleases Christ and His plan for me.

As to the personality of this spiritual person,

- + His center of power extends from the Holy Spirit in strong prayers, love of the word of God, trust in God, complete obedience to God.
- + The fruit of the Spirit is clear in his internal life ... “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Gal 5:22-23).

The obvious example of this type of person is found in each of the Disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ after receiving the Holy Spirit on the 50th day. They were filled with every wisdom, understanding and knowledge; they became new personalities led by the Holy Spirit. They had the features and characteristics of Christ when God reigned over their hearts. They preached to the whole world saying, “We do not preach out of our own accord, but with the help of Jesus Christ.” They stood before rulers in power and with confidence. Their hearts were filled with unspeakable joy even when they were in prison. “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” (Acts 5:41).

They had no physical needs, but: “They ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:46-47).

Therefore, have no fear my beloved to surrender your life to Christ and say - I will willingly be hungry, thirsty, suffer, be sad, and lose my intellect and education. On the contrary, trust Christ and give up your life to Him in order to enjoy the true fullness, peace and joy that is above all understanding, even in the midst of pain and tribulations.

Sin and bodily desires could not overcome a young man like St. George. Even poison could not keep him from his love to Christ.

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Anba Paula lived on very little worldly possessions and simple food for more than 80 years. His life was full of peace. Health and internal peace are not obtained by food and drink.

St. Demiana was able to save her father from destruction and idol worshipping with the power of her words which came from the Holy Spirit within her.

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us” (Hebrews 12:1). It is possible my beloved to enjoy the everlasting victory like these saints “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2).

The question now is - How can I give the Holy Spirit the chance to work in me so that Christ reigns in my life and I become strong and victorious? In other words, what should I do to enable the Holy Spirit of God to work strongly in me changing my heart and transforming my life from a weak one to a strong one that bears the features of Christ in person?

What is my role to enable the Holy Spirit of God to guide my life?

1. First of all, I must believe that the Holy Spirit of God lives in me since I received the new birth with water and spirit and the blessing of the Myroon. “Because he who believed and was baptized is saved”.
2. I pray daily, asking as in the prayers of the third hour of the Agbeya, “O good Lord, do not take your Holy Spirit away from us, this which you sent upon your holy Disciples and honorable Apostles at the third hour. Create a pure heart in me, O God, and put a new and loyal spirit within me, do not banish me from Your Presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51).
3. I must repent and confess my sins in front of God then in front of my Father of Confession “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).
4. I receive the Holy Body and Blood of Christ so that I receive forgiveness for my sins in the Blood of Christ “because without bloodshed there is no forgiveness.” I should attempt to be united with Christ through the Eucharist, “Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My Flesh is food indeed and My

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Blood is drink indeed. He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me, and I in him” (John 6:54-56).

5. I must listen to the Word of God in the Holy Bible, when I read it at home or in the Church. Reading, through the work of the Holy Spirit, will transform into spiritual nourishment and spiritual growth. “The words I say to you are spirit and life ... You are pure because of the words I say to you.” The Bible is not a history book or a book about knowledge; when I read the Bible, I should say, “Speak, O God, your servant listens”. God will provide me through the power of the Holy Spirit within me the ability to hear and flourish in the word of God.
6. I must trust the Lord in handling my life. “Casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). “Therefore, girdle up the loins of your mind, be sober and vest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13).
7. I have to go up to the quiet upper room as the Disciples went up to receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. I have to lift myself above the noise of the world and quieting all motion that distracts me in order to give the Spirit of God a chance to work in me and be fruitful because He does not work except in quietness. Remember Elijah when he went out to the mountain to stand before God. God was not in the great winds and was not in the earthquake and was not in the fire but God appeared in “A still small voice” (1 King 19:12).

How Will My Life be if it is changed into a Strong Life?

- I will **live a victorious life** over sin and death “For the law of the Spirit of life is Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:2) It is a victorious life over bodily desires, “I say then; walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16).
- **My prayers** ... from my heart are strong “Praying always with all prayers and supplication in the spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the Saints” (Ephesians 6:18).
- **My service** ... guided by the Holy Spirit as the Disciples of Christ whose prayers during service used to shake the place. “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were

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filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

- **My heart** ... Christ has settled in it, so I enjoy all that is Christ's - the Cross-and the Resurrection of Christ in my life. “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:16-17).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Let us live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our life away from sin.
- (2) Let us ensure that we are Christians every day of the week - in our thinking, attitude and behavior.
- (3) Christianity is a religion of joy. So let us enjoy it.

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For the success
Of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

In his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

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OCTOBER FIRST SUNDAY

AN INTRODUCTION TO PATROLOGY (I)

Please read the attached article entitled “How many are our teachers?”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

In this lesson we would like to know the value of Patrology in our church. We want to appreciate the depth of faith and love of the fathers of the church.

MEMORY VERSE

“So shall My Word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void.....” Isaiah 55:11.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A) What is Patrology?

The word “Patrology” is taken from the Latin word “pater” which means “father”. Therefore the subject of Patrology is the study of the life of the fathers, their writings, their sayings and most importantly their thinking and explanations of the doctrines of the church.

+ The subject of Patrology, in other words, does not only deal with the fathers and their writings, but also the understanding of their deep life, faith and intimacy with the Lord Christ.

(B) Basis of Orthodox faith:

There are three basic sources for the Orthodox teaching:

1. The Holy Bible
2. The Holy Tradition

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3. The Ecumenical Council and the sayings of the fathers (Patrology).

(C) Who are those fathers?

In the subject of Patrology we do not limit the word “Father” to the Bishops or priests or deacons. But we include all those who were defending the Christian faith in the first few centuries. We include those monks who fled away from the priesthood but they were teachers to many of the fathers. For example, St. Anthony the great was teacher of St. Athanasius.

(D) Importance of Patrology in our church:

Since the establishment of the church in Egypt, the Copts connected themselves with the original fathers’ thinking in the church. They translated many of the sayings of the fathers to the language of the people.

+ The subject of Patrology helps Christians to study the interpretation of the fathers for the Holy Bible and also their explanations of the doctrines of the church.

+One has to realize a basic difference here between the Holy Scriptures and the sayings of the fathers (Patrology). The scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit and they are infallible. Fathers were enlightened and passed on their enlightenment to us, which is occasionally gives rise to different opinions.

(E) Languages of Patrology:

Languages of the texts of the fathers were Greek (all the Eastern fathers), Latin (all the Western fathers) and other languages.

+ The fathers of the church of Alexandria wrote their texts in Greek not in Coptic. For example, St. Athanasius.

(F) Classification of Patrology:

The writings of the fathers can be classified, especially in the first five centuries, on a time basis. Some people think that the first Ecumenical Council (325 A.D.) is considered the line separating two groups of fathers from the point of view of their writings:

1. Anti-Nicene fathers (their writings are popular because of their great simplicity).

2. Post-Nicene fathers

+ We can also classify the writings of the fathers according to the language in which they wrote their texts:

1. Greek fathers (Eastern)

2. Latin fathers (Western)

+ We can also classify also the writings of the fathers geographically:

1. Fathers from Alexandria, Egypt

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2. Fathers from Antioch
3. Fathers from Cabudiuc
4. Latin fathers

+ Sometimes the classification of the writings of the fathers is done according to the subject:

1. Writings to defend the Faith
2. Explanations of the Holy Bible
3. Sermons
4. Letters
5. Church Liturgy
6. Praises
7. Dialogue
8. Asceticism
9. Church Laws
10. Historical writings

(G) Church fathers from the School of Alexandria:

Please see the attached table about the Fathers from the Church of Alexandria who have a very significant contribution to the subject of Patrology and affected the theology and faith of all the churches in the world.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) In our spiritual lives, there are various sources from which to learn as well as in our daily lives. We can learn a lot from the Fathers of the church, their lives, their writings and their opinions on various issues.
- (2) We are proud to belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, which offered the whole world a wealth of theologians, whose writings are everywhere in theological libraries to the present day.

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HOW MANY ARE OUR TEACHERS?

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

The one who has the spirit of discipleship and likes learning and gaining a word of benefit would in no way be able to count the number of his teachers, or in other words the sources of his knowledge.

We do not mean by that, those within the family circle as parents and relatives. Or teachers at schools and universities which are many. We do not even mean those in the Church circle such as a confession father, spiritual father, clergy, church servants and all preachers or teachers of the theological college, if one had the chance to deal with them. For each person there is a countless number of people that we learn from, about all aspects of life. It could be intentional or unintentional, whether we realize it or not.

Would anyone deny that many have affected him by their lifestyle, ideals, principles and behavior, without intentionally trying to teach him? They left a permanent mark on himself and provided him with models of life that became printed on his mind? Would you be able to count those whose lives were a beneficial lesson to you? It could be either their style of speech, their way of treating others or how they solve problems.

Would anyone deny learning from others' mistakes as well as others' ideals? Their mistakes and their outcome became loud bells, cautioning, warning and frightening him, giving him an unforgettable lesson! As one learns from others' mistakes, no doubt he also learns from his own mistakes and from what he receives in his life of punishments, words of rebuke or words of reproach.

One even learns from words of sarcasm, criticism or insult. That is, if he wants to learn. Social relationships, with all their results are also lessons. How many times did you learn a lesson from your dealings in life? How many advices or comments have you received from a friend or a passerby? How many lessons have you learned from those who deceived, exploited or fought you? How many lessons have you learned from those who helped you without making you aware of their help, or those who put up with you without complaining? How many benefits have you gained, by passing by a discussion?

Between two?

Then how many would be our teachers from the friends and enemies, alive or dead, righteous or evil, right or wrong? There are other lessons one learns from his readings and they are many. That could be from either books, newspaper, magazines or other types of media. There are lessons from stories, plays and even jokes and comedies. Many of these have a lesson deep within. Events are also



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teachers as we learn lessons from them. How many are the lessons that people learned from death, wars, catastrophes, fraction and their outcome or from all events that God allows?

The news that we hear or read every day has a lesson if dealing with life. We even learn lessons from animals, birds and insects. We learn from the ant how to be active, from the bee how to be organized, from the dog loyalty, bravery from the lion, and intelligence from the serpent, patience from the fox and fasting from the camel. Sources of knowledge are everywhere. But who is the one who wants to learn? The world and life are large schools full of lessons.

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**OCTOBER
SECOND SUNDAY**

**AN INTRODUCTION TO PATROLOGY (II):
EXCERPTS OF SAYINGS OF SOME OF THE FATHERS**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

In this lesson we would like to glance over some of the excerpts of the sayings of the Fathers and benefit from their deep faith and wisdom.

MEMORY VERSE:

*“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you,
whose faith follow considering the outcome of their conduct”
Heb 13:7*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) Introduction:

- + There are Fathers in the church, who with deep faith and practical experience, have written to us with the permission of God, so that we may benefit.
- + When you look for success, you look for people who have succeeded and follow their footsteps. When you need depth in your spiritual life you look at the experience of the Saints and the Fathers of the church and learn from them.

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(B) **Excerpts of sayings of Saint Anthony in the subject: “How to live in Christ?”**

+ **The way to repentance and spiritual struggle:**

“I consider that the grace of the Holy Spirit is ready and willing to fill those who intend, from the beginning, to be steadfast in their combat against the forces of evil, without ever yielding, until they prevail.”

+ **The three carnal inclinations:**

It is known that there are three forms of carnal inclinations.

The first includes the natural genetic instincts. They are powerless to incite us, without the yielding of spirit, to anything evil that can burden our conscience. It is enough to know that they are innate in the body.

The second results from indulgence in food and drink. The energy generated by rich foods causes the body to revolt against the spirit giving into menial and base cravings. To this effect, St. Paul says, “and do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation.” (Eph. 5:18)

The third is aroused by the satanic forces, that try, through envy, to tempt us, to weaken those who live spiritual purity, and to mislead those who try to perform ascetic practices.

+ **How to achieve spiritual purity and attain heavenly peace:**

When a person arms himself with patience and with the Christian Orthodox faith and belief in God’s commandments, then the Holy Spirit teaches him how to rid his body and his spirit of such cravings.

+ **How to emerge victorious from satanic wars:**

Through humility, Christian understanding and fervent prayer.

+ In his struggle against the forces of evil, he was always guided by reason. “I am wondering”, he said, “Why do you gather against me in such multitudes. If you were really powerful, only one of you would be enough.” He used to tell his attackers, “If God had given you Power over me, and then who am I to resist Him? But if He didn’t, then none of you would be able to do me harm.”

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- + In his war against the devil, he kept on praying, He used to recite psalm twenty-seven:

**“The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?
Though an army may encamp against me,
My heart shall not fear;
Though war may rise against me,
In this I will be confident.”**

- + He spoke of the satanic wars, “At one time I observed Satan’s snares spread all over the land so I said, “O Lord, who could avert these?” And a voice answered, “The humble could.”

- + **Concerning love for God and people:**

Concerning his love for God and his worship, which is based on that love, he said, “I don’t fear God...because I love him. Perfect love casts out fear.” (See 1 John 4:18).

Concerning his love for people he said, “My love for you is not a bodily love, but a spiritual love. For the association with the body is unstable and transient, as it moves with the strange winds. Whoever fears God and keeps His commandment is a slave to God, and this bondage is not slavery, but it is a righteousness that leads to the worship.”

- + **The importance of prayer and reading the Bible:**

Some philosophers used to come to converse with him. They were greatly surprised at his knowledge and intelligence. Once they said to him, “You do not own or read books, so whence did you acquire that knowledge and that amazing understanding?” He answered their query by posing a strange question, “Which came to existence first: the mind or knowledge?”

And when they answered that it was the mind, he replied, “then knowledge can be begotten from the mind without the help of books.” He used to say, “When I want to know something, I pray to God, who reveals it to me and I meditate on the verses of the Bible to acquire the knowledge I require. So, I have no need of books.”

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Emperor Constantine the Great sent to St. Anthony a message seeking his blessings and prayers. When St. Anthony did not read the message at once, his Disciples were astonished. He said to them, "Don't be amazed at this; you should be more amazed that God sends us messages every day in His Holy Book and we do not hasten to read them."

+ **On the need for silence:**

One day, some monks visited him. He asked them what they thought the meaning of a certain verse was. Each one expressed his point of view. Anba Youssef was one of them and he kept silent. So St. Anthony asked him about his opinion. Anba Youssef replied, "Believe me Father, I don't know." To this, St. Anthony replied, "Blessed are you, Anba Youssef, because you have known the way to the phrase "I don't know."

+ **On death to the world and to its lusts:**

Upon the death of his father, he looked at his corpse and said, "Where is your might, greatness and authority? You have involuntarily gone out of this world, but I am going to leave it of my own free will before I am forced out of it."

+ **Learning to benefit from life's experiences:**

He was in retreat by a river when a shameless woman came and began, in his presence to take off her clothes in order to bathe. He reproached her saying, "O woman, aren't you ashamed of getting naked in front of a monk?" She replied saying, "If you were really a monk, you would have stayed in the mountains in the inner wilderness." She said that and laughed sarcastically. As for him, he took her sarcasm seriously saying, "Truly, this is God's commandment voiced by this woman."

(C) **Excerpts of sayings of St. Augustine**

1. "Do what you can, and then pray that God will give you the power to do what you cannot."
2. "I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all, but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."
3. "What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten the poor and needy. It has the eyes to see the misery. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrow of men."

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4. “In Thy birth Of Christ, Thou made the cave Thy palace and the manger Thy throne.”
5. “There is a difference between a person who does not know and a person who rejects to know. The one who rejects to know is judged on his or her rejection.”
6. “People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars and they pass by themselves without wondering.”

(D) Excerpts of sayings of St. John Chrysostom:

1. “If John (the Baptist), who was equal to or greater than all the world, considers himself as unworthy to minister to Christ, what shall we say who are full of ten thousands of sins?”
2. “Never refer to any enemy using scandalous names, but use respectful ones, on hearing this, your soul will learn from your tongue, become accustomed and undergo a change of heart towards him.”

(E) Excerpts of sayings of St. Gregory the wonder-worker:

1. “When the Lord was baptized, the order of things was reversed:
 - + The redeemer humbled himself amongst the captives.
 - + The judge placed Himself with those who are under judgment.
 - + The Good Shepherd joined Himself with the lost sheep.”

(F) Excerpts of sayings of St. Cyprian of Cathrage:

“Put Christ first because He puts us first.”



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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) In trying to explain some of the verses that may be difficult for you, one may try to get the explanation of the Fathers of the church or ask the Father of confession.
- (2) Search for the excerpts of sayings of the fathers of the church and you will benefit a great deal from their depth of faith.

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**OCTOBER
THIRD SUNDAY**

THE ANCHORITES (HERMITS) (I)

Please read the attached articles entitled, “The Strong Heart”, “Calmness”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about the life of Anchorites (hermits). They are the ones who preferred God to the whole world and enjoyed their intimacy with God.

MEMORY STATEMENT

“I am not a monk, but I saw monks”

St. Makarios the great said this statement after he saw two hermits.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A) INTRODUCTION

The hermit is an individual who totally died to the world to live alone with God and God with him. He or she left all the pleasures of the world to have true enjoyment with God.

- † No one can write accurately about the life of a hermit or even write about one day of a hermit’s life. But we can only write about the life of the hermit from an outsider’s viewpoint.
How did he or she start his journey as a hermit?
Who saw him or her?

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How deep was his or her spiritual life and intimacy with God?

(B) Who are the hermits?

† Some people think the hermits are spirits that fly from one location to another, and they say they enter the church while it is closed to pray in it without anybody seeing them.

† Who are the hermits?

1. They are people like us. They eat and drink. They may get sick and suffer from pain.
2. They are leading a very ascetic life in their fasting.
3. They live deep in the wilderness very far, in places nobody knows about. Many of them have spent tens of years without seeing the face of an individual.
4. Many of them were in the wilderness and they themselves do not know where they are located.
5. Close to the end of the life of a hermit God sends to each one of them someone to talk to and to tell about his or her life (i.e. the life of the hermit), write it and deliver it to the church. Usually, this meeting between the hermit and his or her visitor comes close to the end of his or her life on earth. The visitor would then bury the hermit if he or she passed away.

† So they are people like us who eat, drink and may get sick.

† We hear about St. Paul, the first hermit who was eating half a loaf every day, delivered to him by a raven. And we hear about St. Abou Nofre the hermit who had a tree giving him dates to eat. So, it is wrong to say that the hermits are spirits.

(C) The most famous hermits:

† There are many hermits. We will mention some of them who are mentioned in the Synaxarium of the Coptic Orthodox Church:

1. St. Paul the first hermit... The church commemorates him Amshire 2nd.
2. St. Abou Nofre the hermit... the church commemorates him in Baouna 16th.
3. St. Karas the hermit.. The church commemorates him in Abib 8th.
4. St. Pigimi the hermit...the church commemorates him in Kiahk 11th.
5. St. Miseal the hermit the church commemorates him in Kiahk 13th.

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6. St. Mariam the hermit...the church commemorates her in Baramouda 6th.

And there are many other hermits.

(D) The journey to see them:

† We will choose one of these journeys to see a hermit, to find the following elements of the journey:

1. The very long distance that the Saints had to walk to reach a hermit. This is evidence that hermits lived in the inner wilderness.
2. The help of God is clearly manifested in arranging the meeting between the hermit and the visiting Saint.
3. The revelation from God, which He gives to the hermit to know about the name of the Saint whom the Lord sent to see the hermit.

† Examples: The visit of Saint Babnouda to Saint Abou Nofre the hermit:

St. Babnouda said, I want to go to the inner wilderness to look for the hermits, the worshippers of Christ, and glory is to Him. I walked four days and four nights, I did not eat or drink anything and I could not see anyone. I took with me some bread and some water enough for me for a few days. I walked an additional four days and I did not find anyone. I finished all the bread and water, which I took with me. I started to be very tired and I thought I was going to die. But I encouraged myself and I walked for a few more days in which I did not eat or drink anything. I lost all my strength and I lay down on the ground without moving. Afterwards I found a person coming towards me and touched my lips so I gained strength again. I stood up and I was able to walk again towards the inner wilderness for four more days. I became very tired again and raised my hands in prayers. I saw the same person who came towards me before and he touched my lips and body and strengthened me so that I stood up and walked for seven more days.

I saw at a distance a person who looked very scary, and was naked with no clothes on. His hair almost covered all his body and he had some leaves around his body. When he came close to me, I was very scared and I climbed over a mountain to get away from him. He came after me at the bottom of the mountain, raised his head and said to me, "Come down my brother St. Babnouda, don't be afraid, I am a person like you living in this wilderness with God." I was astonished that he knew my name and I realized that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. So I came down and I knelt down before him. He said to me, "Rise up my friend because I am a

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human like you”. So I got up and sat with him. I asked him about his name and his condition. He said to me, “My name is Nofre. I have been here in the wilderness for sixty years during which I didn’t see anyone but I have been enjoying my presence with God.”

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Living with God is a joy. For this reason the hermits left all the pleasures of the world to live with God.
- (2) We also enjoy our presence with God when our prayers are not routine any more. We must take time out of the world in order to dedicate this time to God.
- (3) God takes care of everyone who relies on Him. It is very scary to live deep in the wilderness where there are wild animals, no food or drink. But God takes care of everyone who relies on Him.

*** Note: This lesson is completely based on the writings of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III**



THE STRONG HEART

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

- ❖ The strong heart is the durable heart that can stand up for all external factors and not get shook up by a reason from the outside
- ❖ The strong heart is the one that any word would not change no matter how harsh; one that is not disturbed by any treatment even the odd ones; one that does not get lured in by any temptation. A heart that is durable with nothing controlling it but the ethics and morals inside of it.
- ❖ The strong heart is the one that doesn't become arrogant because of money, status, prestige or promotion whether financially or spiritually; a heart that doesn't fall for any of these
- ❖ The strong heart is the one that neither anxiety nor hopelessness nor weary nor fear can defeat it, but one that listens to the saying of the apostle: "Stay stable not shaky" (see 1 Corinthians 15:58)
- ❖ **And to have a strong heart many reasons, some natural and others from our God's blessing**
- ❖ There is a person who has a strong heart naturally with no fear. That person could be spiritual, but he might not be. He could be strong in some situations, yet shows weakness in front of his parents. He could also show weakness in front of a certain desire that he cannot resist
- ❖ **And another person that has a strong heart because of his spirituality**
- ❖ The satisfied person is always strong, as he doesn't care about anything and doesn't desire anything, and there is no weak points the devil can use against him; As St. Augustine said: "I was at the top of the world, when I desired and feared nothing"
- ❖ Another reason for strength is the passion of the person to his eternity, passions that would let death poses no fear on the heart. It could also be that the heart loves the truth, and the truth is always strong no matter what faces it
- ❖ **And another reason for the strong heart is faith**
- ❖ Faith of God and his strength, one that protects, one that gives the Holy Spirit, as our Lord Jesus Christ said : "and you shall receive power when you receive the Holy Spirit" and as St. Paul said: "I can do everything in Christ that strengthens me"

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CALMNESS

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Calmness is one of the beautiful qualities of the spiritual person; it includes calmness of the heart, nerves, thought, senses, behaviour and body. A quiet person's heart never gets troubled for any reason. He does not lose his calm no matter how the problems are caused. As the Prophet David says *"Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though men should rise against me, in this I will be confident"* (Ps. 27:3). It is the type of calm that comes from faith.

If one loses one's inner peace, everything will look disturbed in one's eyes, and what is simple will seem complicated. This complication is not from the outside but from the inside. When the heart is calm the nerves will also be calm. In this case one would not lose temper but, instead, quietly solve the problem.

If the mind fails to solve a problem, the nerves interfere to help. The agitated nerves might announce the lack of a solution, and the more the nerves get troubled, the more they get agitated..

A person with a calm heart and nerves would be able to obtain quietness in thought and action. His thoughts will be balanced, void of any disturbances. Therefore, he will act in a quiet and sound way, far from anger or anxiety.

What helps a person to gain inner peace is outer peace, a peaceful environment that has no agitating effects. For this reason, monks live in the peace of the wilderness, far from noise, people's clamour, and any agitating news or incidents. They would have usually got used to this calmness..

The life of loneliness and isolation generally brings calmness, because all the senses are calm. As our saints say, the senses are the **access** to thoughts. What you see, hear and touch gives you thoughts. If your senses are at rest from gathering news, you will be relieved from thoughts.

A quiet place helps the senses to be calm, and consequently leads to the calmness of the thoughts, heart and nerves. That is why many people avoid noisy places, seeking peace of mind.

Those who love calm search for it with all their strength, but others, alas, love clamour and could not live without it. Calmness makes them bored!

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**OCTOBER
FOURTH SUNDAY**

THE ANCHORITES (HERMITS) (II)

Please read the attached article entitled, “They were a blessing”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson two in a series of two lessons about the life of the Anchorites (hermits). They are the ones who preferred God to the whole world and enjoyed their intimacy with God. Can we enjoy being so close to God?

MEMORY VERSE

“...and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing” (Gen. 12:2).

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

✠ Start by reviewing the previous lesson with the students and then proceed as follows:

(A) How did the hermits start their journey?

+ There is a different start for each one of them. Some of them were monks and then they became hermits. Others did not go through any monastic life but they became hermits.

✠ **How did St. Paul the hermit start his journey to become a hermit?**

He was the first hermit. At his time there were no monasteries or monks. It was said that his brother or one of his relatives was unfair to him regarding a large sum of money that he inherited from his parents. As they were going to

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the judge, they found the richest man in the city being carried dead to be buried. St. Paul the hermit was very affected by what he saw left everything and walked away towards the West side of the city. He prayed for three days asking God to guide him to whereabouts he should go. God sent an angel who guided him to the place that had good water and where a raven used to deliver to him half a loaf of bread daily.

(B) Were the hermits immune from falling in sin or were they liable to fall in sin?

No one is immune from falling in sin while he or she is living in the flesh on earth. God only is without sin. The life of the hermits tells us some information about the fall of some of them and their repentance. An example of those hermits who fell in sin and repented was St. Moses the hermit. He lived for thirty years as a hermit and the wild animals dwelled around him without hurting him. But the devil was able to deceive him and make him fall several times. But St. Moses repented. God sent St. Samuel the confessor to him so that St. Moses can confess to him, and took Holy Communion and then he departed immediately afterwards from this world.

(C) Did the hermits wear clothes?

We read that in the life of St. Makarious the Great he saw two hermits in the inner wilderness, and they were naked. But this was an abnormal case. St. Paul the first hermit made for a tunic for himself out of the palm leaves. St. Abou Nofre the hermit had very long hair, which covered his nakedness. St. Pigimi the hermit thought of living naked as a sign of leading an ascetic life. But he answered himself wisely and said, "How can I sit naked? How can I pray to God while I am naked?" and he remembered that God made leather jackets for Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness (Gen. 3:21). So we can see that the hermits either God keeps their clothes from wearing away or their hair becomes long enough to cover their body, or they make clothes out of leaves. We hear that St. Miriam the hermit hid behind a rock when St. Soziema went to the inner wilderness to get her blessings. She asked him to throw her the cover of his tunic and she wore it before seeing him.

(D) Are there hermits now?

From among the monks, there are no hermits now because all the monks in the monasteries are known to us by their name, location and what each one of them

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does. But if God allowed in our present day to have some hermits, it is not from among the monks. Maybe an individual went to the inner wilderness and lived an ascetic life without going through the monastery and without starting as a monk.

(E) Did any of the hermits serve the church?

The life of a hermit in its essence is living away from humanity without seeing any person's face until the day of the departure of the hermit from this world. This is what happened in the case of St. Paul the first hermit, St. Abou Nofre the hermit and others. But very few of the hermits came down to serve for a short while. For example, St. Hedra the hermit: he went to a monastery in his old age and closed his cell on himself. God gave him the talent of healing the sick and casting out demons. When the Bishop of Aswan, Egypt departed, the people opened the cell of St. Hedra, and carried him to Alexandria where they ordained him a Bishop by Pope Theophelous (the 23rd Pope of Alexandria) close to the beginning of the fifth century.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- 1) We must move forward in our relationship with God. Take a step forward to become closer to God. Perhaps focus more on prayer or make a commitment to stop leading a sinful life. Try to improve everyday more than the day before.
- 2) If you thought you reached a good spiritual level and you are not liable to fall into sin, just be careful because you may fall into sin.
- 3) Fasting will never adversely affect your health. The hermits were leading an ascetic life filled with fasting, yet they lived for a long time and they were quite healthy. So do not be afraid of fasting thinking that fasting is bad for you. It is not.

*** Note: This lesson is completely based on the writings of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III**

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THEY WERE A BLESSING

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

There are individuals who lived on earth, and were a blessing.

One example is our father Abraham, father of all fathers, to whom the Lord said: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing." Genesis 12:2

And before Abraham was our father Noah, because of whom the Lord preserved life on earth after the great deluge (Genesis 6). Humanity would have ceased to exist if God did not favor Noah, thus becoming the father of humanity after Adam.

We read of many individuals who were a blessing wherever they stayed. One of them was Joseph the Righteous. He became a blessing to the house of Potifar. The Holy Bible tells us: "And his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority." Genesis 39:3, 4 Joseph became a blessing in the land of Egypt and because of him the Lord saved this land and the surrounding lands from the famine.

Another example was Elijah the Prophet, who was a blessing to the widow. Because of Elijah, the Lord blessed her oil and her flour: "The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by Elijah." 1Kings 17:16

Another example was Elisha who was a blessing in the house of the Shunammite woman. The Lord granted her a son and later raised him from the dead, all because of the prayers of Elisha.

The visit of St. Mary to Egypt was a great blessing to this land. Because of her visit, many of the idols in Egypt were destroyed, and faith in God entered the heart of many. Over time churches have been established in the places of her visits. To this day, the blessings of St. Mary and the Lord Jesus Christ fill the land of Egypt.

Remember also the blessings of the saints, the fathers, the archimandrites, and the anchorites. They have blessed many places and many people with their prayers. Their places of residence have become sources of blessings that people continually

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seek. This reminds us of the blessings of the “ten” of whom the Lord spoke with regards to the destruction of Sodom, “I will not destroy it for the sake of ten.” Genesis 18:32

We also remember the blessings of the tithes, the blessings of the Holy Day of God, ...



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**OCTOBER
FIFTH SUNDAY**

**PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (I):
HOSEA THE PROPHET - MORAL RELATIVISM**

Please read Hosea chapter one to three and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below:

Purpose of the lesson:

This is the first lesson in a series of three lessons about Hosea the prophet. The focus in this lesson is on moral relativism as we face it in society.

Please emphasize:

+Introduction

Hosea the Prophet is one of the Minor Prophets (that is – among the prophets who have written short prophecies) and belongs to the eighth century B.C. “Hosea” is a Hebrew word which means “Jehovah delivers” and from which the word Joshua or Jesus was derived. His father’s name was Beeri. Hosea prophesied in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and also in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel (the Northern Kingdom). As it is written, “The word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.” (Hos. 1:1).

We notice here that although Hosea is rather a prophet of Israel, Viz, the Northern Kingdom, he associates the date of his prophecy with kings of Judah first while mentioning only one of the kings of Israel. Some scholars see that the Prophet Hosea’s conception of the separation of the Northern kingdom (with its ten tribes) from the Southern kingdom (the kingdom of David) is that it is like the separation from God and from the temple in Jerusalem. Some other scholars, however, see that Hosea mentioned only one of the kings of Israel because the kings of Israel

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were evil and, as such, were not worth mentioning. Those scholars maintain that Hosea mentioned only this king- even though he was evil as well – because he was honored to carry the title of the “the savior of people.” As it is written, “And the Lord did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash” (2 Kings 14:27). Jeroboam’s reign was followed by a series of disturbances, assassinations and anarchy and ended in captivity.

Hosea was contemporary to both Isaiah, the Prophet, and Micah, the Prophet, in Judah. He was also contemporary to Amos, the Prophet, in Israel.

Hosea is considered a prophet of Israel before captivity – which he witnessed himself – albeit his prophecies sometimes included Judah. It was said that in his last days he went to Judah where he prophesied.

† The family of Hosea the Prophet:

Hosea the Prophet was married to a woman called Gomer, as it is written “When the Lord began to speak to Hosea, the Lord said to him: Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.” (Hos. 1:2)

One might just wonder at God’s command to His prophet to get attached to a harlot woman as his wife – whereas Moses’ canon law stipulates that “The adulteress shall surely be put to death.” (Lev. 20:10)

† Some see that the phrase of “a wife of harlotry” may not mean merely an adulterous woman, flesh-wise. Rather it means a human being dedicating her life to Baal, thereby, considered adulterous – especially that idol worshipping used to be associated with committing adultery.

For, at that time, most Israeli women – if not all--were associated with idol worshipping so that it might have been impossible for a prophet to find himself a woman who was not an idol worshipper, but one who was not necessarily practicing adultery of the flesh.

† It was Prophet Hosea’s marriage to Gomer – as a woman worshipping a false god (which is what adultery means)- that enabled him to experience in his prophecy a glimpse of the feelings of God-Who is supposed to be the bridegroom of the soul-toward His people. That people – being far

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and away from Him – indulged in sinful pleasures. Therefore, the Prophet Hosea’s prophecy brings forth the practical experience to unveil God’s feelings of sadness for His people living in sin.

† So, Hosea got married to Gomer – even though he was aware of her past. He accepted to this because of the divine order – thereby implementing in his life a symbolic image of what used to happen between God and His people.

We do not know Hosea’s sentiments toward his wife Gomer, though we only know that he took her as a wife just to obey God. She bore unto him three children. These are Jezreel (boy), Lo-Ruhamah (girl) and Lo-Ammi (boy).

In chapter three, however, the Lord says to Hosea: “Then the Lord said to me [Go again to love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans]. So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley.” (Hos. 3: 1-2). Some scholars see that Gomer (Hosea’s wife), daughter of Diblaim, might have fled marital house and sold herself to corruption, thereby becoming a serf, but was later purchased by the Prophet to be his woman. Other scholars hold that what is reported in chapter one is exactly what is reported in chapter three. They believe that what is reported in chapter one is the marriage whereas here, the Prophet is narrating what happened as a practical reality presenting us with the experience he went through himself.

Thus, God wanted Hosea to get into His loving communion with His people even though that people turned to other gods.

Still, there are others who think that the incident recorded in chapter three is totally different from the one recorded in chapter one on account of the saying “The Lord said go again”.

Accordingly, the second marriage took place many years after the first one.

Remarks:

- 1- In the marriage mentioned in chapter one of Hosea, we see the strong tie between God and the children of Israel as well as the extent of the sin of those people. However, the marriage reported in chapter three refers to, and

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is a symbol of, discipline and also the captivity days in which the sons of Israel underwent and which resulted in their penitence and repentance of their evil.

- 2- Not only did the Lord ask Hosea to marry a wife of harlotry, but also to beget from her children of harlotry whose names would be dictated by God as Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi. This does not mean that they are fruit of adultery. Rather, their mere birth of an adulterous woman associated with idol worship or paganism reckoned them children of harlotry-even though they were the prophet's sons – until they had accepted their father's mission and rejected their mother's old spirit.

Jezreel means, "God sows". It also indicates that the chastisements that God raises upon us are the fruits of our deeds. Lo-Ruhamah means "I do not make mercy." For, when man does not make mercy with himself, he falls under the yoke of idol worship and does not expect mercy from God. Despising God's patience and mercy "treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath" (Rom. 2:5). Lo-Ammi means "Not my people." So, if sin gives birth to no mercy, the bitterness of no mercy is depriving man of his affiliation with God. Then, God mixes chastisement with hope. For, He declares here that His discipline is not absolute nor is their refusal indefinite, but temporary- as He is waiting for them to return to Him so that He may restore them in more glamour and glory and regain them a strong and great kingdom delighting in sonship. "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them [you are not my people,] there it shall be said to them; [you are the sons of the living God]. Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel" (Hos. 1: 10-11).

- † Says St. Isaac the Syrian "God sometimes allows His children to do something that may sound unbecoming but He is not disciplining them. Rather, this brings about glory to Him – as was the case with Hosea the prophet" (Hos. 1:2), and Elijah the prophet (1 Kings 18:40). "And Elijah said to them [Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape?] So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there." God allowed Elijah to do that i.e. killing God's prophets, to punish them for their corrupt

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worship and also to strongly ask the others to repent from bad worship.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) The human soul is supposed to be a bride of Christ i.e. is full of love with Christ. When the human soul is in love with the world instead of God, it is then considered adultery i.e. it is sinful and leads to death.
- (2) The love of God is never shaken up despite the sins of His people. God is still looking to save His people
- (3) God's feelings are hurt and He becomes very sad when He sees that His people's morals are following the wrong path and living by their own free will.

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For the success
Of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

In his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

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**NOVEMBER
FIRST SUNDAY**

**PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (II):
HOSEA THE PROPHET - OTHER GODS**

Please read Hosea chapter four to fourteen and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below:

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a three lesson series about Hosea the prophet. In this lesson the focus is on worshipping other gods as we face it in the society that we live in today.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and discussing the various aspects of it with the students.

✠ **The Message Declared in the Service of Hosea the Prophet**

The message of Hosea the Prophet to the children of Israel declared a number of things:

- 1- Severe rebuke and warning because of their idol worship-which is considered adultery- instead of loving and worshipping the real God.
- 2- Announcement of God's chastisements ... and mercy
- 3- Announcement and prophecy of the end of animal sacrifices of the Old Testament with the advent of Christ- the real sacrifice – with the generous gifts of the New Testament.

Hosea reminded them of the dirtiness and drunkenness involved in worshipping Baal

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“Harlotry, wine and new wine enslave the heart” (Hos. 4: 11). Their life was filled with sex and desires, which they mixed with worshipping. “They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars and terebinths, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters commit harlotry, and your brides commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go apart with harlots, and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot. Therefore people who do not understand will be trampled” (Hos. 4: 13-14) together with false prophecies and sacrifices for idols “Because Ephraim has made many altars for sin, they have become for him altars for sinning” (Hos. 8:11).

Then Hosea the Prophet explains to the children of Israel what happens to them as a result of this dirty worship.

In their filthy worship, they think that they are increasing fruit and material production. So, he says about them “They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind. Their stalk has no bud; it shall never produce meal. If it should produce, aliens would swallow it up. Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the Gentiles like a vessel in which there is no pleasure” (Hos. 8: 7-8). Likewise, in every age, he who turns to world riches thinking that happiness lies in them- is not satisfied with these fruits, nor does he find happiness therein. Then, in their filthy worship, they suppose that material welfare is everything. Therefore, God replies saying “Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like other peoples, for you have played the harlot against your God. You have loved for reward on every threshing floor. The threshing floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her. They shall not dwell in the Lord’s land, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and shall eat unclean things in Assyria. They shall not offer wine offerings to the Lord, nor shall their sacrifices be pleasing to Him. It shall be like bread of mourners to them; all who eat it shall be defiled. For their bread shall be for their life; it shall not come into the house of the Lord” (Hos. 9:1-4).

And how about potency? The Lord has said to them “Give them, O Lord-what will you give?

Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts (Hos. 9:14). Then He says, “My God will cast them away because they did not obey Him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations” (Hos. 9:17). Then how about the abundance of their sacrifices to Baal? In response, the Lord says “Israel empties his vine; He brings forth fruit for himself. According to the multitude of his fruit he has increased the

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altars; He will break down their altars; He will ruin their sacred pillars...Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.” (Hos. 10:1-6) And how about their military capability as a result of their god worship? “O Israel you have sinned from the days of Gibeah...Peoples shall be gathered against them when I bind them for their two transgressions...in the morning the king of Israel shall be cut off utterly” (Hos. 10: 9-15).

Hosea describes the people’s sin and their breaching of the covenant with God “Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: there is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed after bloodshed” (Hos. 4:1-2).

Then He tells them, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge I also will reject you from being priest for me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hos. 4:6).

Spiritual leaders and the clergy went corrupt at that time and Hosea the Prophet addressed the message of God to them “They eat up the sin of my people; they set their heart on their iniquity.” (Hos. 4:8) on the grounds that they refused knowledge themselves and misled the people failing to turn them away from their wrong path. “And it shall be: like people, like priest. So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds.” (Hos. 4:9) Then he says, “Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For yours is the judgment, because you have been a snare to Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor.” (Hos. 5:1) and also says “... The prophet is a fowler’s snare in all his ways and enmity in the house of his God” (Hos. 9:8).

Similarly, the most probable person to bring trouble to the church is the one who is in charge of the spiritual leadership yet is corrupt himself, because he misleads many with him and assumes a status that is not his. There are always examples in every age.

Despite all this, Hosea the Prophet reminds the people of God’s love and mercy toward them. “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son ...I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them.” (Hos. 11:1-4)

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And He also says, “I will heal their backsliding... I will be like the dew to Israel... His beauty shall be like an olive tree...For the ways of the Lord are right, the righteous walk in them ...” (Hos. 14:4, 6, 9).

Remark:

Today do we find people worshipping gods other than the real God? Do we find these days heresies in the world and corruption in some spiritual leaders? The result of all these things is known and so is God’s mercy.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Worshipping other gods (such as money, lusts, people ...etc) instead of the true God will lead to drunkenness, sexual immorality, lustful desires and death.
- (2) Worshipping other gods (such as following cults and heresies) instead of the One True God will make the person very miserable.
- (3) There is judgment from God on people who are worshipping other gods.
- (4) When someone takes a leadership role in the church while he or she is worshipping other gods it becomes dangerous.

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**NOVEMBER
SECOND SUNDAY**

**PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (III):
HOSEA THE PROPHET - THE NATURE OF OUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

Please read Hosea chapter four to fourteen and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below:

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the third lesson in a series of three lessons on Hosea the prophet. The focus in this lesson is on our relationship with God as established by the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

✝ Please emphasize:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and discuss the various practical aspects of it.

✝ Hosea's Prophecies about Jesus Christ and the church

1- Incarnation:

“Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword or battle, by horses or horsemen.” (Hos. 1:7) It is clear that Hosea is prophesizing about the sacrament of the incarnation of the Word of God and the salvation he offered to humanity without war or weapons. We may observe the advent of Christ in this way i.e. meek and humble in heart – contrary to the Jews’ expectation that He would come with worldly power-an expectation that contradicts the prophecies about the image of the coming Christ-like this prophecy of Hosea.

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The prophet Hosea then says that when Christ comes, He will be the head of the church, attaching it to heaven and detaching it from worldly ties. “Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!” (Hos. 1:11) Here, God’s unsurpassable love is declared in the messianic age through our joint union in Jesus Christ the one head “and appoint for themselves one head” by accepting the belief and faith in Jesus Christ and delighting in sonship via baptism. We also observe that Hosea is not saying, “They meet together under one king”. Rather, he highlights perfection in love by the Savior being the head of the church- thus the body cannot separate from him. Then Hosea says, “They shall come out from the land” prophesizing about the new heavenly nature cherished by members of the church of Christ “Our citizenship in heaven.” (Phil 3:20) Commenting on “for great will be the day of Jezreel”, A. Jerome says that Jezreel means “God sows” for His hand sows us a new and holy planting. He shows us as members of the body of His only Son where we are irrigated by the water of the Holy Spirit so that we may sustain the righteousness of Christ inside us.

2- The trip to Egypt:

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos. 11:1). This is strictly identical to what Isaiah the prophet says, “The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and will come into Egypt; the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst” (Isa. 19:1).

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew we read “And was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, [Out of Egypt I called My Son]” (Mt. 2: 15).

3- The Savior’s pains:

Hosea the Prophet says “Woe to them, for they have fled from me! Destruction to them, because they have transgressed against me! Though I redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me.” (Hos. 7: 13) That was what happened before the seat of Pontius Pilate as narrated by St. Luke the Evangelist “Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people ... And they all cried out at once, saying [Away with this Man, and release to us Barabas] But they shouted, saying [Crucify Him, crucify Him!] So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested” (Lk. 23: 13-24).

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4- Descending to Hades and resurrection:

“Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight” (Hos. 6: 1-2).

This is a prophecy about our Lord Jesus Christ’s fulfilled resurrection on the third day. It was through Christ’s resurrection on the third day that all humanity rose in victory over the power of death as per Hosea’s prophecy “I will ransom them from the power of the grave! I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from my eyes” (Hos. 13:14). As well, St. Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 15- which is a complete chapter about resurrection “O Death, where is your sting? O Death, where is your victory?” (1Cor. 15:55). St. Paul also says, “For, as in Adam all die even so, in Christ all shall be made alive” (1Cor. 15:22). And this is our faith and belief that Christ has given us life that overcomes death in all its shapes e.g. the death embedded in sin and death of the flesh. Therefore, we say in the prayers of the deceased “it is not death for your servants rather a transfer.”

5- The Church and its establishment

- † St. John Chrysostom comments on the Lord’s command to Hosea to “Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry” (Hos. 1:2) saying that God chose for Himself to be a physician –not a judge- in His choice of the new covenant church. For when God ordered Hosea to take himself a wife of harlotry and get attached to her as a wife, He did not scorn our weak nature. Rather, He blessed it and sanctified it for Him so that our souls may become brides for Christ.

St. Paul the Apostle comments in his epistle to the Romans Chapter 9:25-26 “As he says also in Hosea: [I will call them my people, who were not My People and her beloved, who was not beloved]. And it shall come to pass in the place that it was said to them, [You are not My People, there they will be called sons of the living God].

This is identical to what was said about those who no longer have the mercy of God on them and about those who are not the people of God. Then Hosea says about them, “yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place

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where it was said to them, [You are not my people] there it shall be said to them [You are the sons of the living God]" (Hos. 1:10)

The Prophet Hosea also says about the establishment of the new covenant church (Hos. 2:14-23) "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness and speak comfort to her ...

Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people [You are My people!] and they shall say, [You are my God!]" (Luke 15). This reminds us of the father's flattery of each of his elder and younger sons.

Where in the world does a bridegroom flatter his bride after she betrays him? Likewise, God longs for man: - He flatters and dandles him so that he might come back to Him and accept union with Him. And while God sanctifies man's freedom, he does not compel him or her to come back to Him. Rather, God flatters man in order to draw him to Him. And how does God dandle man? "I will give her, her vineyard from there." (Hos. 2:15)) These vineyards which the Lord offers are nothing but Himself- that is why He says, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser" (John 15:1).

"I will give her ... the Valley of Achor as a door of hope on that day" (Hos. 2:15) the word "**Achor**" means disturbance or distress. Therefore, the church accepts distress with vineyards because where Christ is, there is always anti-Christ resisting Him.

Thus, "Achor" i.e. - the distress- is "God's gift" and in this context St. Paul says "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29). The pains that the apostles and martyrs have undergone throughout ages are indeed worthy of remembrance.

Astonishingly, God grants us "Achor as a door of hope". For, amidst pain, the door of hope opens in front of us as we appreciate the power and joy of resurrection through crucifixion with Christ. Thereby, we go back to our heavenly life "Shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. [And it shall be, in that day] Says the Lord [That you will call Me My Husband and no longer call Me My Master] (Hos. 2:16). That is to say, the human spirit would accept union with God without using the pagan expression of "My Master".

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Then, three times Hosea does say, “I will betroth you to me”. Once he says “I will betroth you to me forever” and another time he says, “Yes, I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, in loving kindness and mercy” and thirdly “I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord” (Hos. 2: 19-20).

And by the same token our Lord Jesus Christ says, “For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” (Mt. 9:13). Such is the mercy of God who also says, “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17).

We may observe here that the expression of “mercy and not sacrifice” (Mt. 12:7) is identical to Hosea’s words in Hos. 6:6. It was the expression that the Lord Jesus used to defend His Disciples against the Jews’ adherence to the letter.

God seeks internal deeds and change of the heart, something man cannot do of himself because it is the work of God inside man. It is God Who acts in us in order to grant us mercy fixed in us. The mission of Jesus Christ came to emphasize the change of our cruel nature so that it may be similar to His nature: - full of love and kindness – thereby we sustain His characteristics inside us.

We should not be like Adam about whom it is written “But like mean they transgressed the covenant” (Hos. 6:7). Let our reformation be divine so that it might not be said about us that we transgressed the covenant.

6- God’s refusal of the dissident Jews:

“My God will cast them away, because they did not obey Him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations” (Hos. 9:17).

For, Christ the living Son of God came and showed them all God’s love and performed so many miracles amidst them. However, they refused Him and crucified Him because of their hypocrisy. Indeed, this prophecy has come true these days as we see the Jews straying all over the world.

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hos. 4:6).

We observe here that God did not say, “Because you are ignorant” – instead – He says, “Because you have rejected knowledge.” As if He is saying that you have no

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excuse: - you have available knowledge and the light is on. However, you are rejecting knowledge and are not welcoming light. The reason they rejected knowledge lies in their abandonment of God's word or commandment. "The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life." (Jn. 6:63) In the Holy Bible, we see God face to face and we see ourselves the way we are. To what extent is our keenness to study the Bible?

7- The advent of anti-Christ:

"Though he is fruitful among his brethren, an East wind shall come; the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness. Then his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up. He shall plunder the treasury of every desirable prize.

Samaria is held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God. They shall fall by the sword, their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child ripped open" (Hos. 13: 15-16).

If Jesus Christ grants man life through His crucifixion and resurrection, Satan rants the opposite of this –in other words- grief and death. For, with divine permission, the anti-Christ comes and blows like an East wind which drains the spring of the Holy Spirit and dries up His internal fountain inside man by depriving Him of all His fruit. This has always been the work of the devil: depriving man of all fruit in his life. This prophecy came true, literally, through the blowing of the Assyrian captivity from the East. It was such captivity that destroyed Israel and its capital Samaria entirely. This prophecy will come true again at the end of time when anti-Christ's wind blows from the East and it is named "The wind of the Lord" because it comes through permission from Him.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- 1) Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ came and completed the salvation for us to make our souls true brides to Him, i.e. in full fellowship and love
- 2) The Lord is the true physician of the church not the judge.
- 3) In the Second coming of Christ we are going to be joined to Him in the greatest feast in heaven.

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**NOVEMBER
THIRD SUNDAY**

**ENJOYING INTIMACY WITH GOD (I):
DEGREES OF INTIMACY (A)**

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

This is the first lesson in a five lesson series about the enjoyment of intimacy with God. In this lesson, the focus is on the degrees of intimacy.

MEMORY VERSE:

“No one can serve two masters” Matt. 6:24

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

INTRODUCTION:

Intimacy with God and the enjoyment of have several degrees. Who defines the level of this intimacy with God? It is made clear in the Holy Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, that man himself, decides the level of his intimacy with God. Now, every one of us has a relationship with God according to his own desire. But there might be a case where a person wants to have a deeper relationship. In this case we ask him/her if he/she is ready for the price and effort needed to qualify.

Nowadays, people are busy with the materialistic part of life but at the same time they hear about the beauty of having an intimate relationship with God. The problem is that they do not want to disconnect themselves from worldly matters. They want both God and the world with its joys. The Holy Bible says, “No one can serve two masters”, Matt 6:24. A person who is too

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deeply involved in worldly matters cannot enjoy an intimacy with God at the same time.

The Holy Bible explains that there are several degrees for this intimacy. In the Old Testament, we find four levels in God's relation with Moses and the people of Israel. In the New Testament, we find four levels in the Lord's relationship with his Disciples.

(A) Moses on the Mountain

God called Moses to come up the Mountain and enjoy an intimate relationship with Him. This happened twice and lasted for 40 days each time. When we study the degree of drawing nearer to God we find that there are four levels.

1. The Outer Circle

This time God was preparing Moses to receive the commandments. God asked Moses to prepare the people for His appearance on the Mountain but without coming near. (Exodus 19:11-12). "Let them be ready on the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around saying "Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death."

Why were the people of Israel not allowed to see God closer? The reason is that the events took place at the time of Moses' receipt of the commandments, when they were neither willing nor worthy. When Moses came down he found them worshipping a golden calf that was man made. Therefore they were only worthy of watching from afar, "the sight of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on top of the mountain" (Exodus 24:17).

2. The Second Circle

"Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elderly of Israel and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. "But on the nobles of the Children of Israel, He did not lay His hand. So they saw God and they ate and drank" Exodus (24:9-11).

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This group of people were more advanced than the rest and they saw the glory of God closer. They were happy with what they saw, ate and drank. But they were not worthy of a higher level than this because as we will later find out they had been pressured to join the others in creating the golden calf. They feared the people and found it in their hearts to leave God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

3. The Third Circle

“So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua and Moses went up to the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, “wait here for us until we come back to you.” Exo 24:13-14

In this circle, only Moses and Joshua were worthy. What did Joshua do to deserve being in this level? The Book says, “All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshipped, each man in his tent door. So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend and he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle” (Exo 33:10-11).

In spite of his responsibilities, Joshua used to come back to the tabernacle where the Lord appeared. It resembled the church. Joshua wanted to be in the Holy place where God is present. He defined the way for everyone who wants to enjoy an intimacy with God by continuing to be present at church during the services, not as a habit or for passing time but in longing to be in the presence of God. Hail to the church which is the house of angels. Every time a person comes to church he receives a certain blessing. He comes in burdened with problems and leaves it relaxed and in peace.

4. The Inner Circle

“Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain. Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel” (Exo 24:15-17).

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The same book of Exodus speaks about the relation between God and Moses in the inner circle saying: “The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11). Is there a closer relationship – a friend speaking to the other face to face?

Moses proceeded in his friendship with God, “Now, therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in your sight, show me now your way, that I may know and that I may find grace in your sight. And consider that this nation is your people” (Exod 33:13). Moses tried to know all he could about his friend. His principles and objectives. The Lord argued with him and disclosed part of His inner nature.

In his enjoyment of God, Moses asked God, “Please show me your glory,” Exo 33:18. “Then He said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” But He said, “You cannot see my face for no man shall see me, and live.” And the Lord said, “Here is a place by me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while my glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with my hand while I pass by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (Exo 33:19-23).

“Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses’ hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him” (Exo 34:29).

That was a reflection of part of the glory of God on Moses’ face. Why was Moses alone chosen to be in this inner circle?

The answer is that God, who examines the heart, found that Moses had a heart which is loving and ready to sacrifice for others. He was a prince in the Palace of Pharaoh and preferred to be cast out with the people of God than to enjoy the life in the palace. This is a great love. In another situation, in the book of Exodus, when the people wanted to worship the golden calf, the Lord was very angry and told Moses, “Now therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.” Exo 32:10. Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said, “Lord, why does your wrath burn not against your people

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whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.” Exo 32:11 Then Moses said to God, “Yet now, if you will forgive their sin but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which you have written” (Exo 32:33).

An important question:

If you were living at the same time, in which group would you be in your closeness to God? Would you be with the majority of the people? Would you be with the 74 persons? Would you be with the 2 or would you be with the one?

We know that God has no preferences, but these 3 were worthy to be chosen for his level due to their love and quick response to His love. “For whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and mother” (Mark 3:35).

Why did John deserve that special place on the Lord’s Chest? It was his love that entitled him to reach this stage and deserve to be called “the disciple who Jesus loved.” The Lord loved John more than the others because John loved Jesus more than the others. The exchange of love and trust is the basis for any strong relationship.

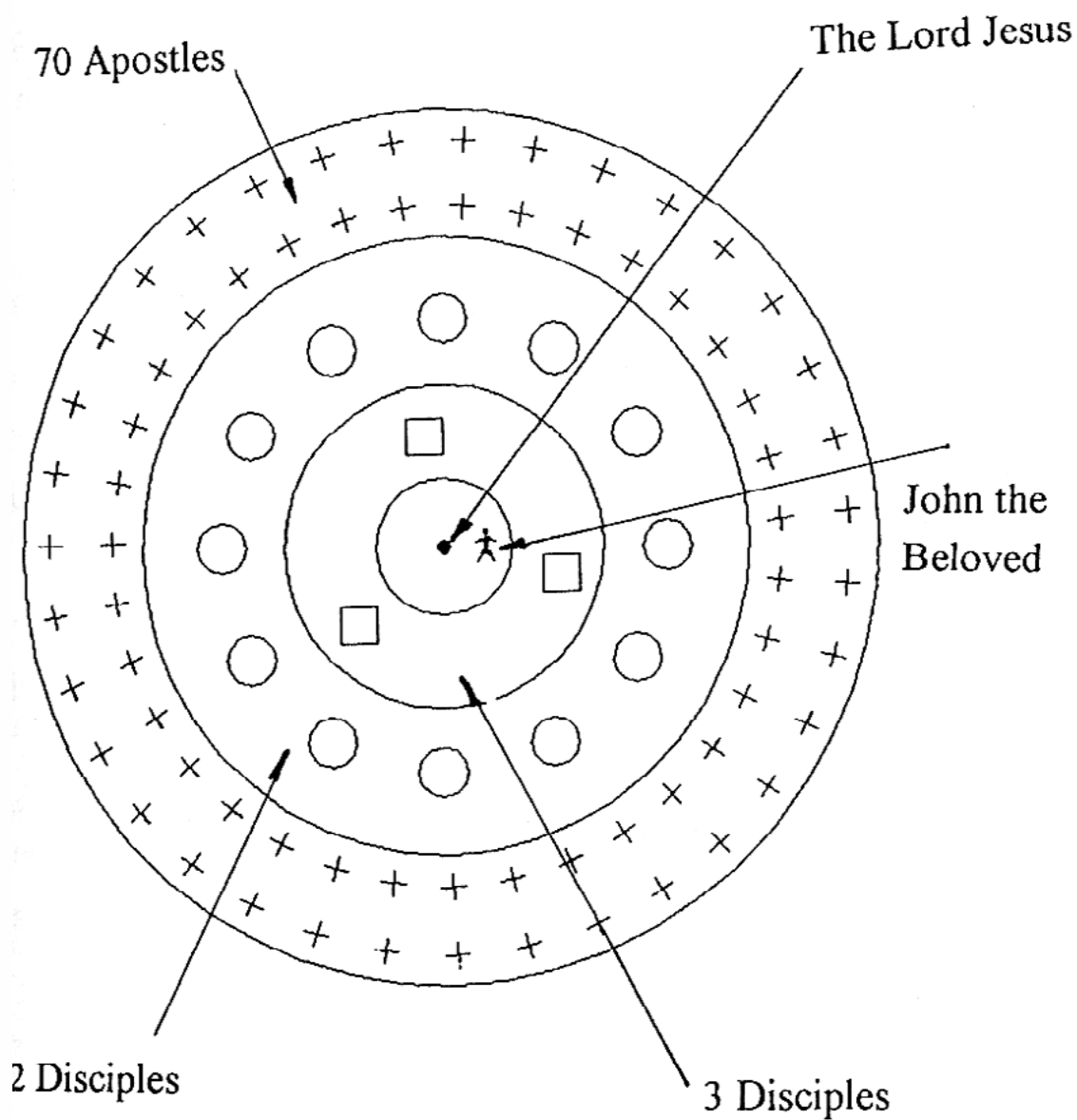
This place is available to anyone who wants to enter the school of love and proceed in it until his heart is filled.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) The individual according to his or her deeds determines the level of intimacy with God. Everyone is completely free.
- (2) Life is filled with choices. If someone chooses God to be his or her first priority and does what it takes (in terms of prayers, repentance, reading the scriptures...etc.)? Then God will be welcoming to him or her. Then it is an enjoyment from this point on.
- (3) Joshua stayed in the tabernacle and did not depart from it at all. He deserved to be with Moses in an inner circle of intimacy. We too, by being regular members of our church services, can enjoy intimacy with God.
- (4) When we love others and sacrifice some of our time or efforts to help someone, we find ourselves ready and become intimate with God. “God is love”.

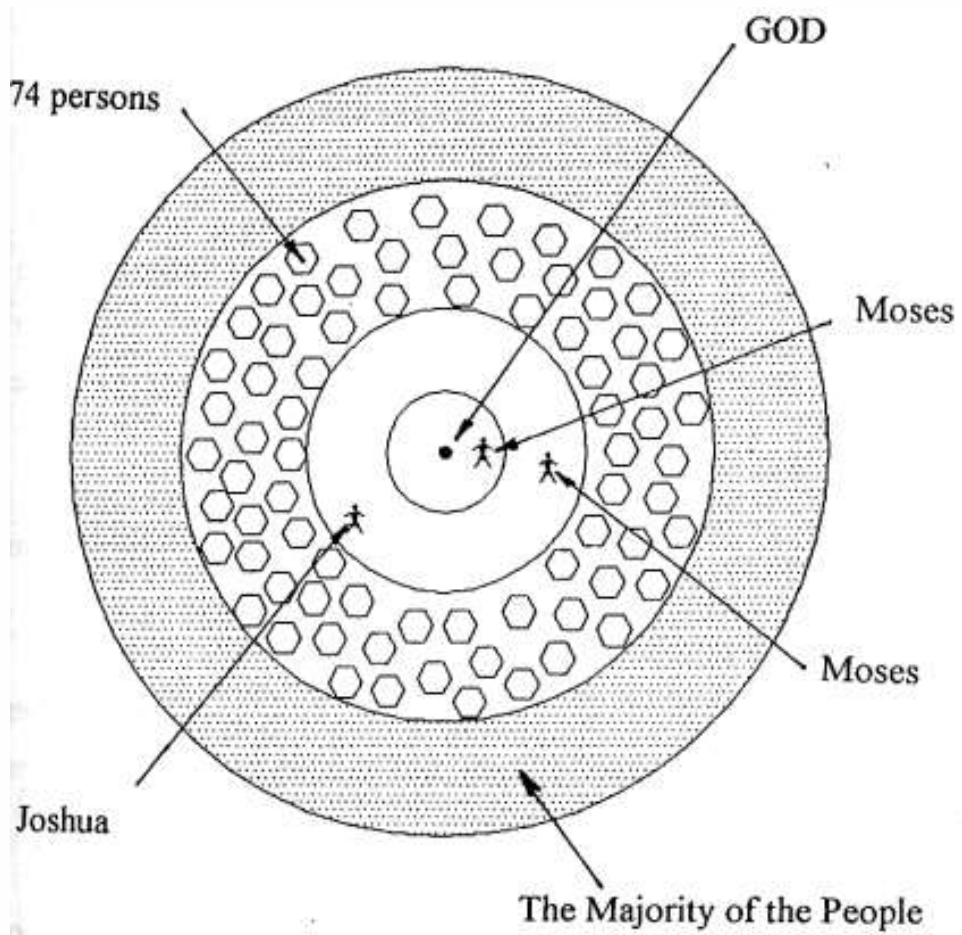
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**NOVEMBER
FOURTH SUNDAY**

**ENJOYING INTIMACY WITH GOD (II):
DEGREES OF INTIMACY (B)**

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a five-lesson series about the enjoyment of intimacy with God. In this lesson the focus is on the degrees of intimacy.

MEMORY VERSE:

*"So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son
Gen. 22:6*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and then continue on as follows:

(B) THE PERSONALITY OF ABRAHAM

After the flood, the people rebelled against God dealing with Him as an enemy not as a loving friend. But God, out of His love, did not turn His back on the people but searched among them until he found a person who was worthy to be a father for these people. This was Abraham, who was asked to leave his land and people to enjoy a strong relationship with God. Read the book of Genesis Chapter 12.

Abraham got used to giving up anything for the sake of God. He asked his nephew Lot to make a choice in order to keep the peace in the family. Lot chose to live beside Sodom where the evil was. While Abraham enjoyed the

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Lord's promises, "Lift your eyes now, and look from the place where you are-Northward, Southward, Eastward and Westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever" (Genesis 13:14-15).

Whenever Abraham moved he built a tent and an altar. A tent for his lodging and an altar to offer prayers and thanks to his beloved companion and Shepherd.

When Abraham heard that the enemies destroyed Sodom and took his nephew Lot and all his belonging as prisoners, he went and fought hard until he conquered them with the power of God. He refused to take any worldly rewards for his triumph at war.

For this reason, the Lord rewarded him an intimate relationship with God and a promise that he would have children as the stars in the sky who are going to bless the nations. Read the Book of Genesis Chapter 15.

Through this intimacy with God, Abraham was called God's friend. In His speech with Israel, the Lord said, "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham my friend" (Isa 41:8). This term, "The friend of God" was mentioned by St. James the Apostle when he talked about Abraham. "And he was called the friend of God" (James 2:23). This unique friendship reveals the Lord's love to His children. The Lord visited Abraham accompanied by two angels at Mentrá and promised him a son. He also discussed the situation of Sodom and Gomorra with him. The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing" (Gen 18:17).

✠What is the secret of this intimate relationship between God and Abraham?

The secret is his deep faith which made him act in a superior manner when handling the incidents that passed by him. The more blessings he received, the more thankful he was to the Lord without being attached to the blessings themselves. As to the difficulties he faced, they made him more appreciated by all. When he received with joy the birth of his son Isaac, though he was in old age, he was asked by the Lord to offer him as a sacrifice of love. However, Abraham and his son succeeded in that test and were ready to go ahead with it, "So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife and the two of them went together" (Gen 22:6). At the right time, the Angel of the Lord called Abraham,

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“Abraham, do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Gen 22:11-12.

INTIMACY CAN BE FORTIFIED AND CAN BE RESTORED:

1. The intimacy with God should be well kept because it could be affected by sins

committed by man. When the Bible talked about the Church of Ephesus He said, “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil... and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary” (Revelation 2:2-3). But in spite of all these efforts and sacrifices, the Lord warns the church of Ephesus of losing everything if they do not go back to their old ways. “Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have lost your first love, remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp stand from its place-unless you repent” (Revelation 2:4-5).

Therefore, if a person lacks love, which is the basis of the relationship with God, then all these works and efforts done in the name of God would be useless and he could lose his friendship with God.

2. **The Holy Bible and the book of Psalms tell us about David the Prophet** who had a deep relationship with God which lasted for a long time amidst difficult times. Let us read some of the words of love from David to God. “I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer. My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies” (Psalm 18-1-3).

“I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope” (Psalm 16:8-9).

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Though I walk

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through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalms 23:1-4).

The problem is being reckless and not careful. David, who reached a high level in his relationship with God, and who was described by God in the Holy Bible as, “I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22). But in a moment of haste, “Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the King’s house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, “Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” Then David sent messengers, and took her, and she came to him and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity, and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, so she sent and told David, and said, “I am with child” (2 Samuel 11:2-5).

After committing adultery ... “then in the morning it was so that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand to Uriah. And he wrote in the letter saying, “Set Uriah in the fore-front of the hottest battles and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die... and some of the people of the servants of David fell; and Uriah the Hittite died also” (2 Samuel 11:14-17).

“Therefore, beware all men, for she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men” (Proverbs 7:26).

But did the glory of David finish at that and did his relationship with God come to an end with this great sin? Will there be a way to come back to God again? Was David able to return to his relationship of love with God? **YES**. David found his way back to God and he taught us the way. He truly repented as Psalms 51 describes. In the Arabic version of the Bible this Psalm is titled “To the Chief Musician, a Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone to Bathsheba” i.e. After coming back from the darkness of sin – from the farthest circle again into the intimacy with God the Father.

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your loving kindness; according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You only have I sinned, and

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done this evil in your sight that you may be found just when you speak. And blameless when you judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts and the hidden part you will make me to know wisdom.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones which you have broken may rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with your generous spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners shall be converted to you. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God the God of my salvation and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

O Lord open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise. For you do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it. You do not delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. This O God, You will not despise. Do well In Your good pleasure to Zion, build walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar” (Psalms 51).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) In every generation, there are some people who enjoy close intimacy with God. Even in the dark world that we live in now with all the heresies and false teachings.
- (2) When we give up something for the sake of God, we enter into closeness and intimacy with Him, just as Abraham did.
- (3) The quality of loving others is key to getting close to God. “God is love”.
- (4) Even if we reached close intimacy in our relationship with God, we still have to be careful because we may lose it by being attracted to the lusts of this world.

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Fourth Sunday

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**DECEMBER
FIRST SUNDAY**

**ENJOYING INTIMACY WITH GOD (III):
THE GIFTS OF INTIMACY (A)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the third lesson in five lesson series about the enjoyment of intimacy with God. In this lesson the focus is on the gifts of intimacy.

MEMORY VERSE:

"I give unto you power to tread on Serpents and scorpions... Luke 10:19

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Please start by reviewing the previous two lessons.

INTRODUCTION

In the previous two lessons we covered the following points:

1. There are different levels of intimacy with God as described in the Holy Bible in both Testaments. Examples: Moses was the only one from Israel who was permitted to climb up the mountain and meet with God. Also, among the Disciples of Our Lord Jesus, we find that John the Beloved rests on the Lord's chest.
2. These different levels of intimacy with God depend on the necessity of the individual's satisfaction for a harmonious intimacy with God and on the level of readiness of the individual's heart to react to God's love. It also

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depends on man's response to God's frequent calls, with the hope that the individual will respond to God's love and give Him the first priority and by loving God in return with all his heart and soul.

3. In our study of Abraham's character, the father of fathers, we found in him complete obedience and complete dependence on God. Therefore, he was named the Friend of God and he was able to obtain a promise from God that he would have children from Sarah in her old age, and that from his children the earth would be blessed.
4. In our study of David's character, we found that intimacy with God can decrease by the fall of man in sin, so he turns away from the intimacy with God who loved him. When David fell in sin, he knew the way back to the Father's bosom and restored the friendship with God through his repentance and by asking for forgiveness from God who is always ready to accept a sinner.

We will concentrate on the gifts and blessings of the intimacy with God that the individual is blessed with. We summarize them as follows:

1. Through intimacy with God the person enjoys true strength.
2. Through intimacy with God the person enjoys Christian completeness.
3. Through intimacy with God the person can give God successful spiritual service.
4. Through intimacy with God the person can see the benevolence of God.
5. Through intimacy with God the person can have victory over the devil.

Let us now talk about these gifts in detail.

1. THROUGH INTIMACY WITH GOD THE PERSON ENJOYS TRUE STRENGTH.

When the Lord Jesus chose His Disciples, none of them were in a very prominent position or had a lot of money or a great deal of education. But how did God, the Lord Jesus Christ, qualify them for this important and difficult task - the mission of spreading Christianity to the whole world through hard times and among hard-hearted Jews, among Romans who were arrogant, and among ancient Greeks who were strong in their beliefs and had many philosophies? How were these simple Disciples able to perform this difficult task? The answer is that through their intimacy with Christ, they had the inner strength and power to perform all the

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missionary tasks and also the power over evil spirits and the healing of sick people. “After these things, the Lord appointed another seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face ... Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes ... And heal the sick... He that hearth you hearth me; and he that despises you despised me...And the seventy returned again with joy saying Lord even the devils are subject unto us through thy name ...Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:1-20).

“And when he called unto Him His twelve Disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. ... Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received freely give. Provide neither good nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves ... Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: ... They will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speak in you” (Matthew 10:1-20).

And in fact, the Disciples and the apostles went around the world. Those, whose voices could not be heard, went out and laudably spoke to all people. They did not fear death. They did not fear beating, prison or exile. What is all this power? And from where did it come? All this power came from their intimacy with the Lord Jesus. It is from the well of the Holy Spirit that they received on the fiftieth day. Wouldn't you like, my dear reader, to enjoy this inner strength – the true strength that expels fear? Live with God and be protected by Him. Exchange love with Him and be His student. Listen to what He says in the Holy Bible and live by it. Guard well the most precious gift God gave you which is the Holy Spirit so that His light does not go out. Do not be stubborn with the Spirit of God inside you but be obedient to Him.

What can we say about the strong power that was given to St. Paul? God said about St. Paul “he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake” (Acts 9:15-16).

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St. Paul's name was Saul "And Saul, yet breathing out threatening and slaughter against the Disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest. And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2).

The hatred in Saul's heart for Christians was immense. How can his heart change completely and all this negative power against the church be transformed into a positive power? He met with the Lord Jesus: "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecute thou me?" And he said, whom art thou Lord? And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutes, it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" And he trembling and astonished said, Lord what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, "Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." Acts 9:3-6.

After he was baptized by Ananias, Saul became Paul and he endured many tribulations because he preached more than any of the other Disciples, in spite of the fact that he had many physical sicknesses. But strength does not lie in the body: it is a gift given from God to those who love Him. How many people have physical health and all possess materialistic things yet their hearts are full of fear and weaknesses and they easily get defeated by physical lust and fear of death? Remember how King Herod was disturbed by the birth of the Child Jesus and sent his soldiers to kill the children of Bethlehem who were two years or under? Remember how Akhab the bad King in the Old Testament came home depressed because he could not overcome the lust of ownership because he wanted to own the land of Nabot Alyazraili? And when Nabot Alyazraili refused to give him the land, Akhab went back to his home sad and crying.

God is the source of strength: "Every good gift and every perfect gift from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow nor turning" (James 1:17).

Remember Pope Athanasius the Apostolic who defended the Christians' belief against Arius the heretic. If it were not for Saint Athanasius, Christian belief in the whole world would have gone bad. When people said to him "the whole world is against you Athanasius" he replied; "And I am against the world". The intimacy of St. Athanasius with God started from his childhood and it was the source of this strength.

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2. THROUGH INTIMACY WITH GOD THE PERSON ENJOYS CHRISTIAN COMPLETENESS

The greatest desire of a father's heart is to see his son grow, develop, learn and become a person with a great heart. So it is with God, the heavenly Father, in our intimacy with Him. He becomes happy when He sees us developing spiritually and becoming complete without being less in anything. The Lord Jesus Himself said in His speech on the mountain; "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). God is absolute perfection, and our own perfection is relative. With our intimacy with God we develop in love and faith. We also develop in knowing the Son of God so we attain Christian perfection. "And he gave some, apostle; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edification of the body of Christ; 'till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him all things, which is the head, even Christ. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Ephesians 4:11-16. Notice here that when man reaches Christian perfection or elevated spiritual height it is associated with the "Knowledge of the Son of God" - verse 13.

We start our spiritual lives as children in spirit and then gradually mature to spiritual adulthood. This can only be reached if we are intimate with God and grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

We also note here that even spiritual adulthood has different levels and the Christian person should not stop. Once the person reaches one level, he/she should proceed to reach the next level up. "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection" (Hebrews 6:1).

Therefore, we have to develop our spiritual lives to very deep depths and ask for more knowledge of God. St. Paul explains to us how we can reach higher spiritual levels "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

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This is God's real purpose towards His children: to see them moving from glory to glory, from inner power to greater power, from knowledge of God to greater knowledge and from love of God to a deeper love of God. This internal change and development in the person is the work of the Holy Spirit inside us. He is the Spirit who guides, teaches and reminds the person of everything, and He is the one who makes this inner development inside the person. We can draw up an analogy between the work of the Holy Spirit and His contribution in the development of the spirit of man to the development of the physical body. When a person eats regular food, his body grows through the different functions of the body, then the body transforms this food to cells in the body and the development of bones, and skin and gives energy to the whole body so that it may function properly. All this takes place without us feeling anything. We only see the food and then it is transformed to different forms inside the body. Likewise, the work of the Holy Spirit, when He works inside us, He enables us to gradually develop and reach a certain level of Christian perfection. Then we grow to another level and so on. All this happens because we know the Lord Jesus Christ, and our intimacy with Him and the works of the Holy Spirit inside us is the greatest gift to man. Therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ asked from His Disciples and commanded them "that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father which said he ye have heard of me" (Acts 1:4). And truly, this happened by the Holy Spirit descending on the Disciples on the fiftieth day. We see, for example how Peter was transformed from the person who was afraid in front of the slave and denied the Lord Jesus, to Peter who, with one sermon was able to convert 3000 people. He was also martyred for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the prayer for the dead, the priest prays and says "God, grant us the Christian perfection that pleases Thou".

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- 1) God is the source of all powers. He gives us inner power that would make fear of death, sickness and various other problems disappear.
- 2) Through the inner strength that we get from our intimacy with God, we can achieve more in our lives under the most difficult conditions.
- 3) Our intimacy with God will give us growth in love, service, purity, understanding and faith.
- 4) The Holy Spirit in us can carry us to deep levels of Christianity dependent on our obedience and faith.

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**DECEMBER
SECOND SUNDAY**

**ENJOYING INTIMACY WITH GOD (IV):
THE GIFTS OF INTIMACY (B)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the fourth lesson in a five lesson series about the enjoyment of intimacy with God. In this lesson the focus is on the gifts of intimacy.

MEMORY VERSE:

"... Feed my sheep ..." John 21:17

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lessons on the subject, and then continue on as follows:

**3. THROUGH INTIMACY WITH GOD THE PERSON CAN GIVE GOD
SUCCESSFUL SPIRITUAL SERVICE**

In the field of serving the Lord successfully, the server himself must have a true intimate relationship with God. He exchanges love with God and starts to talk to other people about his experience that he enjoys so much. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus talked with His disciple Peter, He put this love, the love between the servant and God, as the only condition for successful service. He said to Peter three times "Simon, son of Jonas, loves thou me ... Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). There is no alternative for this love as the foundation for building a successful spiritual service on any level: whether that be the church service, the service of the

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husband to his family, the service of the wife to her family, the service of children to their parents or any other type of service.

Since this foundation exists, (i.e. love), then God selects the type of service suitable for that particular servant. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” John 15:16. We find some people asking for certain positions in the church while the true service is the one that God chooses for the individual and the one to which he calls him/her. The individual does not choose for himself a position in the church: “But whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever of you will be the chiefs, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10: 43-45).

Examples:

- a. Before Moses was able to lead the Israelites from Egypt, the land of slavery, he had to be qualified by God in order to be able to take on such a difficult task: for all the wisdom of the Egyptians that he learned in the house of the Pharaoh was not adequate enough to serve the people of God. God had arranged for him to stay in the desert where he was in recluse with God and where he was spiritually trained and refined with a type of training different from the one he had already received in the house of the Pharaoh. In the desert school, where he was alone with God, Moses graduated and was qualified to lead the people of God from Egypt and stood before the Pharaoh of Egypt with the strength of God supporting him.
- b. St. Paul, in his service, was educated by a famous Jewish teacher called Ghalamail. But his service needed the kind of education that results from a direct relationship with God in recluse. “But when it pleased God who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem ...” (Gal 1:15-18).

From the service of Moses and Paul the Apostle, it is clear that the basic training for each one of them was a personal relationship with God. In this training period, God does not overlook anything and does not hasten to get the person trained. That is why the servant graduates as a true servant, humble and loving and able to carry the cross of service gladly and wash the feet of the people he serves as the

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Lord Jesus did “He rise from supper, and laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the Disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded” (John 13:4-5).

Therefore, my dear reader, if you looked at the service of one of the servants and found that it is strong, then you would know that it is the blessing of God. This individual must have a good intimate relationship with God that led him to this successful service.

4. THROUGH INTIMACY WITH GOD THE PERSON CAN SEE THE BENEVOLENCE OF GOD

The human being cannot appreciate the greatness of God, even partially, unless he/she enters the depth of intimacy with God. He/she then discovers the endless love of God towards people and His eternal greatness. The prophet Isaiah recorded what he felt in his vision when he saw the revelations of God to him “The said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” Isaiah 6:5. At this moment, God purified him and drew him closer “Then flew one of the seraphim’s unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged” (Isaiah 6:6-7).

After this, the prophet Isaiah was given by the Spirit of God and by the strength of his intimacy with God, which purified him, the prophecy to write chapter 40. Recorded in it is the most powerful description of God’s greatness. This was done after Isaiah entered into the deepest depths in his intimacy with God and after God had sanctified his lips in order to be able to utter those magnificent words about God’s whole power and greatness.

Please read Chapter 40 of Isaiah the Prophet and note the following:

† God is great in His Mercy and Kindness: Isaiah 40:1-11

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, said your God. ... Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, ...that her iniquity is pardoned ... O’Zion that brings good tidings, get thee up into the high mountains; O Jerusalem, that brings good tidings, lift up thy

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voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him he shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isaiah 40:1-11).

† **God is Endless in His Power:**
Isaiah 40:12-31

“Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord or being his counselor ... And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn nor the beast thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. ... It is he that sits upon the circle of the earth, ... That bring the princes to nothing; he makes the judges of the earth as vanity ... Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bring out their host by number: he calls them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power, not one fails. ... The creator of the ends of the earth, fainted not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increased strength. Even the youths shall faint and be wearily, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40: 12-31).

Therefore, my dear reader, the closer you get to God, and enter further into the depth of intimacy with Him through strong prayers and reading of the Holy Bible and regular attendance of church, you will know more and more the greatness of God and realize that your previous knowledge about Him was inadequate. Your feelings toward Him will increase according to your level of depth, so that you may kneel to Him in the spirit and truth and worship Him with humbleness and obedience.

5. THROUGH INTIMACY WITH GOD THE PERSON CAN HAVE VICTORY OVER THE DEVIL.

The Holy Spirit plays a very important role in the devotion of the person’s heart to God, and in keeping him in this intimate relationship with Him. It is one thing for a person to enter into an intimate relationship with God, but maintaining it is another thing. The Holy Spirit must take a role in maintaining this relationship.

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“Walk in the Spirit” Gal. 5:16. When a person walks in the Spirit, he/she enjoys true freedom from slavery of the devil “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Gal. 5:1. Then St. Paul says, “For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty, only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” Gal. 5:13. When a person walks under the leadership of the Spirit of God, he will be victorious over any lust of the flesh, and the enemy will not be able to use these desires as a means of defeating the person and making him commit sin. “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusted against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, reveling, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Gal. 5:16-21. Man can overcome all these works of darkness if he walks in the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God gives the individual all the good fruits that belong to the Spirit of God: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” Gal. 5:22-23.

CONCLUSION:

St. Augustine summarizes everything we have talked about in this subject by saying: “O God, you have created us like you, so we shall not have any peace except with you.” Therefore the person remains weak and defeated by the devil, deprived from love and the true light as long as he is away from God. All this can change if he enjoys true intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- 1) The successful spiritual service of God (within the church or at home or in the society) stems from an actual experience of the servant with God. God Himself will train and qualify the person to serve.
- 2) Through intimacy with God, the person can witness to the true glory and love of God. The person will declare that his or her previous knowledge of God was minimal.
- 3) Through the action of the Holy Spirit, the person will be able to defeat Satan and stay victorious in intimacy with God.

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Second Sunday

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For the success
Of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

In his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

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Third Sunday



DECEMBER THIRD SUNDAY

ENJOYING INTIMACY WITH GOD (V) DEVELOPING AN INTIMACY WITH GOD

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

This is the fifth lesson in a five lesson series about the enjoyment of intimacy with God. In this lesson the focus is on the methods through which we can develop and maintain an intimacy with God.

MEMORY VERSE:

"... Do not worry about tomorrow" Matt. 6:34

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous four lessons on intimacy with God.

INTRODUCTION:

This is the third lesson on the subject of enjoying intimacy with God. In the first lesson we explained that there are different levels in the depth of intimacy with God, and we used many personalities from the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) to verify that; e.g. Moses and the people of Israel, Abraham, David, the 12 Disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the second lesson we mentioned the blessings of the intimacy with God, and we said that through it, a person can obtain true power and perfect Christianity. He can also live a victorious life over evil, and perform a successful spiritual service.

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Who does not like to enjoy all these blessings? Definitely everybody would want to, but the question is how could an earthly person, who is surrounded by many temptations of the world, overcome this attraction towards the world, and overcome the devil who never stops trying to tempt him and keep him away from God?

In this lesson we will explain, with the help of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that it is possible for a person to develop a deep intimacy with God if he is committed to the following:

1. The need to be convinced that the worldly matters and the devil's temptations bring suffering and pain here on earth and in heaven.
2. The need to repent and be protected by the blood of Christ.
3. The need of holy retreat and true worship.
4. The need to have fruits in our lives as an indication of abiding with God.
5. The need to have patience and endurance at times of difficulty.
6. The need for guidance from the Holy Spirit in the person.

Let us discuss some of these points in more detail.

- 1. The need to be convinced that the worldly matters and the devil's temptations bring suffering and pain here on earth and in heaven.**

The Worldly Matters:

- a. In the sermon of the mountain, which is the constitution of Christianity, Our Lord Jesus Christ forbid the concern about worldly matters "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body? What you will put on ..., which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ... Therefore, do not worry saying, 'what shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear?' ... But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow

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will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:25-34).

- b. The Holy Bible also explains that worrying about worldly matters deprives the person from responding to God’s loving voice, thus making him lose his eternity. “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come for all things are now ready’, but they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground and I must go and see it, I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them, I ask you have me excused’. Still another said, ‘I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come’, so that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant ‘I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper” (Luke 14:16-24).
- c. The Holy Bible also shows us that worldly matters can hinder or even choke the spiritual life as is written in the parable of the Sower, “And the ones that fell among morns are those who when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches and pleasures of life and bring no fruit to maturity.” Luke 8:14. Moreover, the caring about the body is enmity against God, “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Roman 8:6-7).
- d. Examples: Samson the great, who lost all his powers when he sat at the feet of Delilah. Lot, who suffered a lot when he chose to live near Sodom where the evil was. Solomon, who was fooled by the many women in his life and they even managed to turn his heart to worship idols. Demas, who quit the service with Paul the Apostle, for he loved the world. Judas Iskariot, the Lord’s disciple, who preferred 30 pieces of silver to his master and gave Him up to the Jews.

Satan’s Temptations:

Satan has many names; he is the Dragon, the Old Serpent, “He laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:2). He was also called the Prince of the Power of the air, the Spirit who works in the nations. “And you who were dead in trespasses

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and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the Spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:1-2).

He is also called the Tempter when he tempted Our Lord on the mountain, “And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry. Now the tempter came to Him” (Matthew 4:2-3).

He is also called the Complainer against the believers as he did in his experience with Job. He complained to God against Job. “The Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse you to your face’” (Job 1:10-11).

Satan is a liar and a murderer as Our Lord Jesus said to the Jews who refused His message, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Satan is fighting us through several means, especially our salvation, because he does not want us to be saved. As is mentioned in the parable of the Sower, “Those by the wayside are the ones who hear, then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12)

Satan is always opposing the faithful “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the Lord said to Satan, ‘the Lord rebuke you Satan’. The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you” (Zachariah 3:1-2).

The Holy Bible mentions many examples of people who were badly harmed by Satan and suffered serious disorders, and if he had his way he could have killed them. [Read Matthew 9:21, 17:18 – Mark 7:26, 29, 9:16 – Luke 4:33, 35, 8:27, 9:42, 13:16].

N.B. Today, we see many people who lost their physical health, their morals and happiness, due to their complete involvement in materialistic matters. Some people even took their lives because they found out how their lives were meaningless while they were deeply involved in the world and its temptation.

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How many persons our age were controlled by Satan until they lost their nerves and denied their faith and the church and lost everything?

Therefore, the truth should be firmly established in the Christian heart. Running after materialistic and worldly matters, and following the thoughts of the evil one, results in despair here on earth and the loss of eternal life.

2. The need to repent and be protected by the blood of Christ.

In the Book of Amos it is said, “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” Amos 3:3. The answer is No. Accordingly, how could God who is the complete purity, walk with an impure and sinful person, and have a close relationship with him?

The Holy Bible explains that sin is possible for both believers and non-believers. The believer did not get rid of sin completely, and he is still tempted and attacked by Satan. Therefore, falling in sin is possible and we find it in ourselves. “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murder, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:21-23). Then, how could God the pure, who hates sin, have a close relationship with man who is impure and sinful? The answer is that through the crucifixion of the Son of God, His blood purifies and heals the believer of all sin. Through the Blood of Christ, the believer could have an intimate relationship with God. That is why the purification through the Blood of Christ is so important and without it a person cannot reach intimacy with God.

The Holy Bible explains that the believer is justified by believing in Christ, “By Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses.” “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” Heb 8:12. And from the first epistle of St. John, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleans us from all sins. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write

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to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for us only but also for the whole world” (1 John 1:5-10, 2:2).

This part explains; only God is without sin, “God is light and in Him is no darkness.” It is possible for the believer to sin, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us ...If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. Nevertheless, a believer should hate sin and do his utmost effort to avoid it and should not give in to the pressures of sin. “My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin.” St. Paul explains the triumph of Our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross and the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer will give him power over sin. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” Romans 8:2. The encouraging fact is that, “if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.” The need for confession is also clear, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Therefore, it is clear from the readings mentioned above, that the way to true repentance is careful confession and receiving Holy Communion with a humble spirit. It would then be possible for a person to enjoy an intimate relationship with God the most pure.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. We must be convinced that worrying about worldly things will not only make our life miserable here on earth, but it will also make us lose eternal life.
2. We must be careful about the temptation of the devil.
3. Daily repentance is very important, coupled with seeking the mercy of God.
4. Regular partaking of the Holy Communion with all the preparations that it requires.

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Fourth Sunday



DECEMBER FOURTH SUNDAY

YES... THERE IS HOPE FOR THE FUTURE (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the first lesson in a two-lesson series about Christian hope, even in the hardest of conditions.

MEMORY VERSE:

“Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice...” Phil. 4:4

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Introduction: Is there any Hope?

Various problems face each and every one of us throughout our daily lives. Some of these problems are minor, such as trivial illness, a slight injury or a small loss of money. However, some of these problems are quite complicated and may arise suddenly. They may include things like a severe illness, when a family’s provider loses his/her job during a period of recession, when a change occurs in a family situation causing a hard time for one of the members, or, circumstances which separate a husband from his wife for reasons beyond their control, etc.

In this booklet we shall concentrate on the following question: “Is there any hope for a person experiencing an extremely difficult problem or, facing very bad circumstances?”

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According to the world, finding a solution for these difficult problems would occur through conducting studies and detailed analysis, followed by much thinking and consultation with social and psychological ‘experts’.

As a result, the person becomes a mentally disturbed human being and thus, a chain of difficulties is stimulated. Due to the fact that humans’ abilities are very limited, one finds that the person facing problems loses in areas other than that where the problems originated. Hence, the problems inflate uncontrollably causing that person to lose control of the situation, eventually breaking down and “drowning” as he/she faces this very troubling time. Consequently, the person ends up suffering from hysteria and a complete sense of loss. Therefore, the question: “Is there any hope in overcoming difficult problems?” can only be answered by “NO! There is no hope!”

As for God’s children, even though the problem seems difficult, and the circumstances harder and stronger than a person is able to cope with, there is a solution and there is hope; therefore, overcoming any type of difficulty, facing whatever it is, is a definite: “Yes!”

“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4).

In this lesson, we shall explain in a straightforward manner how a person going through a difficult situation, which is far beyond his/her capability to understand, can actually solve it. This can be fulfilled through the Holy Bible.

To clarify the above in a simpler form, we shall cover the following points:

- The three steps mentioned in St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians (Chapter 4:4-9) to get out of any problem.

First step: Concentration on Jesus’ image when praying.

Second step: Logical, positive thinking – as is shown in the Bible.

Third step: Positive actions – as those based on logical thinking.

- Praying.

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✠ **The three steps in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians:** (Chapter 4:4-9), as written in the Holy Bible.

The first step:

“Rejoice in the lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your Gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:4-7).

The second step:

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things.” (Phil. 4:8).

The third step:

“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” (Phil. 4:9).

Here is a summary of the three points:

- The 1st step is in concentrating in prayer.
- The 2nd step is in positive thinking.
- The 3rd step is in positive actions.

Note: Some people may think that the Holy Bible deals only with the spiritual life and the Heavenly Kingdom, and that it has nothing to do with the difficulties a human being undergoes in life. This however, is a short-sighted view since the Holy Bible does not ignore the daily turmoil one goes through; in fact, the Bible offers us God's words as spoken by His Holy prophets and preachers, for all the answers to the situations and difficulties a person faces. Furthermore, the Holy Bible is not just a history book, nor merely a book concerned with heavenly matters. It is also a manual for our daily lives.

Let us concentrate, as mentioned before, on Philippians 4:4-9 in order to clarify the following points:

The first step: Deep concentration on Jesus' image when praying.

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1. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again Rejoice! ... The Lord is near.” This shows us that no matter how impossible the problem one faces might be, he/she should make certain that no one steals his/her peace and happiness. This in itself works towards ending the problem, provided that the person concentrates completely on Jesus’ image, communicating all feelings and emotions to Him. As an example, we shall look at Peter the Disciple, and how he reacted when the wind raged around the boat causing it to come very close to sinking. Jesus made the Disciples get into the boat and go to the other side of the lake, while He sent the people away. After sending the people away He went up a hill by Himself to pray. When evening came, Jesus was there alone; and by this time, the boat was far out in the lake, tossed about by the waves, because the wind was blowing against it. Between three and six o’clock in the morning, Jesus came to His Disciples, walking on water. When they saw Him walking on the water, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost!” they said and screamed with fear. Jesus spoke to them at once. “Courage!” He said, “It is I, don’t be afraid.”

Then Peter spoke up, “Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you.” “Come,” answered Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on water towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid; he lost hope and started to sink. “Save me, Lord!” he cried. At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said; “How little faith you have! Why did you doubt?” They both climbed into the boat and the wind died down. The Disciples in the boat worshipped Jesus saying, “Truly you are the Son of God!” (Matthew 14:22-33).

Hence, it is obvious from this miracle that as long as Peter was concentrating on Jesus’ image, he was able to walk on the raging water with no difficulty, therefore, Peter’s concentration on Jesus made Jesus be with him. “The Lord is near.” Hence Jesus gave him a heavenly power, making it possible for him to walk on the water, (which is scientifically against the rules of nature) as Jesus Himself walked on the water.

Therefore, deep concentration on Jesus’ image when going through a complex problem will involve Jesus immediately, providing the person with strength to victoriously overcome the problem.

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2. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil. 4:6). God teaches us through St. Paul’s words saying: “Do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer... to God”. This is a message from a Father to His children that He will take care of them. They are engraved on His Palm, and that He will never deliver them to sadness, nor will He allow them to be disrupted by problems.

What then is required to overcome problems and attain the Lord’s help? Praying: asking, thanking and offering the troubling problems up to one’s Heavenly Father. I pray to my Heavenly Father asking Him and thanking Him for being with me, since I’m sure of His love for me. I offer my problems to my Father, like a child crying on his/her father’s or mother’s chest complaining about a certain issue. I go to my Father and tell Him: here is the problem that is bothering me. That is what Hezekiah the King did when the Assyrian King sent him a threatening message asking him to hand his city over, or else he would hit the city with a striking blow that would definitely eliminate all people.

What did Hezekiah do in response to this predicament? Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord and Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: “O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. It is true, O Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone fashioned by men’s hands. Now O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God” (2 Kings 19:14-19).

God’s answer about the Assyrian King was as follows: “By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city, declares the Lord. I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant.” That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning – there were all the dead bodies! So

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Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.

One day, while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Soharezzer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son, succeeded him as king (see 2 Kings 19:33-37).

To summarize the points mentioned above, all of these things will help you gain victory over your problems: concentrating on Jesus, praying, thanking Him for His love, your belief that He is with you, offering Him your problems with every detail, asking Him to interfere in solving it, rescuing you from your predicament. “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

As long as one concentrates on Jesus’ presence and not the problem, Jesus will immediately help the person and give him His peace, which is far beyond human comprehension, and will fill that person and will make his/her heart and mind praise God, with David saying: “Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge. I said to the Lord, You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing. A for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips. Lord you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure.”

“The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices, my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psalms 16:1-11).

The term “protect me” in this psalm means protect my heart and mind, my entrance and exit and everything I do. Examine the verse: “I am always aware of the Lord’s presence, He is near...” Does it mean that we

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are aware of Him, or is He near us? If David could answer and tell us he would say that: “God is everywhere and everything for me. I am aware of Him plus He is near me and He is everything to me.”

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. For the children of God, no matter how difficult the problems appear, there is always hope because, they rely on God.
2. Prayers is the solid foundation based on which everything will end for the best. In prayers, we must focus on Christ our Savior, seeking His mercy and compassion.
3. In our prayers, let us present our problems to God and leave the solution for Him. He knows best.

DECEMBER

Fifth Sunday



DECEMBER FIFTH SUNDAY

YES...THERE IS HOPE FOR THE FUTURE (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a two-lesson series about Christian hope, even in the hardest of conditions.

MEMORY VERSE:

“Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice...” Phil. 4:4

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and then proceed as follows:

The second step: Positive, logical thinking.

After connecting and concentrating on Jesus’ image, the heart and the mind become full and guarded through Godly care. Therefore, St. Paul says, “Finally brothers, whatever true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

There are six (6) points to note in order to achieve this positive thinking:

1. Honest thinking = No lying or cheating.
2. Noble thinking = Constructive not destructive.
3. Right thinking = No prejudice or favoritism.
4. Pure thinking = No lusts or negativity.

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5. Loving thinking = Full of a joyful spirit for everyone, not hatred for one's enemies.
6. Honorable thinking = Not hurting others or causing blame to others.

In the second chapter of this same letter to the Philippians, God speaks through St. Paul about Christian thinking, “Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others, your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:2-5).

It is obvious that this way of Christian thinking is full of truth, love, justice, etc. All these emotions make this Christian thinking totally different from the world's way of thinking, especially when facing problems. In the worldly solution, one needs only to remove himself or herself from the problem in any way possible, even if the way is built on competition, lying, selfishness, etc. – Why? The answer is simple, any thinking unaccompanied by God's love and care, cannot possibly allow one to think in a logical, Christian manner, but instead, the devil and all his satanic powers control his/her thinking.

Therefore, this circle of thinking that is guarded by God's love, is totally different from the circle controlled by the devil, where all of one's thoughts are jumbled up and incorrect.

Consequently, these thoughts go straight to the heart, and from there, inappropriate actions surface.

The third step: Positive actions based on logical thinking.

“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:9).

After deeply concentrating on our Savior's image during a difficult situation, praying, asking, thanking and offering the subject in detail to God, this will definitely make our Lord Jesus Christ interfere and help us. It is like walking with Him and holding His hand until the difficulty passes.

God would guard us and direct our thinking towards the correct *Christian thinking*. The definite step that would follow as a result would be a positive one, built on a

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strong foundation, enabling us to “stand up”, that is why the messenger said: “This I say you should do.”

Unfortunately, often times a person may be too hasty to get out of the bad circumstances; and they would do just about anything to solve it! At this point, what he or she would really have to do is pray heavily; think positive, think logically, then act accordingly – do not involve emotions, but instead, use God’s advice, and use what he/she learned from Church (as it was handed to us by many Prophets and Priests in the past). Life is handed over from one generation to another.

That is why St. Paul says: “What you have learned, received, heard and seen”. Hence, we should act wisely, taking into consideration the time factor. In other words act only when it is necessary for an action to occur. The time an act is performed and how it is performed is extremely crucial. The principle however, is the same: “an action should be built through the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and not on emotions or illogical thinking.” Proper thinking is built on the wisdom we have received from God.

“Who is wise and understand among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit impartial and insincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:13-18).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. We have to adopt a Christian way of thinking i.e. fair, honorable, truthful, pure, and joyful and not cause others to stumble.
2. We must develop a pro-active approach in taking actions after giving proper prayer and proper thinking as described in the lesson above.

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For the success
Of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

In his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

JANUARY

First Sunday



JANUARY FIRST SUNDAY

EMMANUEL: WHICH MEANS, "GOD IS WITH US"

Please read Matthew 2:1-12, Hebrew 1:1-2:4, the attached article entitled "God and Man" and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

In this lesson, we would like to show that the true meaning of Christmas is focused the on word "Emmanuel" which means 'God is with us.' When we realize that God is with us at all times, we will reject the sinful life and become very strong spiritually.

MEMORY VERSE

"Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel -Isaiah 7:14.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A) God is with us:

The name "Immanuel" which means God is with us is a beautiful name given to the Lord Jesus on His birth. This name is filled with comfort because it expresses God's love for us.

- ✠ The blessing of Christmas is this: we feel that Christ is God who is with us, in the midst of us, living with us and living in us.

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✠ God truly loved the human race a lot. He loved to give man the joy of being with Him and wanted the heart of man to be a dwelling place for Him. Since the beginning of creation, God created man in His image and wanted to dwell in his heart. Thousands of years went by, and our righteous Lord has been trying to find a place in man's heart. But all the people went astray and nobody desired to do good; not even one. So God did not find in their hearts a place for Him to dwell. How about me? God is looking in my heart and seeking to dwell in it, as the psalmist said: "This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell for I have desired it" (Psalm 132:14). "For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place" (Psalm 132:13).

(B) The dwelling of God with people:

✠ The dwelling of God with people and in the midst of them is an old story. It is the story of the Tabernacle of Meeting in which we see God is dwelling in the midst of His people. Or it is the story of the Ark of Covenant, which was a symbol of God's presence with people. As the dwelling of God with His people was expressed by the Tabernacle of Meeting, it is also expressed as the Heavenly Jerusalem of which the Bible said, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people, God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21:3). This meaning was expressed with a stronger analogy of His love: He said that He is the head and we are the members. St. Paul said about us as a church that we are, "the Body of Christ." This was what was meant by the Lord Christ when He said, "I am the vine, and you are the branches...." (John 15:5). It was also part of His long prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (John 17:23-26). So God wants you to abide in Him and Him in you.

✠ God, who came to the womb of St. Mary the Virgin to take flesh from her, also wants to come in your heart to fill it with love. The best house for God is in you. God is standing at the door of your heart asking you to open for Him (Rev. 3:2). He considers your body an altar for His Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). He wants to come into you to dwell with you and the Father. He said: "if anyone loves me he will keep my word; and My Father will love him, and will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). So God is insisting in dwelling in you, addressing your beloved soul with this beautiful expression "open for me, My sister, My love, My dove, My perfect one; for My head is covered with dew, My locks with the drops of the night" (Song of Solomon 5:2). This is to that extent God is waiting all this time, knocking on your door, bearing all suffering in order to come in and give you a real heavenly life.

JANUARY

First Sunday

✠ The expression “God is with us” is not meant to be that Immanuel is with us only during the period of His Incarnation. But it meant continuous presence of God with us. For this reason the Lord Jesus said, “I am with you always even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). He also said “for where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). And the Lord will continue to be with us in the endless eternity. He comforted us regarding this, when He said: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am there you may be also” (John 14:3).

✠ Is it to that extent O Lord? Yes. I want to dwell with you, reside in you; I find pleasure in dealing with you and in your friendship. I am Emmanuel which means God is with you.

✠ The blessing of Christmas concentrated on the expression “Emmanuel” which means God is with us. So if you feel at Christmas that you are with God and God is with you, then you are truly enjoying the blessings of Christmas. Do not think that Christmas is the end of fasting. Do not think that Christmas is just the day on which we have the joyful celebrations in the church with all the hymns. Christmas, from a spiritual point of view, is living with Immanuel who is “God is with us.” God wants nothing except to dwell in your heart. Please do not think that God wants anything else. You may tell God that you are going to give a lot of money to the poor, but He will say to you I want your heart. You may say to God I am going too fast and stop doing bad things. Then He will say I want your heart. You may say I am going to pray all night long. He will say if you prayed all night long and you did not give me your heart there is no use for your prayers. All your prayers and worship are external things if God is not dwelling in your heart.

✠ God wants to establish a friendship with you as the Bible said “and Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Gen 5:24). It is a beautiful scene when we imagine Enoch walking with God. It is amazing when we realize that God did not do without him and took him with Him.

(C)God in the life of the Saints:

Saints are used to experiencing God’s presence with them continuously. They used to see Him in front of them continuously. Remember Elijah when he said, “As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to Him today” (1 Kings 18:15). Who of us feels that he is standing continuously in front of God?

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David was also feeling the presence of God with him at all times, “I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8)

✠ The person who feels God is in front of him, cannot sin because he or she will feel ashamed from God. He or she will say that God is looking at me and God is hearing me, so I should not make mistakes. There is a story from the life of St. Abraam the Syrian. One time a woman wanted to commit adultery with him and she threatened him as if he didn't agree with her. He pretended that he agreed on one condition; that what they were going to do should be done in the city and in the midst of people. Then the woman asked, are you not going to be ashamed to commit adultery in front of people, while they are around us? Then the saint answered her, if you are ashamed of people are you not ashamed of God who looks at us and His eyes see everything? The words of the Saint were very effective on this woman and she repented.

✠ Every time one commits a sin he forgets that God is looking at him or her.

✠ Our feeling in the presence of Emmanuel, gives us courage and no fear. In the life of Joshua, God promised him that He would be with him as He was with Moses. Therefore Joshua was very strong and feared nothing. Hence the person who feels the presence of God, feels that he or she has great strength which eliminates all fear. If someone asked you a question and you become afraid and lied – why? What are you afraid of? Do you feel that God is protecting you? If you feel that God is protecting you, you should never fear anything (Psalm 27:1-3). The Saints were very courageous because of their strong feeling that Emmanuel is with them. When St. Paul was standing in front of kings, governors and rulers he was not afraid of them because he knew that they could not hurt him. In fact, they were the ones who were afraid of him (Acts 18:10).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. The true meaning of Christmas is Christ living in our hearts so that we can say: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).
2. When I am sure that God is looking at me at all times, and hearing me at all times, I will no longer be able to fall in sin, because I will be afraid to hurt God's feelings, who loves me a great deal.



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3. When I am sure that God is looking at me and He is so close to me, I will not be afraid of anything because He will support me with heavenly power.

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**JANUARY
SECOND SUNDAY**

**THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX
CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA (I)**

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

This is the first lesson in a series of two lessons about the main features of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. In this lesson, the focus is on the basis on which our Coptic Orthodox Church doctrine and curriculum are based.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

INTRODUCTION:

The Church of Alexandria is a very old and historic church. It was founded and blessed by Our Lord Jesus Christ when He visited the land of Egypt and stayed there for a period of His childhood with St. Mary and St. Joseph. Then St. Mark the Apostle, who was one of the seventy apostles, preached the Christian faith as he received it from Our Lord Jesus Christ. Since then, the church preserved the true faith in spite of the many pressures from heretics, governments, societies and the ceaseless work of the evil one. In return for this preservation, this church had many martyrs sacrificing their lives, more than any other church.

In these lessons, we would like to present the following:

1. The reference on which the church of Alexandria relies in its doctrine and curriculum.
2. The summary of this doctrine.
3. The curriculum of the church of Alexandria and its purpose.

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4. The main features of worship in the church which comply with the doctrine and curriculum.

The Reference that the Church of Alexandria Relies upon in its Doctrine and Curriculum.

St. Paul the Apostle says, “We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17).

If we examine St. Paul’s words to the Thessalonians we will find that they apply it to the church of Alexandria. It is the church chosen by God from the beginning for salvation by the sanctification of the Spirit and the belief in the truth. The word “stand fast” and the words “hold the tradition” prove that it is a steady church that does not change with time, neither in its doctrine, nor in its spirituality. The word “by word” and “epistle” prove that it is an Evangelical church (the written word) and a traditional church (the verbal teachings).

†The Church of Alexandria Depends on the Bible with Both of its Testaments:

The church of Alexandria believes everything that is in the two Testaments of the Bible, that it is a Holy Book, written by people filled and directed by the Holy Spirit, and that it is not a philosophical or scientific book (for mental fulfillment), but they are the words of God coming from Him so that man can live by them as an experience of meeting God and enjoying the work of the Holy Spirit. Since the 2nd century, the church of Alexandria was famous for its theological school which concentrated on the Bible and explained it as a whole, not depending on one verse and leaving another.

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✝ The Church of Alexandria Depends on Tradition:

The word “tradition” in the Greek language, as it came in the New Testament, is “Paradisos”. It does not mean “imitation” but it came with a sense of forwarding something to another person. This means receiving the life that the Disciples who lived with Our Lord Christ experienced. The Lord did not give His Disciples a written book, but He prepared them in a way to accept Him in their hearts. They had practical teachings from Him, then He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in each one of them. Accordingly St. Paul’s talks to the Philippians, he says: “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9). To the Corinthians he says: “I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions as I delivered them to you” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Therefore, the church of Alexandria is an evangelical, traditional and apostolic church, which depends on:

- a) the Holy Bible
- b) the tradition received from the saints
- c) The church’s worship at the time of the apostles.

All this produced a church with a steadfast doctrine and a particular curriculum.

1. Summary of the doctrine of the Church of Alexandria

- ✝ The church believes that God is one with no partner. He has three hypostasis: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and these three hypostasis are in One God.
- ✝ The church believes that Our Lord Jesus Christ the person is one nature as existing in the unity of His divinity and humanity without mixing or changing, or separating for one moment or a blink of an eye.
- ✝ The Holy Spirit comes forth from the Father only as Christ said, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will

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teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26).

- ✠ The Virgin Mary is the Mother of God (Theotokos) the Logos. She was born from Hanna and Joachim naturally like all humans. She is a great saint above all the heavenly powers and saint because the Logos was born from her through the Holy Spirit. She is the Mother of Our Savior. The Church believes in her virginity after the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ. After her death, her body ascended to heaven and the Disciples saw it.
- ✠ The Church believes in the intercession of the Virgin Mary and all the martyrs and saints and angels and the heavenly powers.

All that is mentioned in this summary is taken from the Creed that was published by the 3 Ecumenical Councils in Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus. We recite it in all our churches during the Holy Mass and individual prayers.

2. The Curriculum of the Church of Alexandria and its Purpose

The teachings of the church about worship is based on lifting the heart towards heaven without ignoring the human reality and daily life. These teachings bring the apostolic life and evangelical mind to modern man without any misinterpretation, giving him a deeply spiritual life. Is the church against the world? No. The Church’s job is to lead the world towards peace, towards heaven and eternity. It is not the Church’s job to stand against the world. The Church always prays in the mass for the salvation of the world. The church did not stand against those who personally produced the heresies, but against the heresies themselves and the bad ideas. God is Love and His church is a church of love to all. God wants all people to be saved and to have the knowledge of the truth, and so does the church.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Our church is an ancient one; established by our Lord Jesus’ visit to our homeland Egypt.
- (2) The Doctrine and Curriculum of our church are based on the Holy Bible and holy traditions.

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(3) Our church aims at lifting the heart towards heaven without ignoring the human reality, needs and daily life.

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**JANUARY
THIRD SUNDAY**

**THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX
CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA (II)**

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a series of two lessons about the main features of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. In this lesson the focus is on the main features of the church and how it affects the faith of the believers.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and then continue as follows:

4. The Main Features of Worship in the Church of Alexandria which complies with Doctrine and Curriculum

† A Church filled with prayers:

“You should pray all the time without boredom”. There are individual prayers, family prayers, and a person needs these prayers. Praying the Agbeya is a necessity for the believer to take his daily spiritual nourishment thus avoiding soul degradation. Prayer is the backbone of the spiritual life. It is a school where a person goes from the elementary stage (mind-wandering during prayer and unorganized) to a more advanced stage of loving affection shared continuously with God, like Abba Bishoy who used to tie his hair in the ceiling of his cell not to fall asleep during his prayers.

† An Ascetic church:

It is a church that laid the foundation of monasticism in the world. Abba Paula and Abba Antonios are the first monks. What is Monasticism? It is leaving the whole world for the sake of the One, Jesus Christ. Like Mary,

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who chose the better share that cannot be taken away from her and sat at the feet of the Savior, listening to His words.

† **A Church of Fasting:**

The understanding of fasting is “Repressing the body and enslaving it.” These are the days when the spirit rises without any hindrance and bodily demands. “This kind does not go out except with prayer and fasting.” Therefore, fasting with prayer is fortified power overcoming the evil one who keeps tempting man continuously. “Sanctify the fast”. Fasting is not only a change of food, but it is a way to lead a person to a holy life. There are many fasting occasions in the church: Advent, Lent, the fast of the Apostles, the fast of the Virgin Mary, the fast of Wednesday and Friday.

† **A Church Carrying the Cross Joyfully:**

The Cross is a sign of pride in the church “I should not be proud except for the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ”. The Cross is a sign of pain and triumph. Also “For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Romans 8:36). The church is filled with unutterable joy amid pain and persecution.

† **A Church that Celebrates and Honors Feasts:**

The feasts are happy spiritual occasions of blessings which the faithful enjoy.

- † 7 great feasts (The Annunciation, the Birth of Christ, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, the Resurrection and Pentecost).
- † 7 small feasts (Circumcision, The Lord’s entrance into the Temple, the Lord’s entrance into the Land of Egypt, the Wedding of Cana of Galilee, the Transfiguration, Maundy Thursday and Thomas’s Sunday).
- † The feasts of saints during which we sing rejoicing hymns to these saints and ask for their intercession e.g. the feasts of St. Mary, St. George, etc.
- † The feasts of Angels and heavenly hosts during which we rejoice and ask for their intercession e.g. the feast of Archangel Michael.
- † The two feasts of the Cross, the sign of Christians.

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† The Coptic New Year, the year of the martyrs.

† A Church of Seven Sacraments:

What is a sacrament? It is a heavenly blessing, above any conception, which is unseen, and is given through the Holy Spirit during prayers. Only an authorized priest can perform the sacrament according to certain rituals.

a) The Sacrament of Baptism:

This is the new birth from water and the Holy Spirit. It rids the person of the original sin and all the other sins committed up to the time of Baptism. The word “Baptismos” is Greek and it means “dye”, this is the reason for the complete immersion during Baptism. “Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12).

“Therefore, we were Buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

b) The Sacrament of the Holy Chrism:

This is the sacrament of confirmation in the church which is the body of Christ. Through it the believer accepts the gifts of the Holy Spirit and becomes a temple for the Holy Spirit which dwells in him. This sacrament is received immediately after Baptism. The Holy Chrism was first made by the Apostles from the scents that were prepared for the body of Christ after His burial (Luke 23:56 and 24:1).

c) The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession:

In this sacrament the faithful are reconciled with God to receive forgiveness of the sins they committed after baptism. Repentance and confession are a return to the fortress of the Father and a renewal of the Sonship relation. It is a second baptism. Confession was practiced by the church since the first century was mentioned in the Book of Acts. “And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds” (Acts 19:18).

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The priest who receives the confessions is called “Father of confession”. When the priest is ordained he receives the power that the Lord Christ gave His Disciples to hold and release all the ties of darkness. “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Matthew 18:18. Also in John 20:22-23 “And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit, If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

d) The Sacrament of the Eucharist:

This is called the sacrament of sacraments, because during this the bread and wine are changed into the true body and the true blood of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The believer becomes worthy to have eternal life through this sacrament. “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead, he who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:53-58).

According to the first Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians chapter 11:27-29 “Therefore, whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in any unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of the cup”. The believer has to be ready for communion by repentance, confession, fasting and humility.

There are three divine liturgies in the church: The Basilian Liturgy, the Gregorian Liturgy, and the Cyrillian Liturgy.

A Word about the Coptic Language:

The Coptic language is an extension and development of the old Egyptian language. The Greek language also took some of the Alphabets of the same old language. By the middle of the second century B.C. the Greek language was the official language, because it was used in the cultural circles at that time. When the Copts wrote down their language, they used the Greek alphabet and added 7

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characters from the old Egyptian language which express certain sounds not found in the Greek language.

I wish we could preserve our original Coptic language. Did you know that the most accurate translation of the Holy Bible is written in the Coptic language? Did you know, dear reader, that there are some Coptic words regarding theological aspects that cannot be translated into any other language accurately?

A Word about Coptic Art:

The origin of this art is the Old Egyptian Art (the Art of the Pharaohs known for its richness and glamour). When Christianity was spread in the world, it did not change the cultures, art and folklore already present. But when Christianity came into Egypt there was already a Byzantine influence on the old Egyptian Art. Soon the Coptic art restored its own character.

A Word about Coptic music:

As it is with Coptic art, Coptic music is an extension of the old Egyptian music. It depends on vocal music; for this reason you will not find musical instruments, because the hymns depend on them when they are sung.

e) The Sacrament of the Unction of the Sick:

In this sacrament the priest prays on the ointment and anoints the sick person, whether he is physically or spiritually sick. This is in accordance with St. James when he said, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" James 5:14-15. "Anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them" (Mark 6:13).

f) The Sacrament of Marriage:

Through this sacrament the man and woman become one through the power of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly the marriage is considered to be a holy

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sacrament and a symbol of the unity of Christ and the church. From the start we find in Genesis 2:18-24 “And the Lord said, It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper comparable to him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh”.

Our Lord Jesus Christ takes us back to this quotation in Genesis as is mentioned in the Gospel of St. Mark chapter 19:1-9.

Therefore, the Christian marriage is a complete unity and divorce is not possible except in the case of adultery, “What God has join together, let no man separate” (Matt 19:6).

Therefore, marriage should be preceded by prayers and serious consideration as well as asking for the guidance of your father of confession and the consent of your family.

g) The Sacrament of the Holy Orders:

In this sacrament, the Holy Spirit grants the submitting person the ability to concentrate his life to serve the Lord by giving him 3 positions:

- The Episcopal position (which represents 3 ranks: the bishop, the archbishop and the Pope)
- The Ministry position (which represents 2 ranks: the priest and the archpriest).
- The diaconship position (which represents the deacon, the archdeacon, the psalmist, the epasaltos and the anagnost).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) The life of all believers is founded on deep prayers.
- (2) Our church is an ascetic church with many fasting periods.
- (3) The church has carried her Cross throughout history with complete joy.
- (4) We believe and practice the seven Sacraments.

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(5) We must learn the Coptic language.

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**JANUARY
FOURTH SUNDAY**

**PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (IV):
JOCHEBED - CIVIL AUTHORITY**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the first lesson in a two lesson series about Jochebed the mother of Moses the prophet. The emphasis here is on the importance of justice within the civil authority system.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) Who is “Jochebed”?

We read about her in the Book of “Exodus”.

“Now **Amram** took for himself **Jochebed** his father’s sister, as wife; and she bore him Aaron and Moses. And the years of the life of **Amram** were one hundred and thirty seven.”

Also, we read about her in the Book of “Numbers”.

“And these are those who were numbered of the Levites according to their families: of Gershon, the family of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the family of the Kohathites; of Merari, the family of the Merarites. These are the families of the Levites; the family of the Libnites, the family of the Hebronites, the family of the Mahlits, the family of the Mushites and the family of Korathites. And Kohath begot **Amram**. The name of Amram’s wife was Jochebed the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and to **Amram** she bore **Aaron** and **Moses** and their sister **Miriam**” (Num.26:57-59).

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Therefore, she was a Levite, born in Egypt, and became the wife of **Amram**, grandson of Levi, son of Jacob. From this tribe of Levi descended the Levites who thereafter were entrusted with the responsibility of serving the Temple. Jochebed is the mother of Aaron the Priest, who became the founder of the Hebrew Priesthood. His service extended for almost 40 years. She is also the mother of Miriam, who led the children of Israel amid the chanting and praises after they crossed the Red Sea fleeing from the face of Pharaoh. The motherhood of Jochebed to Moses and the influence of her personality on his upbringing constitute a basic theme that is discussed in this booklet.

(B) **“Jochebed” was good-looking:**

On three different occasions, we find references in the Holy Bible to the child **Moses**, son of **Jochebed**, as having been “good-looking”:

†(Ex.2:2): “So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a ‘beautiful child’, she hid him three months.”

†(Acts7:20): “At this time **Moses** was born and “was well pleasing to God: (Exceedingly fair” according to ‘Old King James’); and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months.”

†(Hebrews 11:23): “By faith **Moses**, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because “they saw he was a beautiful child”; they were not afraid of the King’s command.”

It is to be deduced that the child **Moses**, who is thrice described in the Holy Bible as having been “beautiful” and “exceedingly fair”, must have been born to a “beautiful” mother, or, to say the least, “good-looking”. Such a “good-looking” outward appearance would not have mattered in the least, had it not been that the inner self of that person was likewise “beautiful” (“pleasing to God”), reflecting a great personality and an unswerving faith, as will be seen from the sequence of events.

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- (C) **The circumstances surrounding the Prophet Moses' birth, and the part played by his mother "Jochebed" and four other women, in rescuing him:**

†**"Pharaoh" orders the killing of the male children of the Hebrews:**

(Ex.1:8-22): "Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, 'Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply; and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.'

Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel.

So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage-in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor.

Then the King of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one was **Shiphrah** and the name of the other **Puah**; and he said; 'When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birth stools, if it is a son, then she shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.'

But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but kept the male children alive. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this thing, and kept the male children alive?'

And the midwives said to Pharaoh: 'because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: for they are lively and give birth before the midwives come to them.' Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. And so it was, because the midwives feared God that He provided households for them. So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, 'Every son who is born you shall cast into the river and every daughter you shall save alive.'

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Such were the circumstances surrounding the birth of Moses: every male child of the Hebrews is killed by the Egyptians by casting him into the river as commanded by Pharaoh, who was furious at the Hebrew people. What does this bring to our remembrance? It reminds us of “Herod the King” who, having been exceedingly enraged by the birth of the Lord Christ, ordered that the male children of Bethlehem, from two years old and under, to be killed. In either case, both Pharaoh and Herod were symbol of Satan, who becomes perturbed and enraged by every good deed, and relentlessly strives to achieve his wicked ends through violence and assassination.

But, did “Satan”, with all his evil forces, succeed in overcoming the “**Good**” and all his resplendent powers? Neither did Pharaoh, nor did Herod, subsequently. Until this day, Satan is desperately trying, to no avail, to confront and overpower the children of God; but all his attempts are doomed to failure because the children of God are under His Mighty protection! Pharaoh decreed that the male children born to the Hebrews be killed; this included the child **Moses**. Let us reflect on how Pharaoh was defeated and the child Moses survived!

† The rescue of the child ‘Moses’ is preordained by the Lord:

In (Exodus Chapter 2:1-10): “And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months. But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s bank.

And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him. Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, ‘This is one of the Hebrews’ children’.

Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, ‘Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?’ And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her: ‘Go’. So the maiden went and called the child’s mother. Then Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.’ So the woman took

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the child and nursed him. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So, she called his name 'Moses', saying: 'Because I drew him out of the water.'

† Five women contribute to the rescue of 'Moses':

1. **"The Two Midwives"**: Pharaoh summoned unto him the two Hebrew Midwives **Shiphrah** and **Puah**, and commanded them to kill every male child upon his birth, saving alive the daughters. "But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the King of Egypt commanded them." Here, let us reflect on the fact that the midwives were **"Hebrew"**, and **"feared God."**

The description "Hebrew" applies to the original Jew and differentiates between him and the "proselyte" Jew of Gentile Origin. The believers are called "Hebrews" also because the pattern of their life is the continuous "Passing-over" or "crossing". They feel that they are all the time aliens, sojourners on the road from the earthly temporal things to the Heavenly. The fear of God presides over the heart of the person who is on the way to Heaven, who looks to God as the compassionate Father, and at the same time, the Just Judge, ensuring that He should never be offended or enraged, but at all times fearing Him awesomely and striving not to injure God's feelings in any way. The person who fears God cannot perform any act of violence such as the slaughtering of children, and this is manifested by the behavior of the two midwives. Despite the fact that it endangered their own lives, in having to disobey the command of the King of Egypt, yet their fear of God was more predominant in their lives than the fear of the King of Egypt.

As to God's rewarding of the two midwives: "And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them." (Ex. 1:21): How does God reward the two midwives who had lied to Pharaoh? Is it permissible to lie, as did also the harlot **Rahab**? St. Augustine assigns two articles to "Lying", in which he explains that no act of lie should be performed even if it were for the benefit of others, because "...the lying mouth slays the soul". (Wisdom of Solomon 1:11).

Our Lord Christ Himself charges us: "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No', 'No'. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matt. 5:37).

We are warned by the Apostle Paul thus: "Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25). St. Augustine

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justifies the Lord's rewarding of the two midwives in that he dealt with them according to the standard of their spirituality and ability to respond. On the other hand, he says they were rewarded "not for having lied but for having been compassionate and considerate towards God's People. He did not recompense them for their deception (of Pharaoh) but for the favor they had done; for their sympathetic way of thinking, not for the transgression of lying."

A similar incident that illustrates this principle is God's commendation of the "Dishonest Steward" (Luke 16:1-9): "So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly" (Luke 16:8). The Lord praised the virtue of "foresight", not the vice of "forgery". Foresight' is an act of treasuring in heaven and making every effort to building on that heavenly treasure. But as regards to fraud: "How much do you owe my master? And he said: 'A hundred measures of oil'. So he said to him: 'Take your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty'" (Luke 16:5-6). The fraudulent action of the Steward was no cause for praise by the Rich Man. (Who symbolizes **God**).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) In the societies that we live in, there are some social injustice exercised by the civil authorities [e.g. towards the poor, the unborn, women ... etc.]. These things are unacceptable in Christianity and we must pray and do our best against those evil forces.
- (2) God has His ways to save His people from the evil powers and any injustice that may come upon them.

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FEBRUARY FIRST SUNDAY

PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (V): JOCHEBED - COURAGE, OBEDIENCE AND FAITH IN THE TRUTH OF GOD'S PROMISES

†Purpose of the lesson:

This is the second lesson in a two-lesson series about Jochebed the mother of Moses the prophet. In this lesson we focus on the importance of courage, obedience and faith in the truth of God's promise.

†Please emphasize:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson. It was mentioned that God sent five women to save the life of Moses. In the previous lesson, the role of the two midwives against the civil injustice was done. Let us continue with the rest of the personalities.

2. Pharaoh's Daughter:

When Pharaoh's daughter beheld baby Moses as he was crying, "She had compassion on him and said: This is one of the Hebrews' children." God, in His loving mercy, made the heart of the daughter of Pharaoh (who symbolizes the devil) to pity and have compassion upon the weeping child, despite the orders of the King (her father) to kill such children. God transforms the hearts of stone to hearts of flesh, for the purpose of achieving His Almighty glorious aims. Because-Glory be unto Him – He changed the hearts of "the **Samaritan Woman**", "**Zacchaeus**" the Tax collector, and "**Saul of Tarsus**". He can do anything; nothing is too hard for Him. It was He Who made the tongues of the children of Jerusalem that went out to welcome the Lord Christ upon entering the city on "Palm Sunday", to utter that deep and heavenly hymnal paean: "**Hosanna in the highest**".

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“**Hosanna to the King of Israel**” Wherein it is contained an assertive definition of the person of **Christ the Heavenly King**. What a miraculous encounter, pre-ordained by God, that Pharaoh’s daughter should have compassion on the child Moses and put in her heart, sympathy and pity towards this child! “**Origen the Erudite**” contemplates that Pharaoh’s daughter symbolizes the “Church of the Gentiles” that accepted “**Moses**” (denoting the “Law”) from the Jews through the River (denoting the “Baptism”) and conceived it with a new concept, having carried him to her palace. On this particular point he comments: “I believe that Pharaoh’s daughter is a symbol of the Church that gathers people from all nations. So that, despite the fact that her father was an unjust man and an idolater, yet she was told: “Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; Forget your own people also, and your father’s house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty.” (Ps. 44[45]: 10-11). She leaves her father’s house and goes to the water to cleanse herself of the transgressions she had committed there, in her father’s house, whereupon she acquires “Affection and Mercy” and has compassion on the child!

3. “**Miriam**”, Sister of **Moses**:

After **Jochebed** laid her child **Moses** in the ark {basket} that she had made for him, she committed his sister **Miriam** to oversee him: “And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him.” (Ex. 2:4). Undoubtedly, it was one of the most difficult hours for both the mother “**Jochebed**” and her daughter “**Miriam**”. That hour must have been spent in deep prayer, with the firm belief that it is God’s watchful eye that will rescue and deliver.

Miriam must have learnt from her mother how to behave peacefully and calmly. She stood “afar off” to know what would be done to the child **Moses**. She did not slacken her sight from her brother for twinkling of an eye.

Miriam must have under-studied her mother in meticulous behavior, combined with instantaneous intuition and spontaneous reaction. At the opportune moment, Pharaoh’s daughter goes down to bathe at the river and sends her maid to get the ark which, upon opening it, finds the child **Moses**. At this moment, his sister comes hurriedly: with precision, shrewdness and valour, she advances towards Pharaoh’s daughter and asks: “Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?” (Ex. 2:7). What a simple and straightforward, yet very considerate, question!

Firstly: It implies respect to Pharaoh’s daughter: “Shall I go?”

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Secondly: It is endowed with wisdom: “That she may nurse the child for you”, thereby placing the child at the disposal of Pharaoh’s daughter, but at the same time, under her responsible care. The decision-making was left to Pharaoh’s daughter, who, after having had compassion on the boy and after having been placed ‘head-on’ with her responsibility, could only result in a positive “Yes”. Clutching on the sanction, she hurriedly went to call her mother. The plan has worked out and the suckling is securely back in his mother’s bosom, in peace and tranquility! **Miriam** did not make any move that would have exposed her, not even by insinuation, as the child’s sister, nor that the woman she was calling for nursing him was his and her mother. **Miriam**’s behavior was with absolute equilibrium and innermost valour. She had learned from her mother how to handle intricate matters with high precision, and this enabled her to perform her part impeccably. At the same time, she was scant in speech, so that through one question that she uttered with precision, she succeeded, with God’s help, to accomplish her mission.

Let us now reflect on Jochebed, the faithful mother, the Saint:

4. “Jochebed” the mother of “Moses”:

How deep is the faith of this mother! How deep must her prayers have been! How rational was the performance of her role, leaving the greater part for God to perform! When we consider that her three children: **Moses, Aaron and Miriam**, are each an outstanding and eminent figures, we realize that their mother **Jochebed** must have played a vital role in handing over to them such a fathomless abyss of spirituality and strength! **Jochebed** was not confined to mere prayer and faith; for “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17). She exploited her foresight and imaginative power to weave with her own hands the ark of bulrushes and to have it daubed with asphalt and pitch for the protection of the child **Moses** against water percolation. She sustained quenching the fire within her for the purpose of securing the safety of her son. Through her clear thinking and unified purpose, she recruited her hands, her mind and her daughter to draw a precise plan, aided by the Divine Providence, for the rescue of her son. Would a person relax and say: “I have asked God to perform a certain act for me, without himself acting towards attaining that goal? One of the saints said: “Without God, man cannot work; and without man, God does not want to work.”

In the miraculous raising of **Lazarus**, the Lord Christ said: “Lift up the stone.” This was the simple part required to be performed by man, but it had to be done. Thereafter, the Lord Christ stepped forward to perform the crucial part, which was

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the raising of the dead Lazarus. The Lord Jesus Himself was going about, performing well and healing all sickness and weakness in the people. He said: “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” (John 5:17).

This simple mother **Jochebed** also confided in her daughter **Miriam**. Do parents place such trust in their children? If they do, they will find that the children will grow up, mature and become capable of assuming responsibility. Whereas, if the parents distrusted their children, this would, first and foremost, signify a lack of trust in the education they had given them, and proof of the parents’ failure to hand over to them the correct faith. Such attitude would act as a barrier in the path of their advancement and of their confronting present-day challenges.

This honest mother **Jochebed**, after having raised up her son: “And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name **Moses**, saying: ‘Because I drew him out of the water.’” (Ex. 2:10). Not for a single moment did it cross her mind to run away with the boy! She did not even entertain the idea of sharing him with Pharaoh’s daughter, to the extent that it is written in the Book about **Moses** and his relation to Pharaoh’s daughter: “He became son to her.” **Jochebed** was certain that she had taught **Moses** the appropriate principles and handed over to him the steadfast faith in God, irrespective of the evil environment encircling him at Pharaoh’s Palace. Now, she is more confident than ever in God’s love for him, trusting that Moses- that pretty person- would reciprocate God’s love and would never be overcome or influenced by Satanic forces.

On the other hand, we perceive in **Jochebed’s** heart that exceptional alertness to justice, in-as-much-as she had taken over that child from Pharaoh’s daughter to nurse him, but when the boy grew up, she surrendered him back to Pharaoh’s daughter, having accomplished the work she had been entrusted with.

We are unaware of how old she was when she died, nor of the circumstances of her death. We are unaware, too, as to whether or not she lived to see her son **Moses** leading the people of God out of the land of Egypt, nor whether or not she saw her daughter **Miriam** as she led the choir of praises after the Exodus of the Israelites from the land of enslavement and the drowning of Pharaoh and his chosen captains in the Red Sea. The Holy Bible mentions nothing about her witnessing any of these events. We assume that the circumstances appertaining to her death, even if she had witnessed the historic events, may not have been so momentous. What is of paramount importance, however, is that her life which was richly fraught and

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inter-woven with grace stands out as a high example to be followed until the present day.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Jochebed is:

- † An example for faith that works with love.
- † An example for deep contemplative prayer.
- † An example for bringing up children and nourishing them with the food of faith
- † An example of internal stability at the most crucial of moments.
- † An example of a justice-dominated heart and of straight thinking.
- † An example of how a woman, at the disposal of God, lives the most profound and serene life.

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For the success
Of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

In his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

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Second Sunday



FEBRUARY SECOND SUNDAY

THE SECOND CANONICAL BOOKS IN THE HOLY BIBLE

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

In this lesson we would like to become familiar with the second canonical books in the Holy Bible. We would also like to thank God for our Holy Church who preserved the word of God for us in its fullness.

MEMORY VERSE

*“While both were enclosed in the room, Tobias rose up from the bed and said, ‘Arise, sister, and let us pray that the Lord will have mercy upon us’”
(Tobit 8:4).*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A) **INTRODUCTION:** **An overview of the Old Testament**

The Old Testament may be classified into five sections:

1. The five books of Moses (starting from Genesis to Deuteronomy)
 2. The historical books (starting from Joshua to Esther)
 3. The poetic books starting from Job to the Song of Songs of Solomon.
 4. Prophetic books (from Isaiah to Malachi)
 5. The Second Canonical books
- + The subject of this lesson is the second canonical books.

(B) **An overview of the Second Canonical books:**

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✝ The second canonical books is a group of books in the Old Testament, which was found in the Greek Septuagint of the Old Testament with the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. These books were transferred to the various Christian churches, which translated it into various languages.

✝ The Jewish community council refused to include these books as books of the Old Testament in a council held in year 100 A.D., because these books were not in the group collected by Ezra the writer. These books were called apocrypha, because it was also omitted from the Holy Bible issued in the sixteenth century by the Protestant Church.

✝ Some Christians called these second canonical books by the word apocrypha and naming it in this way is wrong. The word “apocrypha” is a Greek word, which means “hidden”, and it is taken to mean “false or untrue.” However, the second canonical books are correct and there is no doubt them, either in the Coptic, Catholic or Orthodox Churches.

✝ The second canonical books are nine books in the Bible and are included in the Bible, or printed in our church or in the Catholic Church.

1. Tobit (14 chapters)
2. Judith (16 chapters)
3. The remainder of Esther (7 chapters)
4. The Wisdom of Solomon (19 chapters)
5. Joshua the son of Sirach (51 chapters)
6. The prophesy of Baruch (6 chapters)
7. The remainder of the book of Daniel (2 chapters)
8. The first Maccabees (16 chapters)
9. The second Maccabees (15 chapters)

(C) Proofs that the second canonical books are correct:

1. The testimony of the Ecumenical Council

The first Ecumenical Council held in 325 A.D. after reviewing everything related to the second canonical books, affirmed its total approval of it.

2. The testimony of the Apostles

Our fathers the Apostles included those books with the rest of the books of the Old Testament.

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3. The testimony of the Fathers of the Church
Many of the fathers of the church referred in their writings to these books with great confidence. For example, St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom and St. Athanasius the apostolic.
4. The testimony of the Orthodox and Catholic churches:
Both churches approved these books and are using them in the readings of the church.
5. The second canonical book has many prophecies about the Lord Christ. This shows that these books were written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. An example of these prophecies about the coming of the Lord Christ to our world is in the book of Baruch “This is our God...He was seen upon the earth and lived among men” (Baruch 3:36-38).

(D) Readings of the second canonical books in the church services of the Coptic Orthodox Church:

There are many readings during the Holy forty days Lent and the Holy Week that are taken from these second canonical books. These readings are very deep and spiritually enriching.

(E) Some highlights from the second canonical books:

1. **The book of Tobit:** The subject of this book is about the history of Tobias and his son and it gives an overview of the life of the Israelites while they were in exile. This book also shows the importance of fasting and prayer. Therefore this book is read in the Holy Lent on the Friday of the seventh week.
2. **The book of Judith:** This book tells us about the story of Judith, the brave woman who was able to save her people and her country from destruction because of her bravery and prayers.
3. **The book of Wisdom of Solomon:** This book gives in a marvelous way a description for wisdom, and it shows that God gives wisdom to man as an answer to his prayers. Also in the book of wisdom, we see a clear discussion of the faith in eternity. We also see in this book a clear reply to people who are seeking a lustful life and temporary joy.

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4. **The book of Joshua the son of Sirach:** This book is very similar to the book of Proverbs. It also includes a popular chapter about physicians (chapter 38:1-15), showing that God gives wisdom to physicians in identifying and treating diseases. Therefore, a physician should pray before identifying or treating a disease.
5. **The book of Baruch:** This book refers to God as the One with the supreme wisdom, justice and authority. It also declares that many sufferings are because of leading a sinful life and that God accepts the repentance and prepares for a better life ahead.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. Get your copy of the nine books of the second canonical books to enrich and deepen your spiritual life.
2. We thank our Heavenly Father for our beloved Church who reserved for us everything related to the word of God for our benefit.
3. Solutions for our problems always come from God.

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A Glance at the Old Testament

Section II
Historical Books

Section I
Pentateuch

Section III
Poetical Books

Section V
Apocryphal Books

Section IV
Prophetical Books

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Third Sunday



FEBRUARY THIRD SUNDAY

CHRIST IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS (I): THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

Please read Hebrews chapter 1 and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

This is the first lesson in a series of three lessons about Christ in Hebrews. In this lesson the focus is on the Preeminence of Christ.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

†Introduction: Christ is the center of the epistle to the Hebrews

The epistle was written primarily to the Hebrew Christians. The purpose of this epistle was to confirm them to the Christian faith and to show them that what they gained in Christianity was far better than what they lost by being expelled from the Sanhedrin. The apostle Paul showed them that they now have a heavenly high priest instead of the Levitical priesthood. They also were joined to a church of first born, angelic assembly instead of the Jewish one, and to the heavenly city instead of the earthly Jerusalem.

What joyful epistle that proclaims the richness of the grace of Christ. The epistle links the Old Testament to the New Testament. It draws the reader's heart from the shadows to the truth and from the external ceremonial observances to the inner, spiritual and heavenly worship.

The Preeminence of Christ

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1- Above the prophets:

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. “Hebrews 1:1-4.

These few verses summarize our faith in the Lord Christ. God of the Old Testament is the same one of the New Testament. In the Old Testament God spoke to the world through His servants the prophets who were men like us, yet chosen by God. But, in the fullness of time, He came in person speaking to us directly in His loving voice, not on the human level, but on the divine level. This is the Son of God, who is of the same nature as the Father and who was incarnate, that He may bless our nature and world and may grant us the heavenly inheritance. As for the prophets, they were only speaking about the heavenly inheritance.

2- Above the Angels:

The Jews were proud of receiving their law by the hands of angels as St. Stephen said:

“Who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” (Acts 7:53). But in the NT God came in person to speak to us through His Son. As we say in the liturgy of St. Gregory: “not angel, nor an archangel, nor a patriarch, nor a prophet, thou entrusted out salvation, but thou without change was incarnate and became man ...” and also “For to which of the angels did He ever say: You are My Son. Today I have begotten You ... Let all the angels of God worship Him ... Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire ... But to which of the angels has He ever said: Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool, are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” ... (Heb 1:5-14)

3- Above Moses:

Christ in His incarnation is much greater than Moses the prophet. Like the difference between the Creator and the creature. “For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath built the house hath

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more honor than the house. For every house is built by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb. 3:3-6).

Hence, Moses was a servant speaking of the Lord Christ. But Christ is the Son of God. There is a huge difference between the servant in the house and the owner of the house, as well between the builder of the house and the house. Not only that, but Christ, to whom is the glory, came to earth to bless our life on earth and give us the rest of which He is a symbol, like the rest which God gave to His people during the ministry of Joshua. “For if Jesus had given them rest, and then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. 4:9 there remained therefore a rest to the people of God ...” (Heb. 4:8-9).

Thus, this wonderful duplicity became apparent in the life of the children of God. The inner deep rest as a fruit of the unity with Christ, despite the external tribulations. This is the same path which Christ Himself has passed. “For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin...” (Heb 4:15).

Although Christ was tempted in everything, yet He did not lose His peace, or comfort because He is the one who gives peace. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give me unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid...” (John 14:27).

4- He is the Son of God

The Lord Christ is the Son of God and the wisdom of God, with which He created everything “Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds” ... (Heb 1:2). This is also mentioned by St. John the Evangelist “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3).

The Son in His incarnation is light out of light for He is the eternal glory who is inseparable from the Father. The apostle Paul describes Him in his epistle to the Colossians saying: “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature” ... (Col 1:15), and in the epistle to the Hebrews: “Who being the brightness of [His] glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb 1:3). Then in

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the epistle to the Philippians: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:” ... (Phil 2:6)

The word image, or express image, or form, when it refers to the Lord Christ, to whom is the glory, does not mean an image separate from the original, like when an artist depicts an image of a scene, and the image is separate from the original scene. The Apostle Paul continues speaking of the greatness of the Lord Christ, not only in creating us and the world from nothing, but also, after our nature was corrupted. He redeemed us with His blood and paid the ransom for our sins in order that we might enter with Him into His eternal kingdom, where He ascended first, sitting at the right hand of the Majesty. After He completed the redemption on the Cross, He arose, destroying the pangs of death, and opened the door to the Church to enter the heavenly glory.

St. John Chrysostom said: “For your sake of man, He prepared the kingdom and for your sake He prepared indescribable goods and a ready share in the heaven and a life that nothing else resembles and unspeakable joy.”

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) We gain a lot as true believers of Christ, no matter how the world may reject us.
- (2) We must be thankful, because we live in an era in which the grace of Christ can give us in a plentiful manner unlike in the Old Testament.
- (3) We will lead a comfortable life as a fruit of living with Christ.
- (4) God prepared the kingdom, filled with life and joy for us.

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FEBRUARY FOURTH SUNDAY

CHRIST IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS (II): HIS PRIESTHOOD

Please read Hebrews chapters 2 to 9 and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a series of three lessons about Christ in Hebrews. In this lesson the focus is on the preeminence of Christ's priesthood and its effect in our life.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson.

(A) The preeminence of Christ's priesthood and its effect in our life:

1- Christ is His incarnation: was an introduction to the work of reconciliation (Heb 2:16, 17).

The Lord Christ out of His love for us shared with us everything except for sin only. He did not despise our nature, but called us His brothers "For both he that sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one: for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying! I will declare your name my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to you. And again; I will put my trust in Him. And again: Here am I and the children of God have given me. In as much then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise shared in the same; that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is,

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the devil; And release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” ... (Heb 2:11-15)

Hence, the Lord Christ passed through death, crushed Satan with His glorious resurrection, and was also able to pass through death, while Satan having no authority over us; we pass through death to paradise.

2- The Lord Christ in His temptation: able to aid those who are tempted (Heb 2:18)

3- The Lord Christ in His priesthood: sympathetic and encouraging to steadfastness and prayer (Heb 4:14-16)

4- The human high priest: his office and work (Heb 5:2-4):

- Taken from among men.
- Sympathetic because of his own weakness
- Present offering for himself as well as for the people
- Divinely chosen

5- Characteristics of Christ is priesthood (Heb 5:5-10)

- Divinely chosen after a new order
- He offered up earnest prayers for deliverance in a submissive way
- Became author of eternal salvation

The subject of the priesthood of our Lord Christ is the essence of the epistle to the Hebrews. Aaron was the first high priest, chosen by God. But Christ is greater than he is for He enters with us into the heavenly holies and intercedes for us in a new and unique manner. For every high priest is taken from among men – is ordained – compasses with infirmity – and he offers sacrifices for his own sins first, then for the people’s sins after vested in his priestly vestures and honored by the people. But the Lord Christ – as a high priest – is the Son of God incarnate becoming like one of us (i.e. taken from among men also) and consequently He knows the human weakness and He has experienced pain – though He knew not a sin and there was no weakness in Him – He has offered Himself as a sacrifice, because of the love He has for us, so that He may enter with us into the heavens.

This comparison springs forth from what the Apostle Paul said about the human priest comparing him with the Lord Christ, the unique high priest. “For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things

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pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: He can have compassion on those who are ignorant, and going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. Because of this he is required, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who is said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee? As He saith also in another place, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in the he feared; Though he were a son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.” (Heb 5:1-10)

As the Lord Christ has endured real suffering, then He, to whom is the glory, has entered into the affair of pain sanctifying it giving man an endurance of pain.

† The priesthood of Melchisedec is a type of Christ's:

1- Having a great name and belonging to an eternal order.

St. Paul speaks to us in more details about Melchisedec that he was a type of the Lord Christ, to whom is the glory, in many aspects: “For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.” ... (Heb 7:1-3)

2 - Superior to the Aaronic priesthood (Heb 7:4-10)

The Lord Christ, to whom is the glory, is the King of righteousness and He is without sin, as well as He is the King of peace who grants the heavenly peace to His children. We do not know His father nor His mother. We cannot comprehend His personality fully. We only know as much as He reveals to us. He is, He is not created, without beginning and without end. Then, St. Paul compares the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of the

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Lord Christ saying: “Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron?” (Heb. 7:11)

† The summary of the preeminent qualities of Christ priesthood:

St. Paul compares the effect of the Levitical priesthood – which was only a type – to the effect of the true and eternal priesthood of the Lord Christ:

“(For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord swear and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:). By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing him ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.” ... (Heb 7:21-28)

It is clear from these verses that the difference between the human symbolic limited priesthood and the heavenly eternal priesthood of Christ is a huge difference. Him who offered Himself as a sacrifice on the Cross once and for all, not repeatedly, having no need for repetition, for it sufficient for all at all times and in small places.

We can summarize the qualities as follows:

- 1- Like that of Melchisedec but belonging to an eternal order.
- 2- Eternal and unchanging.
- 3- Without sin, perfect offered a perfect sacrifice.
- 4- Now is in the heavenly altar.
- 5- The ceremonies of the Old Testament and its sacrifices offered by the priests were only types.

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- 6- Christ's redemption and His blood which takes away sin are realities.
- 7- The institutions of the Old Testament represented Christ's perfect sacrifice in the New Testament.
- 8- The repetitive Jewish sacrifices were ineffective in taking away sin, while Christ with His oneself sacrifice completed the redemption of mankind and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty, waiting for the completion of the dispensation.

In the Old Testament, the high priest used to enter into the most holy places once a year on the great Day of Atonement for his sins first then for the people through the blood of the suitable animal sacrifices. The temple was divided into two parts: the first part is the holy where the table of showbread, the altar of the incense and the lamp stand of the seven branches. The second part is the most holy places where the two cherubim, the mercy seat which is the Ark of the Covenant. The curtain between the first and the second part.

Our teacher Paul has explained in his epistle to the Hebrews how the earthly temple was a type of the heavenly temple, and how the Lord Christ entered the holy places and the meaning of His entrance. He compared between the Aaronic priesthood in the Old Testament and the priesthood in the New Testament after the order of Melchisedec since the Lord Christ is the priest forever after the order of Melchisedec according to the divine revelation in the Holy Scriptures. He said about the heavenly ministry of the Lord Christ: "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." ... (Heb 8:1-2).

He said about the divisions of the temple and order of the ceremonies had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid roundabout with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubim's of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle,

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accomplishing the service of God. “But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people.” (Heb 9:7).

We notice here that in the second house which is called “the holy of holies” which the high priest enters once a year. St. Paul the apostle explained the comparison between what the high priest in the Old Testament and what the Lord Christ did as he completed the redemption. He said about Christ’s entry into the heavens: “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” (Heb 9:11-12)

It is clear here that the Lord Christ in His entry to the heaven entered the most holy of places not once a year but entered once forever for there is no need to repeat the sacrifice very year. Neither, did He enter with the blood of other sacrifices but entered with His own blood that is the true sacrifice which is acceptable to the Heavenly Father. He said about not repeating the saving sacrifice: “Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice himself.: ... (Heb 9:25-26).

He spoke of the evil: “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God” ... (Heb 10: 19-21). When the Lord Christ was crucified, His body was slain with the Cross, the veil was torn into two from top to bottom (Mat 27:51). The veil of the temple was separating the holy from the most holy places. This means that the Lord Christ has opened the way to the bosom of the Heavenly Father through his sacrifice of salvation on the Cross. This is what our teacher Paul the apostle has said about the entry of the believers to the holy places through the blood of Jesus by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh. The Lord Christ is the way that leads to eternal life.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

There is a huge difference between something symbolic (as the priesthood in the Old Testament) and something real (as the priesthood of Christ).

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MARCH FIRST SUNDAY

CHRIST IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS (III): CROSS, SALVATION AND EUCHARIST

Please read Hebrews chapters 9 to 12 and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

This is the third lesson in a three lesson series about Christ in Hebrews. In this lesson the focus is on the Cross, Salvation and Eucharist.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

- ✠ **The Eucharist is an extension to the Cross and not a repetition:**
- ✠ **Start by reviewing the previous two lessons.**

The basic quality which characterizes the works of God is that all His works are everlasting. “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.” ... (Ecc 3:14)

If we believe that Christ is God incarnate, then His works, without doubt, are divine, eternal and unending. Consequently, the sacrifice of the Cross is eternal and without end that the angel of the resurrection mentioned that: “Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified” (Mk 16:6) even after His resurrection. And that is no wonder, for John the Theologian has seen: “stood a Lamb as though it had been slain” (Rev 5:6)

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Our teacher Paul the apostle speaks with his people in Corinth saying: “for I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and he crucified”. ... (1Cor 2:2).

This continuous everlasting Cross-is manifested everyday on the holy altar. So we see Jesus standing as a lamb as though it had been slain. “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). Many prophecies have pointed out to the great slain one: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he was brought as lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” (Is 53:7)

John the Baptist witnessed saying: “the next day John seeth Jesus is coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

In the liturgy of St. Gregory we say: “you came to the slaughter like a lamb to the Cross.” Hence, the sacrifice of the Cross is a true sacrifice with an everlasting effect. We must collect the fruits of the Cross which are salvation, forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

An important fact that is mentioned in the epistle to the Hebrews is: “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). Then the Eucharist (by which we are sanctified), which Christ has instituted for His Disciples is an extension to the sacrifice of the Cross and not a repetition. The sacrifice of the Cross did not end nor will it ever end, but its effect is everlasting as we mentioned before. Thus, the sacrifice of the Cross comes every day on the altar in the sacrament of the bread and the wine which take their power from the word of the Lord: “this is my body, this is my blood”. So, the nature of the bread and wine became through the sanctification and faith, Christ Himself who has been slain. God does not have to use the senses or change the substance’s taste or appearance. We partake of the body of the Lord and His blood under the form of the bread and wine.

In one of the inaudible prayers of the priest it is said: “lift up thy countenance upon this bread” (the prayer of the offering). This is why all the liturgies insist and assure that this sacrifice is not a bloody one like those of the Old Testament but rather spiritual, rational, and true. “This holy

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offering that is rational, spiritual and not bloody” (the prayer of reconciliation in the liturgy of St. Cyril). Also in the brief prayer of the fraction: “a rational heavenly sacrifice that is the divine body and the honored blood which are to thy Christ.”

Therefore, the Eucharist means bringing the slaying action and the blood shedding not as a mere memory but as an actual recollection for partaking of the same mystery. For every time we partake of the holy Eucharist we practice the true breaking of the body and the true shedding of the blood; in other words, the Cross with all its divine mysteries, without shedding new blood nor killing another *Pascha*.

This is what the liturgy means by the sacrifice that is not bloody, that is the bread of the Eucharist is truly an action and not an idea. For we eat a torn body although it was only bread in the hand of the priest, we also drink the blood that has been shed, although it was only wine in the chalice. These are continuous and a proclamation of the death of the Lord, continuous by faith, not perceiving it by the senses nor trying to comprehend the action of the tearing of the flesh and shedding which continue at all times and unto the end.

“Behold, on this table today is Emmanuel, the Lamb of God, who carries the sin of all the world, who is sitting on the throne of His glory...” (The prayer of the Fraction). When the priest dips the Spadicon in the holy blood and anoint the body with it, he proclaims the wounds of Christ, where the priest covers the wounds with the blood of Christ...to show truly Christ our God (as a lamb standing as though it was slain).

Note: from the saying of the Lord “do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19) the Greek word “anam-nesis” is used. This word does not only mean the remembrance of something as if it were absent but recollected and brought back today, it’s to say that the offering is a present rational sacrifice.

†Salvation and the Eucharist:

“For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched, and that burned with fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore: (For they could not endure what was commanded, And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow: And so terrifying was the sight, that Moses said, I am exceedingly afraid and trembling: But you have

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come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” Heb 12:18-24.

In the sacrament of the Eucharist, the believers enjoy the continuous salvation in the ecclesiastical life and regain what has been lost by sin and enter into greater glory through the unity with the body of the Lord and His holy blood. If we have lost our place towards God through sin, this sacrament makes us unite with His only Son who was slain, where His Holy Spirit raises up to the bosom of the Father. Thus, we conclude the prayer of the fraction with the proclamation of the new place of the people of God who stand in the presence of the Father, confidently without fear saying the Lord’s prayer: **“Our Father who art in heaven ...).**

Regarding our relationship with the heavenly ones, we no longer see a cherub carrying a fiery sword in the way to the tree of life, but we see the heavens open joyfully. We have become fruitful branches in the tree of life (the vineyard of Jesus Christ) as we also see the heavenly ones surrounding the altar, sharing our love, thanksgiving and worship of God in Jesus Christ and we share their sanctification and praises.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Through the love of Christ, we are free from the slavery of sin and death.
- (2) We must be united with Christ on earth in order to be with Him in heaven as well.

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MARCH SECOND SUNDAY

ANSWERING THE MORMONS (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSONS:

This is the first lesson in a two lesson series on the Mormons. In this lesson we will show that the Mormons are actually non-Christians.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

INTRODUCTION:

This is the second lesson presented to the youth on the issue of answering questions concerning the modern religions known as “cults.” The first lesson dealt with Jehovah’s Witnesses group. This lesson will answer questions concerning the Mormons who are also known as “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints”.

The Mormon religion is one of the modern religions which attracts many people for different reasons, some of which are:

1. They claim that they are presenting a corrected version of Christianity.
2. They approve the possibility of man becoming a god. This goes with the age in which modern man seeks to become a god without rivalry.
3. They discourage smoking, drinking alcohol and even tea and coffee, to reflect an image of high religious level.
4. They state that everyone is going to be saved and enjoy an eternal life, but there are different levels in heaven and that the Mormons will occupy the highest level.

The reason for rapid expansion of this cult is that the Mormon Church encourages all men, who are members of the church, to present a two-year volunteering preaching service. There are now about seven million followers of this church.

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This lesson will cover the following points:

- A) A summary about Mormons' beliefs and who they are.
- B) The Mormon's Sacred Texts
- C) Are Mormons Christians?
- D) Some of their beliefs and the answers to frequently asked questions
- E) Some questions for discussion with our youth in this subject

A) A Summary of the Mormon Belief:

1. There is more than one God
2. These gods created all things
3. God has a physical body like all humans
4. Jesus Christ is not born from the Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit but as a result of a normal physical relation between Mary and an immortal glorified father
5. Man can become a god like all previous gods such as Abraham and Jacob

B) Who Are the Mormons?

As previously mentioned, they are also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). They prefer to be addressed by this latter name. The founder of this religion is Joseph Smith, who was born in 1805 in the state of Vermont in the United States. Since his adolescent years, he was said to have experienced heavenly visions.

In 1820, when he was 15 years old, an angel appeared to him and convinced him that all Christian religions and churches are wrong and far from the ways of God. Then the angel handed him golden tablets with certain writings. The angel explained the way these writing should be understood. These writings became the book of Mormons, which is the name given to Joseph Smith by the angel. In 1829, three apostles visited Joseph Smith and gave him the power to establish the true church. The book of Doctrine and Covenants was written by Joseph Smith as an outcome of many visions. He then started correcting the Holy Bible.

The Mormon Church grew rapidly. In 1844, Joseph Smith and his brother were killed. Brigham Young became the new leader and established headquarters for himself in the State of Utah. There was a disagreement on who should be Joseph Smith's successor. Some wanted one of his sons to take his father's position, and

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they rejected the fellowship of Brigham Young. These groups established headquarters for themselves in Missouri under the leadership of Joseph Smith's family. They were called the reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and refused to be called Mormons. They rejected the teachings of the headquarters of Utah. Consequently, the Mormons are now divided into two groups: the first big group has its headquarters in Utah and the smaller group is established in Missouri. This smaller group kept the book of Joseph Smith and rejected the beliefs shared by the big group. Consequently, they became closer to the Protestant church in their beliefs.

C) The Mormon's Sacred Texts

1. ***The Book of Mormons:*** is considered more important than the Holy Bible. Some sayings in this book state that some people came to North America from the region of Israel at the time of building the tower of Babylon i.e. before the coming of Christ. This book also says that the Native Americans belong to the ancient Hebrew people and that Jesus Christ came to America after His resurrection in order to preach the Bible to those who came from Israel.
2. ***The Book of Doctrine and Covenants:*** which was written by Joseph Smith, contains the divine visions that God gave him.
3. ***The Book of the Pearl of Great Price:*** this book contains Joseph Smith articles regarding faith and his personal life.

N.B. The chief of the Mormon sect can receive special visions from God to translate Joseph Smith's articles.

4. ***The Corrected Holy Bible:*** It is the version that includes the changes made by Joseph Smith done under the guidance of the divine visions he received from God.

D) Are the Mormons Christians?

The Mormons consider themselves Christians. They even think that they are the only real Christians in the world with a true religion. But in reality, they are not Christians because they reject all the fundamental concepts of Christianity. They reject the traditional concept of the nature of God which is shared by other

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Christian churches. They also reject the concept of the nature of Jesus Christ, the principle of trinity, the existence of the original sin, human salvation through the blood of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. The Mormons say that they are the only true Christians whereas when we look at their beliefs, we find them to actually be non-Christians.
2. In the Mormon's beliefs man can become god. They believe there are many gods, god has body and bones like any person, the Lord Jesus was born from St. Mary not through the Holy Spirit, there is marriage in heaven with its rites practiced here on earth...and many other wrong beliefs.
3. The founder of the Mormon religion is Joseph Smith in the 19th century.
4. We must be very careful from the Mormons because they can start talking in a very smooth way with the individual and may plan ultimately to hurt him or her.

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Third Sunday



MARCH THIRD SUNDAY

ANSWERING THE MORMONS (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a two-lesson series about the Mormons. In this lesson we will provide answers to some of their wrong beliefs.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and continue on as follows:

E) Some of the Beliefs of the Mormons and our Answers

1. *The possibility of extension of the Bible and the vision according to the Mormons.*

The Mormons say that God will continue giving visions to humans and will speak to them. According to them it is possible to add to the bible as they have added the visions of Joseph Smith and his writings.

The Answer:

- "From Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ" Romans 15:19.
- "I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Jude 1:3.

2. *Creation According to the Mormons:*

The gods prepared for the creation of heaven and earth with the leadership of a chief of the committee of gods.

The Answer:

- "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:1

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- “You alone are the Lord; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.” Nehemiah 9:6.

3. *The many gods of the Mormons:*

There are many gods. They have a temple which is the temple of gods, and a chief god.

The Answer:

- “Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” Deut. 6:4.
- “Before Me there was no God formed nor shall there be after me.” Isaiah 43:10.
- “I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God.” Isaiah 44:6.

4. *There is no Holy Trinity:*

The Mormons believe that the Holy Trinity is absurd and that three in one and one in three is a wrong concept.

The Answer:

- “Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” Deuteronomy 6:4.
- “Go, therefore and make Disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19.

5. *God is human in the Mormon’s Faith:*

God is a physical being like us made of flesh and bones.

The Answer:

- “God is Spirit” John 4:24.
- “I am God and not man, the Holy One is your midst.” Hosea 11:9.

6. *Jesus Christ was not born of the Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit:*

Jesus Christ was born from Mary through a normal marriage to a great, immortal and glorified person.

The Answer:

- “After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 1:18.
- “Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’” Luke 1:34.

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- “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” Luke 1:35.

7. *The Blood of Christ does not cleanse us from our sins:*

According to the Mormons, the blood of Christ does not cleanse us from our sins: the sinner should be punished and die.

The Answer:

- “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7).
- “To Him who loves us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” (Rev 1:5).
- “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.” (Heb 9:28).

8. *The Holy Spirit is a Limited Person:*

The Holy Spirit has a personality of a man. He has the ability to be present in one place and cannot change his appearance into any other image.

The Answer:

- Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to men but to God.” Acts 5:3-4.
- “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.” Psalms 139:7-8.

9. *A Human Being Can Become a God:*

A person can learn how to become a god like all the previous gods; i.e. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The Answer:

- “Therefore, You are great, O Lord God. For there is none like You, nor is there any God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears.” 2 Samuel 7:22.
- “I am God, and not man, the Holy One in Your midst.” Hosea 11:9.

10. *There is no salvation outside the Mormon church where heavenly visions are continuous:*

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There is no salvation for humans outside the Mormon church where the heavenly visions are continuous and all the blessings and the new teachings are available.

The Answer:

- “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9.
- “Not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Titus 3:5

11. *There is no eternal sufferings even for the wicked:*

Even those who live in evil will be saved after suffering in hell.

The Answer:

- “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:46.

F) Some Questions for Discussions With Our Youth in this Subject

- What is Celestial marriage? How is it compared with marriage in our church?
- Do you believe that couples stay married in heaven after departing from this world? Please read Matthew 22:23-33.
- What is the principle of baptism in the Coptic Orthodox Church? How is it compared to the baptism in the Mormon Church – The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints?
- Are there circumstances when you cannot enter the church according to the Coptic Orthodox Church? How could this be compared to the same situation in the Mormon Church?



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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. All the beliefs of Mormons which are stated in the lesson have been proven wrong by references from the Holy Scriptures.
2. A cult group like the Mormons, with their wrong beliefs, should not even be acknowledged because they can become dangerous.
3. We must be thankful for our precious church in which faith was given only “one time” and nobody can alter it.

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For the success
Of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

In his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

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MARCH FOURTH SUNDAY

SALVATION IN THE ORTHODOX CONCEPT (I): NO SALVATION WITHOUT THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about the meaning of salvation in the Coptic Orthodox Church and the importance of the Grace of God as well as our deeds as we aim towards salvation.

MEMORY VERSE

“...and without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A)INTRODUCTION:

✝ The subject of salvation is the most important subject in all generations because it is the ultimate result of our faith and it is the crown of our Christianity. The Coptic Orthodox Church’s understanding of the subject of salvation is based upon a thorough look at the Holy Bible in its totality. Other churches, because of their improper understanding of the Holy Bible in its totality, explain that salvation can happen in an instant and last a lifetime. Yet in the Coptic Orthodox Church, salvation is a continuous process which lasts a lifetime.

(B)The danger of using a single verse or single situation in the Holy Bible:

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- ✠ The wise reader of the Holy Bible will never consider one verse, part of a verse, or one situation and draw a general conclusion from it. But he or she will examine *all* the verses and *all* the situations related to this subject to make his or her conclusion.
- ✠ In the subject of salvation, St. Paul the apostle said to a jailer in Philippi “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). Some people take this verse to mean that salvation comes through faith alone. These people don’t realize that this verse was said to a nonbeliever, so he needed to believe in Christ first as the beginning for a life of salvation. If we continue the passage, we see that he and his family were baptized. So we learn that we have to put together a number of verses and situations in order to understand salvation correctly.
- ✠ A young man came to the Lord Jesus and asked Him, what should he do to have eternal life? (Matt. 19:17). The Lord Jesus did not mention faith or grace in His response. The Lord said to this young man, in his situation to keep the commandments. Can we then say that keeping the commandments is sufficient without faith, baptism and the sacraments? Certainly not. But in the situation of this young man, the Lord Christ treated salvation from the angle of keeping the commandments, in order to reach this person’s weaknesses, because he was in love with money.
- ✠ Another example about the danger of using a single verse in the subject of salvation is this verse alone “therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom 5:1). If we took this verse alone, we can say that salvation is through faith alone. But let us now add another verse like this; “for not the hearer of the Law are just in the sight of God but the doer of the Law will be justified” (Rom 2:13). Also, “you see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24).
- ✠ From the above verses we can see clearly that salvation requires the Grace of God, faith of man, baptism, and keeping God’s commandments. We cannot then use one verse for our benefit to achieve our desires and neglect the other verses.

(C)No salvation without the Blood of Christ alone:

- ✠ Good works alone without the blood of Christ are not sufficient for the salvation of man. But no matter how good or how perfect the work of man, the

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work alone cannot save him without the blood of the Lord Christ. Therefore, the righteous people who satisfy God with their good works in the Old Testament were waiting in Hades until the Lord Jesus got them out after His crucifixion. Therefore, good works alone cannot save the person without faith in the blood of Christ. Otherwise, the heathens who have good works can be saved by their works!!!! That is impossible.

† Why can't there be salvation without the blood of Christ?

1. Sin is against God. Since God is unlimited, any sin committed against Him is also unlimited.
2. Sin cannot be forgiven except by an unlimited propitiation.
3. Therefore, the only solution for the human race problem is for God to come to our world, take our flesh and die on our behalf.

† **There are four conditions to benefit from the blood of Christ and achieve salvation:**

1. **Faith:** The Lord Christ stated clearly that faith is a must when He said, "for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). There are so many verses in the Bible that show that faith in the Lord Christ is the condition for benefiting from the shedding of His Blood on the Cross (Please read John 20:31, Acts 13:38-39, John 8:24 and Acts 16:31).
2. **Baptism:** The importance of baptism has been clearly stated when the Lord Christ spoke with Nicodemus, "most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3), therefore, the Lord Jesus explained to Nicodemus that baptism is a condition for an individual to see the Kingdom of God (John 3:5). There are many other verses in the Holy Bible that show the need for baptism as one of the requirements for salvation (please read Mark 16:16, Matt 28:19-20 and Titus 3:4-5). Baptism has been exercised since the very beginning of Christianity.
3. **Church Sacraments that are necessary for salvation:** There are some sacraments that some people may not need, for example not everyone needs the sacrament of the unction of the sick or the sacrament of the

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Holy Orders or the sacrament of the Holy Matrimony. But everyone needs the sacrament of Baptism, the sacrament of Chrismation (Holy Mayroun), the sacrament of Repentance and Confession, and Holy Communion (Eucharist). In the sacrament of Chrismation we gain the gifts of the Holy Spirit without which our spiritual life is nothing. Our spiritual life is our response to the action of the Holy Spirit in us, “but you have an anointing from the Holy One and you know all things” (1John 2:20). No one can proceed towards his or her salvation without the action of the Holy Spirit. In the sacrament of repentance and confession we can clearly see that without repentance no one can proceed towards salvation. Faith and baptism would not prevent the person from falling into sin. Therefore, everyone needs repentance. The Lord Christ emphasized the need for repentance when He said clearly, “.....but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Repentance and the need for it can be found in many verses and events in the Holy Bible. The person needs to go to his or her father of confession to declare his or her sins, commit to repentance, and get an absolution from the priest (Acts 19:18 and John 20:22-23). In the sacrament of the Holy Communion the Lord Christ explained clearly the importance of this sacrament when He said, “most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you”(John 6:53). Here we can see clearly that eternal life is dependent on uniting with the Lord Christ through the sacrament of Holy Communion. Can salvation then be a reality without the Holy Communion? Definitely not. As we say in the Divine Liturgy that the Holy Communion “given for us for our salvation and remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of Him”.

- ✝ So far we said that salvation requires faith in the blood of the Lord Christ, Baptism, Chrismation, Repentance and partaking of the Holy Communion. We have yet to talk about the importance of working for salvation.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. We must be very careful when we read about salvation in other Christian denominations (like the Protestant books), since they consider only a few verses without a careful look at the Holy Bible in its totality. They come up with a wrong understanding of the concept of salvation.

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2. We thank our Heavenly Father for the Grace that He has given us in the Sacraments of the church, which we obtained now as a result of Him paying the price for our sins on the Cross.

*** Note: This three lessons series is completely written on the basis of the writing of H.H. Pope Shenouda III.**

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**APRIL
FIRST SUNDAY**

**SALVATION IN THE ORTHODOX CONCEPT(II):
THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD DEEDS FOR
SALVATION**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is the second lesson in a series of three lessons about the meaning of salvation in the Coptic Orthodox Church and the importance of the Grace of God and our deeds as we aim towards the salvation of our souls. In this lesson we will focus on the importance of good deeds for salvation.

MEMORY VERSE

“Also, to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work” Ps. 62:12.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A) INTRODUCTION

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and then proceed. In the previous lesson it was mentioned that there are four conditions required to benefit from the Blood of Christ and achieve salvation of the soul: (1) faith, (2) baptism, (3) church sacraments that are necessary for salvation, and (4) working for salvation, which is the subject of this lesson.

(B) The importance of man’s deeds for the salvation of the soul:

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✝The deeds of man are either good or bad. The bad deeds lead to destruction of man and his loss of salvation. The good deeds are necessary for salvation. The absence of good deeds indicates that the faith of a person is dead. However, good deeds alone are not enough for salvation without faith, baptism and the Blood of Christ. God requested these good deeds and identified the destruction of the person who does not have good deeds. The final judgment will be according to man's deeds.

✝The good deeds of man request the support of the Grace of God, as the Lord said, ".....for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Therefore, our good deeds are a result of our work and the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

1. Evil deeds lead to perdition

✝This is very natural because as God is perfect in His mercy, He is also perfect in His justice. The Bible said; "For the wages of sin is death" Romans 6:23, then the sinner must get the punishment for his sins. Truly, Christ died for us, but only those who repent can benefit from the Blood of Christ. Otherwise, this salvation offered by the Lord Christ would encourage corruption and sin.

✝St. Paul emphasized that although we are under the effect of the grace of God, if we lived a sinful life we will die:

+ "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" Rom 6:10-12.

+ "And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" Rom 6:13-16.

From these two verses we can see that leading a sinful life will make us lose our salvation. As for the Protestant church that says that salvation is based on grace of God and faith, what can they say to these verses?

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†Let us look at other verses in the epistles of St. Paul that indicate that bad deeds would lead to perdition:

- “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” Gal. 5:19-21.
- “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” Eph. 5:5-6.
- “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God” 1 Cor. 6:9-10.
- “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” Heb. 13:4.
- “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work” Titus 1:16.

And there are many other verses.

†Other references for the Holy Bible that show that bad deeds lead to perdition:

- “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” John 5:28-29.
- “Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” Matt. 13:40-42.

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- “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” Matt. 7:19-20.
- “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” Matt 12:36.
- “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) – then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord. But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Boer, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity; a dumb donkey speaking with a man’s voice restrained the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they

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- “Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work” Ps. 62:12.
- “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” Matt. 16:27.
- “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” Matthew 12:37.
- “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” Gal. 6:7-8
- “Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night” Luke 2:8.

† **Deeds are fruits of faith and real faith must result in good deeds.**

These good deeds are a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in us as well as our acceptance to the voice of the Holy Spirit in us. Does God require these good deeds? Yes. Let’s just mention a few verses:

- “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” Matthew 21:43
- “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” James 2:14.
- “But someone will say, ‘you have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” James 2:18

† **The good deeds are evidence of the existence of faith:**

- “You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit” Matt. 7:16-17.

† **The good deeds are evidence of being *born of God*.**

- “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” Rom. 8:14.
- “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.” 1 John 2:29.

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- “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” 1 John 3:10.

† The good deeds make faith perfect:

- “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” James 2:22.
- “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” James 1:27.
- “But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil” James 4:16.

† The importance of good deeds:

- “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” 1 John 1:6-7.

Therefore our good behavior results in unity with one another and sanctification.

- “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” Romans 8:1.

This shows that our good deeds will save us from the final judgment day.

- “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Gal 5:16.
- “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” 2 Thess 3:6.

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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. We must do our best to make our repentance a true one asking for God's help to lead a righteous life.
2. The precious Blood of the Lord Jesus can only benefit those who have faith, baptism, repentance, confession, Holy Communion, and adhere to good deeds in every word and every action that they do.

*** Note: This lesson is completely based on the writings of H.H. Pope Shenouda III**

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**APRIL
SECOND SUNDAY**

**SALVATION IN THE ORTHODOX CONCEPT(III):
STRIVING AND THE GRACE OF GOD**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is the third lesson in a series of three lessons about the meaning of salvation in the Coptic Orthodox Church and the importance of the grace of God and our deeds as we aim towards salvation of our souls.

MEMORY VERSE

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness" 2 Tim. 4:7-8.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

How can an individual be saved? Is it through his own striving? By the Grace of God? Or both?

(A) Striving and the grace of God together:

✝ The Lord Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing" John 15:5.

✝ Grace is necessary for salvation, but it will not solely save us unless we respond to it. St. John Chrysostom said, "God does not want to see us lying on our backs and He gives us a place in the kingdom. So, the grace of God does not want to work alone." For example Joshua, when he was leading the

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army and Moses at the same time was raising his hands in prayers: “And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” (Ex. 17:11). How did the people gain victory? Is it through Joshua who was striving or Moses who was praying?

(B) The communion of the Holy Spirit

- ✠ “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” 2 Cor. 13:14.
This verse shows that the Christian life is a fellowship where both the Holy Spirit and the individual work together.
- ✠ The Holy Spirit does not cancel your freedom. Therefore, you have the choice to respond to the voice of the Holy Spirit in you or not. For this reason St. Paul warned us, saying, “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19) and (Eph. 4:30).
- ✠ The grace of God presents His help to you. You are free to accept it or reject it. The grace of God is like a weapon given to you to help you to overcome the devil. If you use it then you will win.

(C) The necessity of striving:

There are many verses in the Holy Bible about the necessity of striving in our spiritual life. We mention here some of these verses.

- ✠ “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,” Heb. 12:1.
- ✠ “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:” Heb. 12:14.
- ✠ “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Tim. 4:7-8.

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(D) The spiritual wars:

(1) St. Paul described the spiritual war against the devil and the types of weapons we must carry to defeat the devil. “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the Saints” Eph. 6:10-18. Therefore we can see clearly that our weapons are: the Holy Bible, prayers, adhering to the truth and following a righteous path. St. Peter also said, “be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” 1 Pet. 5:8-9.

Examples: (1) How did David defeat Goliath? David defeated Goliath with the help of God. He called on God. He did his little part by taking five small stones with him.

(2) The striving of the apostles and the shepherds “ but by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the Grace of God which was with me.” 1 Cor. 15:10.

Why does the shepherd strive, work hard in his outreach, sermons....etc?
Because both are needed- striving and the grace of God.

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(E) Confidence concerning the kingdom of God

Two questions came to the minds of many:

- (1) To what extent may one have hope in God's mercy?
- (2) Can a believer have confidence that he or she will attain the kingdom?

+ The unlimited trust in God

This trust and hope can only come from faith in God, dealings with Him, trusting His promises and trusting His blood on our behalf. Hope is one of the three great virtues mentioned, "Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret." 1Cor. 14:13.

+ We must not trust our own will:

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." 1Cor. 10:12.

(F) What about this question: Are you saved or not?

The answer should be: we were saved from the original sin in baptism, but final salvation shall be attained when we put off the flesh. For this reason our church does not celebrate the birthdays of the Saints or the day that they were accepted into the church. It celebrates the godly completion of the journey of their lives on earth.

(G) Is it possible that a believer perishes? Yes. And the Holy Bible is giving examples:

"Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off." Rom. 11:20-22.

"Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." John 15:2.

"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again 'the Lord will

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judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Heb. 10:26-31.

Those who deny the faith “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.” 2 Pet. 2:20-21.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. Both faith and deeds are essential for a continuous process to salvation.
2. Answer all questions related to salvation according to the teachings of our church. It is a complete coverage of the Holy Bible. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;” Prov. 3:5.
3. “Behold I am about to stand before the just judge, terrified and trembling because of my many sins. For a life spent in pleasures deserves condemnation. So, repent O my soul so long

*** Note: This lesson is completely based on the writings of H.H. Pope Shenouda III**

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For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

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**APRIL
THIRD SUNDAY**

**THE HOLY WEEK AND GOOD FRIDAY
CHRIST, MY PERSONAL SAVIOR**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To show that the Lord Christ is my personal Savior. His divinity, as it was manifested in the Holy Week and Good Friday, has its personal strength on me.

MEMORY VERSE

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name – you are Mine” Isaiah 43:1.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A)INTRODUCTION: The importance of the Holy Week and Good Friday

✠ The events of salvation from the entrance of our Lord Christ to Jerusalem as a King of Peace, His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension have occupied a very major part of the four gospels: 1/3 of the gospel of St. Matthew, 1/4 of the gospel of St. Luke, 1/3 of the gospel of St. Mark and 1/2 of the gospel of St. John. The reason for this is very clear, that this is the most important part in the life of our Lord in the flesh on earth and everything that was mentioned before was an introduction to it.

✠ Our Coptic Orthodox Church, in turn gives significant importance to this precious occasion, the Holy Week and Good Friday.

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(B)The Divinity of the Lord Christ as was manifested in the Holy Week and Good Friday:

1. The events of the Holy Week start with Lazarus Saturday, in which the Lord Christ raised Lazarus from the dead after four days. This unique miracle is a clear proof of Christ's divinity. Although He has performed many miracles, this specific miracle was very important because it showed that He can give life to whomever He wants. Therefore, He is God, who can give life.
2. After He raised Lazarus from the dead, they celebrated with him in Bethany and Mary the sister of Lazarus anointed Him with an expensive fragrant oil. When Judas complained about this the Lord Christ answered him saying, 'she did this for my burial'. So He knew in advance that He was going to be crucified and there will not be enough time for Him to be anointed, as were the customs of the Jews.
3. On His triumphant entry into Jerusalem He prepared for Himself a great celebration. He put special praise in the mouth of the children saying, 'blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.' When the Jews complained about this praise, He said to them, 'if those children stopped the stones will talk.' Therefore, only God can put such a deep praise to declare the personality of Christ, the Savior.
4. When He entered the altar in Jerusalem, He cleaned it up from the people who were buying and selling in it. He said, 'My house is a house of prayers'. It is known that the altar is the altar of God and the Lord Jesus called it His. Therefore, Jesus is God.
5. When He passed by, He found a fig tree that was filled with leaves but no fruits. He cursed that tree and the tree dried up instantly. Can anybody do this? Only God can do this to the tree. Therefore, the Lord Jesus is God.
6. While Judas Iscariot spent Wednesday of the Passion Week discussing with the Jews how to betray His Master, the Lord Christ had full knowledge of it and He spent the day in Bethany with His beloved one in full peace. As the Israelites during these days were holding on the Passover Lamb to be killed in a couple of days the Lord Christ was held in peace for couple of days until the time of His

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crucifixion. Remember that all the sacrifices of the Old Testament were just symbols of the true Lamb of God, the Lord Christ.

7. When He stood up in front of the Jewish authorities He declared saying, 'I have authority to deliver it (i.e. His soul) and authority to take it.' He also said to king Herod, 'you have no authority over Me.'
8. On the Cross the Lord Christ manifested His heavenly power more than any other time in flesh on earth. For example, there was darkness on all the earth from the sixth hour to the ninth hour. There was a huge earthquake on earth and the sun stopped giving light. The curtain of the altar was split in half from top to bottom. The Lord Jesus asked for the forgiveness of sin of the people who crucified Him. He talked to the right hand thief and told him, 'today you will be with Me in paradise.' For this reason our Coptic Orthodox Church sings for Him on Good Friday saying, 'Holy God who made in His weakness a lot more than when He was in His strength.'
9. The soldier called Linginius, when he saw all the powers that were manifested around the Cross; he was knocking on his breast, saying, 'truly this was the Son of God.' Later on, Linginius who was a Gentile became a Christian and was martyred in the name of the Lord Christ.

(C) Christ, my personal Savior

- ✝ It is not enough that I have faith that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. But it's more important that I myself believe that He is my personal Savior.
- ✝ The Lord is my Father. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my life. I sing for Him during the Pascal week saying, 'the Lord is my strength, and song and has become my salvation.'
- ✝ The Lord is for me personally. Every time I pray to Him, it is very personal between a child and His Father. In my prayers, I have to open up and tell Him everything. I must tell Him that I have sinned against Him and have done evil things. I must also tell Him to touch me with His purifying hand and heal me.



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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. My Lord and my Savior when I look on Your Cross, I realize that You are opening Your arms for me. You are my personal Savior.
2. I trust that when I deliver up my soul, You will receive it kindly according to Your mercy and You will bear my soul to paradise.
3. I cannot love you enough, O my Lord. Indeed I don't deserve all what You have done for me personally. But I can only say I live with the help of your mercy.

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**APRIL
FOURTH SUNDAY**

CHRIST IS RISEN..... HE IS INDEED RISEN

Please read John 20:1-18 and Acts 2:22-35, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To show that enjoying the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus in our life involves rolling out a big stone, similar to the stone that was rolled out of the gate of the tomb. In our lives, this big stone symbolizes our sins, which prohibits our joy with the Resurrected Lord.

MEMORY VERSE

*“Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?”
(Mark 16:3)*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A)INTRODUCTION:

✝ The resurrection of Christ is the strength of the church. It is the strength of a new life given to us by Christ, when He trampled on death and defeated Hades.

Easter, the feast of the Resurrection is an opportunity to renew the strength of our resurrection which we took when we were baptized. We were buried with Christ in baptism and just as Christ rose from the dead, we were also raised and can proceed in the newness of life.

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(B) Who will roll away the stone?

✠ At the beginning of the resurrection of the Lord Christ, the women went towards the tomb very early in the morning carrying the spices and were talking among themselves, saying, “who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?” Mark 16:3. The stone was huge and it was impossible based on human thinking that the women will reach the Body of Christ. Similarly, many times we feel that Jesus is trapped inside us, as if He has no movement and hence we cannot enjoy His Resurrection. Just exactly as He was in the tomb before resurrection and there was such a big stone at the gate of the tomb. This big stone symbolizes our sins, which prohibits us from enjoying the resurrected Lord.

How many times do I long to see the Lord Jesus, resurrected in His light and glory? How many times have I tried to roll the stone and my efforts went in vain? The heaviness of sin and the heaviness of the bad habits, which I am tied up with, are stronger than me to move and many times I say to myself in despair: “who can roll the stone away?”

✠ Despite the impossibility of rolling away the big stone, the women taught us a lesson to move forward and do what we can. They went towards the tomb. Was it because of their faith? Was it because of ignorance? In any case they taught us a lesson to continue and move forward in hope that the stone will be rolled away with the help of God.

✠ The women taught us another lesson: that when they went to the tomb, they did not go with empty hands. But they brought with them their ointment and spices to anoint the Body of the Savior (Mark 16:1). Therefore, I must take something with me, I must be ready to serve the Lord and I must be ready to sacrifice something for the Lord. I must at least show my good intentions if I truly want the stone to be rolled away and enjoy the light of the resurrected Lord and His glory.

✠ Now the women found that the stone was rolled away because the angel of the Lord came down from heaven and an earthquake had taken place (Matt 28:2). Therefore, for the stone to be rolled away, a miracle must have happened. Heavenly powers must have been involved.

Similarly, this big stone on my heart which resembles the Lord Jesus not moving or not resurrecting in my heart can be rolled away, when I get heavenly power that would change the inner side of me.

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Therefore, to enjoy the glory of the resurrected Lord in my life, I must never lose hope. I must move forward in my life, as the women did. I must do what I can in serving the Lord and listening to His commandments as the women carried the spices to anoint the Body of the Lord. Then I need help from heaven to roll away completely the stone of sin from my life so that I can enjoy the glory of the resurrected Lord.

(C)Why in Galilee?

✠The angel declared to the Disciples that the resurrected Lord would be waiting for them in Galilee. Therefore, Jesus Himself determined the place where He will see them to be Galilee (Matt 28:1).

Why Galilee again? Was it because Jesus wanted to protect His Disciples from the enmity of the Jews? There was another deeper reason.

✠The Lord Christ first met His Disciples in Galilee and there they heard His calling and they started to follow Him. Therefore, the memories of this place in their hearts will cause a pleasant refreshment inside them. After all the weaknesses that they showed during the Lord's suffering, the Lord wanted to renew in them the original joy and the original warmth. He wanted to renew their feelings and their strength to become the way that they were in the beginning and a lot more.

✠In the life of everyone there is a "Galilee". At least for those who met the Lord Christ one day and loved Him. This "Galilee" is the time in which I felt the Lord looking at me and calling me by name. And since that time years went by, probably loaded with sins and it appeared as if I forgot my beloved Jesus. Despite all this, whoever meets the Lord Jesus even one time, cannot forget Him. And Jesus is calling me to go back to Galilee again to enjoy this unlimited love and intimacy, which is characterized these days by the enjoyment of the Lord Jesus.

✠My Lord.....I would love to go back to Galilee, but am I going to meet You there? Can my heart be on fire again with Your love after it became so cold? Is remembering Galilee in my life enough to bring back my feeling the first time I met You? ".....He is going before you into Galilee....." (Matt 28:7). Therefore, the Lord is answering and confirming that He will not only wait in Galilee, but He will lead us into Galilee.

APRIL

Fourth Sunday

(D) The various themes of the Lord Jesus

✠The Lord Jesus appeared after His resurrection to the Disciples and did not spend much time blaming them because of their weaknesses and lack of faith. Also the Disciples did not waste time, saying sorry for what they did or felt. But everything went in simplicity and love, “have you any food here?” (Luke 24:41) and life started to become normal again. From the same point where it started, stopped and now is proceeding again. Therefore, if I fell and denied Jesus, I can simply come back and He will welcome me and there will be no wasting of time. There will be total joy.

✠He appeared in different themes (Mark 16:12) and in a different manner (John 20:20); may the Lord make us enjoy this beautiful theme of His resurrection as He made it possible for His Disciples before us.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. Move forward. Never stop even if things appear to be difficult. Just keep going to church. Just keep praying. Just keep reading your Bible. Keep moving towards the Lord and never go in any other direction.
2. In your way towards the Lord, don't keep your hands empty. Be ready to give. Be ready to sacrifice for the comfort of others. Be ready to serve the Lord as much as you can.
3. With the help of heaven, the large stone (my sins) will be rolled away from my heart and I will enjoy the feeling of the resurrected Lord in His light and the glory as the Martyrs and the Disciples did.
4. The Lord will take me back to past memories (Galilee) and help me to recover from my sins and from any shortcomings that I have. He promised to carry me back, as He carried His Disciples.

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**MAY
FIRST SUNDAY**

MAIN BOOKS IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To familiarize ourselves with the books of our beloved Coptic Orthodox Church and realize that these books have been put together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order for us to have a complete and deep spiritual life.

MEMORY VERSE

“For thus says the Lord...on her side shall you be carried, as one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 66:12-13).

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A)INTRODUCTION: The church is the mother of the believers

In the New Testament the church receives a kind of “motherhood” to all believers, so that she might beget sons of God in Christ by the Holy Spirit, through preaching the gospel and baptizing those who believe in it. The motherhood of the church is a right she received from God to witness to God’s fatherhood. Through the motherhood of the church, people can conceive God’s loving kindness.

St. Clement of Alexandria speaks of the church as the Virgin mother of the Christians. Her motherhood is correlated to God’s fatherhood, through her loving kindness she feeds her children on the Logos as holy milk “for thus says the Lord:....on her side shall you be carried,....as one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem” (Isaiah 66:12-13).

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St. Clement states that the ancient church – as the mother of the believers – presents the most accurate knowledge.

Our beloved Coptic Orthodox Church in her lovely motherhood helps her children to carry the Lord's Cross joyfully, for she created an atmosphere of joy even in the periods of persecution. Prisons were changed into places of singing hymns by the confessors, especially on the eve of their martyrdom. In other words, the Alexandrians often look to the Church as the "community of joy". Our church is rich in its resources of books, put together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to serve the believers and make out of them the Body of Christ. Let us now identify some of the main books in our Coptic Orthodox Church.

(B) Main books in the Coptic Orthodox Church:

1. The Holy Bible:

Old Testament forty-six books (including seven canonical books removed by the Protestant church).
New Testament twenty-seven books

2. The Divine Liturgy book:

There are three liturgies in the Diving Liturgy book: St. Basil, St. Gregory, and St. Cyril.

In our Coptic church, we use these three liturgies. The liturgy of St. Cyril was the first one written and it was written by St. Mark the apostle and then modified slightly by St. Cyril the great, whose name is usually associated with it. The Basilian Liturgy is customarily used throughout the year. The Gregorian Liturgy is often reserved for the festive occasions of the Lord Christ (e.g. Christmas, Epiphany, Easter etc.). The Cyrillian Liturgy of St. Mark is also very beautiful and can be used throughout the year and especially during Lent periods.

3. The Agpeya book of prayers:

Seven hours of prayers are in the Agpeya book. "Seven times every day I praise You" (Psalm 119:164).
The prayer of the veil is an extra prayer for monks.

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4. The Book of the church readings (Katameros):

There are five different Katameros in our Coptic Orthodox Church.

- (a) Annual for Sundays – readings depend on the Coptic month that we are in.
- (b) Annual for weekdays – readings depend on the Coptic date (e.g. the tenth day of the month of Baba....etc.). The theme for these readings depends on the Synaxarion of the day.
- (c) The Great Lent – contains the readings of all the days of the Great Lent including Jonah's Lent.
- (d) The Holy Week – contains all the readings of the Holy Week.
- (e) The Holy Fifty days – contains the readings of all the Holy Fifty days from Easter to Pentecost.

5. The Synaxarion:

The Synaxarion is the book of the life of our Saints and Martyrs. It is a beautiful practice to have a Synaxarion at home and read about the Saints of the day.

6. The Psalmody book of praises:

We have two different psalmodies. Annual psalmody: which contains the praises of all the days of the week and all the occasions, except the month of Kiahk, and the Kiahk Psalmody, which contains all the praises for the special month of Kiahk.

7. The Book of the Liturgy of the waters (Lakan) and the prostration prayers.

This book contains the prayers of the three liturgies of water:

- † Epiphany
- † Maundy Thursday
- † Feast of the Apostles

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This book also contains the prostration prayers of the feast of Pentecost.

8. The book of Antiphony (El-Difnar):

This book contains a glorification and a summary of the life of the Saint of the day. It is used in the midnight praises.

9. The book of Psalie:

This book contains special psalies for special feasts of the Lord Christ and the feasts of the Saints usually not found in the annual Psalmody.

10. The Book of Processions:

The book of processions of the feast of the Holy Cross and Palm Sunday and the expositions of the Great Lent and the Holy Fifty days. It also contains the psalies for all these occasions.

11. Deacons Hymnal Book:

This book contains all responses and hymns for deacons including hymns of special occasions.

12. The Holy Week directory book:

This book contains all the hymns rites and readings for the Holy Week starting from Palm Sunday until the Feast of the Resurrection.

13. Book of Church Offices:

This book contains the prayers of the church offices, such as Baptism, Chrismation, engagements, weddings etc.

14. The Book of Ordination and Consecrations:

This book contains the prayers for ordaining the various ranks in the church (for example deacons, priests....etc.) and the consecration of new churches, icons and vessels.

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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. The Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of God, guided the Church, our mother to prepare for us all these rich books for the various occasions of the church to help us grow spiritually and live a life of joy with the Lord Christ.
2. We must pay attention to all the readings in the church, so that we can live through the occasion that we are celebrating.
3. It is a good idea to own the Synaxarion at home and read about the life of the Saints of the day and learn from them.

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**MAY
SECOND SUNDAY**

**PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (VI):
OBADIAH THE PROPHET- GOD’S CALLING TO YOU
(A)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the first lesson in series of two lessons about Obadiah the prophet. In this lesson the focus is on God’s calling for us to bear witness for Him in a dark world.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

† **INTRODUCTION:**

The name **Obadiah** is a Hebrew word; literally, it means “Jehovah’s slave”, or “Jehovah’s worshipper”; translated into Arabic, it becomes “Abdallah” (meaning “the slave of God”), a name that started gaining favor and popularity in the Arabic-speaking countries at the seventh century.

St. Clement of Alexandria states in his commentary that, when **Jehoshaphat** began his reign over **Judah** (862-847 B.C.) for 25 years, there were three prophets at the time: “**Elijah** the Tishbite”, “**Micaiah**, son of Imlah” and “**Obadiah**, son of Hananiah”. At the time when **Jehoshaphat** was reigning over Judah in the South, there reigned over the Kingdom of Israel in the North: **Omri** (885-874 B.C.), **Ahab**, son of **Omri** (874-853 B.C.), Ahaziah, son of Ahab (853-872bc) and Jehoram, son of Ahab (852-841B.C.).

The authenticity of the time during which **Obadiah** the prophet lived is supported by the statement in his book concerning the fall of **Jerusalem** to the hands of the Philistines and Arabians, which coincides with the actual occurrence during the reign of **Jehoram** as recounted in “*2Chr 21:16*”: “Moreover the Lord stirred up

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against **Jehoram** the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians who were near the Ethiopians', which incident was previously reported in "2Kin 8:20": "In his days (referring to **Jehoram**), **Edom** revolted against **Judah's** authority and made a king for themselves."

The book of "**Obadiah**" is the shortest book of the Old Testament, consisting of only one chapter of 21 verses. It is one of the Old Testament books of which no reference is made in the New Testament Bible.

† **The message of Obadiah the Prophet and its historic context:**

The **Edomites** are the descendants of **Esau**, Jacob's brother. **Obadiah** foretold, in his prophecy, the fall of the **Edomites**. The land of **Edom** – known also as the land of "Seir"- was situated to the South East of the Kingdom of **Judah**. The word "**Edom**" literally means "dusty/earthly", or "bloody", in reference to the carnal human being who cherishes earthly things and bloodshed or iniquity.

It follows, therefore, that "**Edomite**" is a title ascribed to **Esau**, who was overflowing with grudging hatred to his brother Jacob. The book of Genesis recounts the initiation of the animosity between **Esau** and his brother **Jacob** (Gen.27). It became evident that the animosity was still prevalent when the **Edomites** denied the **Israelites** access and refused to grant them passage through their borders after the exodus from the land of Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. (*Num 20:14-21; Deut 2:4; Judg 11:17-18*). Thus the aggression of the **Edomites** against the children of Israel recurred persistently, allying with Israel's enemies throughout ancient history. We find that the desolation and fall of the "**Edomites**" – in addition to having been foretold in the book of **Obadiah**, is recounted also in "*Is 34:6; Ezek 25:12-14 and 35:1-5; Amos 1:11-12*".

† **Standpoints in the life of Obadiah the Prophet:**

Obadiah the Prophet was born about 800 years before the birth of Christ, in a village called in Hebrew "Beth Carim", literally meaning "House of Vineyard".

A number of people were called by the name **Obadiah** in the Old Testament Bible:

1. One of the chief servants in charge of the palace of **Ahab** the king, the second of the kings of Israel. "**Obadiah** feared the Lord greatly." 1 Kings 18:3
2. A descendant of **King David** (*1Chr 3:21*).
3. One of the chiefs of the family of **Issachar** (*1Chr 7:3*).
4. A descendant of **King Saul** (*1Chr 8:38; 9:44*).

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5. A man of the family of **Zebulun** (*1Chr 27:19*).
6. A man of the **Gadites** who joined **King David** at the stronghold (*1Chr 12:8-9*).
7. One of the leaders whom **Jehoshaphat** entrusted with teaching the law (*2Chr 17:7-9*).
8. A **Levite** that was responsible for work and service in the house of the Lord (*2Chr 34:12*).
9. One of the **Heads** for the **Houses** that went back to Jerusalem (*Ezra 8:9*).
10. One of the helpers of **Nehemiah** in sealing the Covenant (*Neh 10:5*).
11. A **Gatekeeper** to keep watch at the gates of the Temple (*Neh 12:25*).
12. The **fourth** of the **Minor Prophets** whose message was to foretell the fall of **Edom**.

Which one of those abovementioned was **Obadiah** the Prophet, the author of the Book in the Old Testament bearing this name?

There are four sources asserting that it is the first-mentioned in the above list, namely “**One of the Chief Servants of King Ahab, who feared the Lord greatly.**” These sources are:

First Source- The “**Synaxarion**”: The repose of this Prophet is commemorated on the 15th day of the month of “Toobi”. The narrative states: “On this day reposed St. **Obadiah**, one of the Prophets of Israel. He is the son of Hananiah the Prophet, of the tribe of **Judah**. He prophesied during the time of **Jehoshaphat**, King of **Judah**. He is believed to have been Captain of the third party of fifty men whom King **Ahaziah** sent to **Elijah** the Prophet, and who fell on his knees before **Elijah** and pleaded with him not to destroy him as the first two who had been burned up by the fire that came down from heaven, but to go down with him to **Ahaziah** the King. The Prophet arose and went down with him as commanded by the Angel of the Lord (*2Kin 1:15*). Here, **Obadiah** became convinced that serving **Elijah** the Prophet was by far higher and more honorable than the service of the earthly kings, that to be his companion would lead to the service of the **Heavenly King**. Leaving the service of the King to follow **Elijah**, he became worthy to receive the grace of prophesying: He prophesied for a period exceeding twenty years, and foretold the desolation of the land of **Edom** in return for their hostility towards God’s people (*Obad 16*),

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and foretold the salvation of **Jerusalem** and its victory over the descendants of Esau and over all its enemies (*Obad 17:21*). When he reposed, he was buried in the graveyard of his fathers.”

Second Source: The renowned writings of “Bishop **Nikolai Velimirovic**”, and of those of some of the early fathers of Alexandria.

Third Source: The Jewish Tradition.

Fourth Source: The book “**Life of the Sainly Prophets**” (Holy Apostles Convent Publication 1998).

We cannot, with absolute precision, pinpoint which of the persons by the name of “**Obadiah**” was the author of the Book. Such being the case, we must of necessity rely on what we feel confidently is the most authentic source of information, which is the “**Synaxarion**” of our Coptic Orthodox Church. Consequently, the author of the Book is The Prophet **Obadiah**, as depicted by the following standpoints and achievements in the Holy Bible:

a) “Obadiah” the Prophet rescues 100 Prophets (*1Kin 18:4*):

Obadiah loathed to acquiesce with King **Ahab** in his evil idolatry of worshipping the Baals, and despite his high-ranking office in the palace of **Ahab**, he continued to worship the true **GOD**. Is it possible for a person to co-exist with people of other religions but steadfastly maintains his true faith? The answer is “**Yes**” – if the person adheres unwaveringly to his/her own religion, practicing and enjoying the immense graces of the Divine Support.

When the ungodly Queen **Jezebel** was at loggerheads with **Elijah** the Prophet, persecuting all the Prophets and chasing to massacre them, **Obadiah** took one hundred of them and hid them, fifty in a cave and the other fifty in another cave. He kept feeding them with bread and water. The Pope St. **Athanasius** the Apostolic, reflects on this point and says: “What would these say when they see **Elijah**-after raising the dead-hiding for fear of King **Ahab** and the threats of **Jezebel**? At this time the sons of the Prophets did hide, with the help of **Obadiah**, in closed caves.” These caves were situated outside the city wherein was the palace, and this enabled **Obadiah**, the servant of the palace, to supply them with what they needed without being detected. To what extent would it be possible for love to tolerate and sustain risk and danger for the sake of others? What situation would **Obadiah** have found himself in, if it were revealed to **Ahab** or **Jezebel** that he was performing that act?

b) The secret meeting between Obadiah and Elijah (*1Kin 18:1-20*)

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“And it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to **Elijah**, in the third year, saying, ‘Go, present yourself to **Ahab**, and I will send rain on the earth.’ So **Elijah** went to present himself to **Ahab**; and there was a severe famine in **Samaria**. And **Ahab** had called **Obadiah**, who was in charge of his house. (Now **Obadiah** feared the Lord greatly. For so it was while **Jezebel** massacred the prophets of the Lord, that **Obadiah** had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water). And **Ahab** had said to **Obadiah**, ‘Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, {1} so that we will not have to kill any livestock.’ So they divided the land between them to explore it; **Ahab** went one way by himself, and **Obadiah** went another way by himself.

Now as **Obadiah** was on his way, suddenly **Elijah** met him;{2} and he recognized him, and fell on his face, and said, ‘Is that you, my lord **Elijah**?’

And he answered him, ‘It is I. Go, tell your master, “Elijah is here.”’ So he said, ‘How have I sinned, that you are delivering your servant into the land of Ahab, to kill me? As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, ‘*He is not here*,’ he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you. And now you say, “Go, tell your master, ‘**Elijah** is here’”!

And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from you that the Spirit of the Lord will carry you to a place I do not know; so when I go and tell **Ahab**, and he cannot find you, he will kill me. But I your servant have feared the Lord from my youth. Was it not reported to my lord what I did when **Jezebel** killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid one hundred men of the Lord’s prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water? And now you say, ‘Go, tell your master, “Elijah is here.”’ He will kill me!

Then **Elijah** said, ‘As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand,{3} I will surely present myself to him today.’ So **Obadiah** went to meet **Ahab**, and told him; and **Ahab** went to meet **Elijah**. Then it happened, when **Ahab** saw **Elijah**, that Ahab said to him, ‘Is that you, O troubler of Israel?’ And he answered, ‘I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, {4} in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals. Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at **Jezebel’s** table.’ So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel.” (1Kin.18:1-20).

It becomes evident, from the points here above underlined, that:

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{1} **Obadiah** was a Chief in the Palace of **Ahab**, responsible for the livestock, as stated by “**Josephus**” the Historian. (260-340AD)

{2} The dispensation of the Divine Providence for the meeting between **Elijah** and **Obadiah**. In the “Divine Liturgy” we pray: “Manage our lives as deemed fit.”

{3} From the assertion of **Elijah**: “As the Lord of Hosts lives, before Whom I stand”, we discern that Elijah was actually visualizing **GOD** and His Powerful Hand in all matters, and anything else disappears from in front of him.

{4} **Elijah**'s reply to **Ahab** “... but you and your father's house ...” is a clear expression of trust in **GOD** and complete submission to Him.

c) Elijah the Prophet rescues the life of Obadiah, Prince of the fifty (2King:1)

This incident occurred to **Obadiah** before starting on his prophecy as called up on by **GOD**: St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis (367-403 AD), comments that **Obadiah** the Prophet was the Prince of the fifty sent by King **Ahaziah** who reigned after **Ahab**. **Ahaziah**, the eldest son of **Ahab**, reigned for less than two years (850-849 bc). He had fallen through the lattice of his upper room and was injured. He sent messengers to the prophets of Baal, asking when he would recover from this injury. At the same time, the Lord commanded **Elijah** to arise and meet those messengers, and tell them that **Ahaziah** will die and will not come down from the bed to which he had gone up (2Kin 1:2-4). When those messengers went back and gave a description of the man they had met, **Ahaziah** recognize him as **Elijah** the prophet. So he sent one of his captains at the head of a party of fifty men- **Elijah** asked that fire may come down from heaven and consume them, and it did. The same thing happened to the second fifty when they met **Elijah** the prophet. The third time he sent one of his chiefs (this time it was **Obadiah**) at the head of fifty men. When **Obadiah** met **Elijah**, he fell on his knees before **Elijah** and pleaded humbly that he may be spared from facing the same calamity that had befallen the previous two parties. (2Kin. 1:13-15).

What was the fruit of humility? **Elijah** arose, went down to King **Ahaziah**, and imparted to him in person his forthcoming doom, dying on the bed to which he had gone up and from which he would never come down.

d) Obadiah abandons the Palace to follow Elijah:

The “Synaxarion” mentions that **Obadiah** left the Palace and followed **Elijah** the Prophet. He was convinced that the Palace was not for him, and that he would be much better off following the “Man of God”. This led to him being called upon by

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the Lord to prophesy, and he wrote his prophecy in one chapter which is known as “Book of **Obadiah** the Prophet”, one of the books of the Old Testament Bible.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) As Obadiah the prophet was called to witness to the truth in a dark age, we all have a duty to be a light to the world in which we live. The world we live in today is filled with wrong religions, harassments, injustice, racial immorality ... etc.
- (2) As Obadiah feared the Lord from his youth, we too must act in a very careful way, walking in the fear of God and doing our best not to anger God.

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Second Sunday



For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

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**MAY
THIRD SUNDAY**

**PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (VII):
OBADIAH THE PROPHET- GOD'S CALLING TO YOU
(B)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a series of two lessons about Obadiah the prophet. In this lesson the focus is on the prophecies of Obadiah.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and then proceed as follows:

† **Meditations on the Book of "Obadiah":**

Summary: This book is composed of two inter-related themes:

First Theme: The desolation of **Edom**(*verses 1,8*), which is stressed upon in the personification of "**Esau**" (*verses 6, 8, 9, 18*), and of "**Teman**" (*verse 9*).

Second Theme: The justification of **Judah**(*verse 12*), stressed upon in the personification of **Jacob**(*verses 10, 17, 18*), of **Jerusalem**(*verses 11, 20*), of **Mount Zion** and, more comprehensively, in the person of "**Israel**" as a whole (*verses 18-20*). The Book contains other prophecies, such as predicting the fall of Lucifer "**Satan**" (*verse 4*); the perdition of the Jews who denounced the **Lord Christ**(*verse 15*); the salvation of the Gentiles and their deliverance would come down from "**Zion**" (*verse 17*).

Even though the whole Book is but one Chapter, its depth is fathomless. Its objective is to highlight the saying:

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“As you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.”(verse 15).

The concluding prophecy is that **“The kingdom shall be the Lord’s”** (verse 21), which is the end purpose of the Divine Act.

1. The “Desolation of Edom” foretold (verses 8-10):

a) *“Will I not in that day,”* says the Lord, *“Even destroy the wise men from Edom, And understanding from the mountains of Esau? Then your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, To the end that everyone from the mountains of Esau May be cut off by slaughter. For violence against your brother Jacob, And you shall be cut off forever.*

“**Edom**” was renowned for its men of wisdom and understanding. Among these is “**Eliphaz the Temanite**” (Job 2:11), who was from “**Teman**”, a distance of five miles to the east of “**Petra**” in “**Edom**”. However, **GOD** will cause those wise men to perish from “**Edom**”. That wisdom, which is founded on haughtiness and rooted in unlovingness, will be exterminated by **GOD**.

b) *“But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother In the day of his captivity; Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah In the day of their destruction; Nor should you have spoken proudly In the day of distress.”(verse 12).*

St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (373-397 AD) says: “Whosoever rejoices at the fall of a brother (or sister) is hailing and rejoicing at Satan’s victory.”

The prophecy about the desolation of **Edom** was fulfilled. The Prophet **Malachi** describes the desolation of **Edom** as having actually taken place, and in the “Past-participle” tense: **“But Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage, for the jackals of the wilderness.”(Mal. 1:3).**

Around 312 BC, the Arabians advanced towards the land and displaced the **Edomite’s** that had been living in “**Petra**”. The **Edomite’s** fled to Southern Palestine, but were vanquished during the age of the Maccabees (134-104 BC) at the hand of John Hyrcanus. In the year 70 AD, they were destroyed along with the Jews when they revolted against the Holy Bible to the destruction of **Edom**. (Is.34:6; Ezek. 25:12-14 and 35:1-15; Amos 1:11.12).

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2. The fall of “Lucifer”(Satan):

*“Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars. From there I will bring you down,” says the Lord.
(verse4)*

St. Jerome (347-420 AD) points to the similarity between “Obadiah’s” prophecy about the fall of Satan, and that of **Isaiah** (Is. 14:12-14):

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer (literally ‘day star’), son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart; ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of GOD; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation, on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’”.

Thus does **GOD** bring down to the pit, the haughty and proud, who strive for exaltation in this world?

3. Prediction of the perdition of the Jews who denounced CHRIST:

“As you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.”(verse 15).

In the commentary of St. Cyril of Alexandria (412-444 AD) on this verse, he points to the similarity between these and those Jews who “**cried out at once saying: ‘Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas’**”(Luke 23:18). He says:

“My brethren, there is no understanding nor comprehension in the hearts of those who are carried away by evil and lead others to sin against the Divine Majesty. This is evident within the Council of the Jews, who did wrong to **Christ** and this led them to a great torment, having been judged by the Divine Justice. They had led **Christ** to **Pilate**, and themselves they were led to the torment under the Romans who vanquished their land, enslaved them and demolished their City that had been the Holy Place, and burned everything that was in the City. To those Jews applies the saying of **Isaiah**: “*Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him. For the reward of his hands shall be given him.*”(Is. 3:11).

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Also the saying of **Obadiah**: *“As you have done, it shall be done to you. Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.”*(Obad.15)

Also the saying of the Lord **Christ**: *“With the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”* (Matt. 7:2).

This is the Law for the Lord’s Great Day.

4. The deliverance of the Gentiles foretold:

“For the day of the Lord upon all the nations is near.” (verse 15).
This was fulfilled, as the Lord **Christ** *“Came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God.”*(John 1:11-12).

The people of Samaria believed in **Christ**. “**Cornelius**” believed in **Christ**. The Egyptians believed at the preaching of **St. Mark** the Apostle, and turned from their ancient ungodly idolatry to the True God and His Only-Begotten Son, our Lord **Jesus Christ**, heralding the establishment of the most spiritually-deep Church in the world.

5. Salvation will come down from “Zion”:

**“But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
And there shall be holiness;
The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.”** “Obadiah 1:17

This coincides with Christ’s declaration to the **Samaritan Woman**: *“... for Salvation is of the Jews’*(John 4:22). If **GOD** destroyed **“Edom”** (*the Old Person*), it is only to establish **“Zion”** (*the New Person*), sanctified for the Lord. On her Mount will spring up the rescue and salvation, when the Cross is uplifted to embrace every believing soul, bestowing on her the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, sanctifying her and making of her a Holy Temple for the dwelling of *the Holy Spirit of God*.

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✠ Spiritual lessons to be gained from the life and strife of Obadiah the Prophet:

1) **God's Fear: "Obadiah feared the Lord greatly". (1Kin. 18:3).**

Introducing himself to **Elijah** the Prophet, he said: "*I, your servant, have feared the Lord from my youth*" (1Kin. 18:12).

In **Obadiah's** life, the fear of the Lord was dominantly prevalent. What does it mean "to fear the Lord?" It is that the person is frightened from the mere thought of performing an act that would anger or displease God, let alone actually indulging in it. Thus the person becomes extremely cautious in refraining from injuring the feelings of the Lord. In whatever is said or done, be it something conspicuous or concealed, the person is meticulously sensitive in avoiding sin or performing injustice because of the fear of GOD that fills his heart. As is written: "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom*" (Ps. 111:10)

In Church, before the Gospel is read, the Deacon calls: "Stand up in the fear of **GOD...**"

During the Divine Liturgy, he asks the people to "Worship God with fear and trembling". It is true that **GOD** is a Merciful and Compassionate Father, but it is equally true that to Him is due awe and veneration.

2) **Gallantry and Courage in serving others:**

Obadiah took one hundred Prophets, hid them from the face of the evil queen **Jezebel**, and kept feeding them with bread and water. He risked his own life by putting it on the line in order to provide them with the protection that was needed. To what length is a person prepared to go in order to positively illustrate his love for others, not in word but indeed and action? Are we defenders of truth and justice? Do we provide help for those in destitution, wherever they may be, and take positive action to alleviate their need for means of subsistence and for the improvement of their living condition?

3) **Humility is the key factor for success and great achievements:**

When **Ahaziah** the King sent **Obadiah** at the head of fifty men of the Palace dignitaries, **Obadiah's** humility was so profound when meeting **Elijah**, pleading with him and beseeching that he may spare him and his men the doom that befell on the previous two parties. (2Kin. 1:13-15).

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Our Lord **Christ** teaches us thus: *“Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”* (Matt. 11:29).

“Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His Mouth.” (1Pet. 2:22) When He offered Himself to **John** to baptize Him, who was but one of the sinners, what was the outcome? The Heavens were opened to Him and the voice of the Father came from heaven, saying: *“This is My Beloved Son”* (Matt. 3:17), *‘and the Spirit of GOD descended like a dove and alighted upon Him’* (Matt 3:16). It is that same outcome that opened for us the door wide open through the sacrament of Baptism.

When our Saintly Mother *Virgin Mary* bowed her head in submission to the *Angel Gabriel’s* Annunciation, saying: *“Behold the maidservant of the Lord!”* (Luke 1:38), *“the Holy Spirit came upon her”* (Luke 1:35), and in her womb she conceived immaculately, and in the fullness of time gave birth to **GOD the Logos**.

We should learn to be humble in words, in thoughts and in all our dispositions, refraining from the haughty attitude and behavior of the people of the world.

4) When a person extracts himself out of the pomp and vainglory of the world, he plunges into a great and fathomless spirituality with GOD:

When **Obadiah** turned his back from the King’s Palace and followed **Elijah** the prophet, he plunged into the fathomless depths of great spirituality. Even though he was actually preserving himself in the fear of **GOD** while in the Palace, yet, for him to discover the greater spirituality of unsurpassable dimension and qualify for prophesying, he had to walk away from the Palace. A similar experience was savored by the two Saints, Maximus and Dometius, the sons of the Royalty, (*Emperor Walendianus*) whose immense love for **GOD** still fell short of their aspiration and they sought to plunge into far deeper depths, and prompting them to leave the Palace wherein they had been brought up and seek to cross the barrier between them and that fathomless dimension in the company of **GOD**. The same could be said of St. **Arsenius**, the teacher of the children of Royalty, and of Pope St. **Cyril VI**, who in his early days as a monk, left the monastery and cherished solitude, first in a cavern and later at the deserted flour-mill, in order to savor a more passionate and intimate companionship with **CHRIST**, chanting with the bride of the “Songs”: *“I am for my beloved, and my beloved is for me.”*

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Dear Reader: Won't you give even a mere hour a day for solitude with the Lord?

5) *As you have done, it shall be done to you. Your reprisal shall return upon your own head*(Obad.15):

If only this rule were followed by everyone in every-day life, injustice would have been eradicated and relations would have become flawless:

“Would the children disobey their parents?” NO.

“Would a stronger man strike a weaker one?” NO.

“Would a husband or a wife commit an act of infidelity against each other?” NO.

It is inconceivable that any miscarriage of justice or sin would be committed in any of these situations, if only every person had it at heart that; ***“the reprisal shall return to him.”*** To the contrary, we would find every person intensifying his/her commendable behavior, readily and willingly extending a helping hand to others and to the service of the Church and Community, knowing for certain that **GOD** will reward everyone a hundred-fold in this world, and Eternal Life in the Coming Age.

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**MAY
FOURTH SUNDAY**

**THE EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE TO
PHILEMON (I): CHRISTLIKE COMMUNICATION (A)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the first lesson in a two lesson series about the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon. In this lesson the focus is on Christlike communication.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

INTRODUCTION:

- ✠ The epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to his friend Philemon is considered to be the most personal epistle and a very private one.
- ✠ This epistle was written from Rome during the imprisonment of St. Paul the Apostle, around 62 or 63 A.D.
- ✠ It appears that Philemon was a Colossian, for he referred to his son Archippus as a Colossian “And say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord that you may fulfill it”, Col. 4:17. As well he referred to his servant Onesimus as a Colossian “Tychicus will tell you all the news about me ... with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.” (Col 4:7-9). It also appears that Philemon was a friend of St. Paul since he freely asked him to prepare a guest room for his accommodation “But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you (Philemon 1:22).

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✠ The Epistle's purport and significance:

St. Paul wrote this epistle to Philemon concerning the latter's fugitive slave or servant Onesimus who took some of Philemon's money and ran away. Later, Onesimus met St. Paul and became a Christian following a great repentance, faith and baptism. Now St. Paul is sending to Philemon this epistle which asks for the acceptance of Onesimus in Christian love and pardoning him and pledges to pay what Onesimus had taken. Not only did St. Paul ask Philemon to accept Onesimus in love, he asked him to use Onesimus in the service of the Lord's vineyard. As such was the pioneering church, i.e. a positive one that utilized all capabilities for the purpose of establishing the Kingdom of God. St. Paul himself was reluctant to use Onesimus in service before obtaining Philemon's approval. Such conduct highlights the fact that even good deeds should not be administered through force and compulsion, but through free will. It is worth mentioning here that the word "Onesimus" means "useful."

The objective of this epistle is to point out the following:

- ✠ The light of the Gospel of God is able to change man entirely even if it were this fugitive Onesimus who robbed his master Philemon.
- ✠ The strong barrier between people and fatal hatred due to enslavement falls and collapses before the light of the Gospel and sonship to God. So much so that Philemon and Onesimus become Christian brothers and co-servants. We would like to note in this context that St. Paul's interference was a matter of performing a good deed for the benefit of the church members and also sets an example for us that we must not be negative towards life's day-to-day situations.

Verse 1: "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer."

Despite the fact that St. Paul was a prominent minister who had many Disciples, he started his epistle taking the pride of being "a prisoner of Christ Jesus". There are people incarcerated for crimes they committed. However, this St. Paul was in prison in Rome because of his love for Christ Jesus and because of his ministry in the name of the Lord our God for whose sake he

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was also willing to die as well. St. Paul said “who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom 8:35) To what extent are we willing to abide by our principles and fellowship with Christ Jesus?

- ✠ How graceful of St. Paul to take into partnership his disciples and colleagues in his service. No matter how personal the epistle, he says “and Timothy our brother”. How clear the apostle’s humbleness and love are. Timothy was St. Paul’s disciple and St. Paul called him “our brother.” We should not be filled with boastfulness over others. Rather, we ought to take all into partnership in our deeds and service. Let us not take credit for ourselves or attempt to seek a high stature for ourselves. Let us work together in harmony, love and friendliness.

Before we proceed with the Divine Liturgy, we pray the reconciliation prayer saying “Kiss each other with a holy kiss.” It has to be that way because “God is Love”.

- ✠ “To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer”. St. Paul had a heart so full of celestial love and all his epistles are replete with all that love. Hence, he said “Philemon our beloved”. No wonder “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). Then St. Paul reminds Philemon of the fact that they are co-laborers in the Lord’s vineyard for the purpose of setting up the Kingdom of God. That is why the apostle says “fellow laborers” work for building the kingdom of God and His glory is indeed Christians’ fundamental task with which Christians should be pre-occupied. Well, how about our daily secular duties? They too, have their own place working for community service and meeting man’s personal needs. However, of prime importance, for life’s purpose is to enjoy the heavenly peace and work for the spread of the Kingdom of God. “And He said to them, ‘Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature’” (Mark 16:15). It is noteworthy that a basic sign and a measure of depth in Christian love are the power of love in the hearts of Christians. In the depth of his life with Christ Jesus, St. Paul was also in the depth of love.

Verse 2: “To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.”

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✠ It seems that this Apphia was Philemon's wife and Archippus was his son in the flesh. Here the apostle has been keen on being thoughtful of all in true love and respect when he mentioned Archippus, he described him as "our fellow soldier". Indeed, a Christian is supposed to be a good soldier under the command of the Lord Jesus Himself. As a matter of fact, St. Paul himself said earlier "finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in the chains; that in it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak" (Ephesians 6:10-20).

✠ The church in your house. The church is the group of believers whose house transforms into a prayerful church surrounded by angels and whose family lives enjoying the peace of God that surpasses all reason. This is not the only time where the believers' house is described as a church. "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus ... likewise greet the church that is in their house". (Rom 16:3-5). As well "Greet the brethren who are in Loadicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house" (Col 4:15).

What are the features of the Christian family? They are members in the sacramental Body of Christ where they co-live in splendid love, singing and praising together. According to the traditions, the church dresses with the bridegroom the "burnoose" in the marriage ceremony reminding him that he is the servant of the family's altar at home and is responsible,

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together with his wife, for creating a Christian environment at home for their children.

Can each and every one of us say that there is a church in his or her house? Can we all say that we are living with God? “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations” (Psalm 90:1)?

Verse 3: “Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ”.

Here, the Apostle points out the role of the Father as the planner for salvation and sender of the prophets and giver of all blessings, thereby confirming the unity of labor between the Father and the Son and the Apostle. This demolished the Gnostics’ duality which differentiates between God of the Old Testament and God of the New Testament. When talking about the Father and the Son, St. Paul does not handle their relationship together apart from us. Rather we know about them through the blessing of the Holy Spirit, for our sake and for our benefit “for there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these are one.” (I John 5:7).

Verse 4: “I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers.”

This is identical to what St. Paul said in his first epistle to the Thessalonians “we give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers” (1 Thess 1:2). In all cases, we should always be thankful. After all this is what our church teaches us “Let’s give thanks to the blessing maker at all times”. As well, we should all pray for one another, a token of our love for each other. Do we recall the sick, the poor, the widows and the orphans in our personal prayers?

Verse 5: “Hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints”.

Here the apostle proclaims that the reason why he is thanking God for Philemon is that he, St. Paul, has heard of Philemon’s love and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his association with all the saints. Such was St. Paul: while imprisoned, he was still following up the church’s news

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“hearing of your love” nor would he forget to pray for each person “making mention of you always in my prayers.”

Verse 6: “That the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgement of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.”

In interpreting this verse, St. John Chrysostom says “you see St. Paul giving before taking, and before he asks for anything, he himself gives something far greater.” The sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledging the good things you have. Philemon, attained great virtue and lacked nothing, because his faith becomes effective when it was accompanied by deeds. St. Paul the Apostle did not say “Your faith, but the sharing of faith”, thereby connecting his faith and that of Philemon together with the rest of the believers, all being members in the Body of Christ Jesus.

In so saying, St. Paul makes Philemon willing enough to accept what St. Paul was going to ask concerning Onesimus.

Verse 7: “For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.”

Here is the unity of the church. St. Paul was not alone in his joy and consolation in Philemon’s conduct. Rather the whole church had great joy and consolation because of his love.

St. John Chrysostom interprets this verse on “the hearts of the saints” by saying that “the saints’ love for Philemon is like the parent’s love and sentiments for their child (based on the word “hearts”) which reflects the depth of their love for Philemon.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Never lose hope. As Onesimus repeated “become a good Christian,” we must never lose hope. We can improve. The light of God can help us overcome the darkness of the world.

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- (2) We must serve God and share with others the services and the belongings as well.
- (3) Love is the best language of communication.
- (4) Our homes are supposed to be extensions of the church i.e. filled with prayers, peace and purity.

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For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the students
in the class

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**JUNE
FIRST SUNDAY**

**THE EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE TO
PHILEMON (II):CHRIST-LIKE COMMUNICATION (B)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a series of two lessons about the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon. In this lesson the focus is on Christlike communication.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and continue on as follows:

Verse 8: “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting.”

After St. Paul had presented his friend Philemon with this whole loving and humble introduction, he started this request in the same love and humble spirit but with force. Through Jesus Christ, he dares not to ask but rather orders in a befitting matter. Whosoever has authority in serving the Lord’s vineyard, may give an order, provided it is done in a constructive manner, “as deemed fit”, so that both the end and the means, are correct at the end.

Note: An introduction is always important: when giving a speech, writing an article or when demanding something from someone. The introduction must be full of love and respect, in order to attract the recipient’s attention.

Verse 9: “Yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you- being such one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.”

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In this verse, St. Paul elaborates on his request from Philemon: first “for love’s sake”, second, in the capacity of his priestly sovereignty, noting that the word “the aged” here bears the priestly authority and third, considering his fatherly love “also a prisoner of Jesus Christ”.

In this context, St. John Chrysostom says: “In his words ‘Paul the aged’, makes Philemon too courteous to refuse the request. Moreover Philemon would not refuse Paul’s request because he is a “prisoner of Jesus Christ”.

Verse 10: “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus whom I have begotten while in my chains.”

The request was not based on St. Paul’s stature, his priestly power, or his suffering for the sake of the Lord and sharing faith with believers, but on what Onesimus acquired following faith and baptism whereby he became Paul’s son.

Therefore, St. Paul’s request with regard to Onesimus had to be fair rather than being merely based on St. Paul stature.

Note: Even when mediating to those in power for a needy person, the factor of justice has to exist as well. God is love, yet fair and we should be like Him.

Verse 11: “Who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.”

In so saying, St. Paul describes the change Onesimus experienced that not only did he become a Christian, but he became a servant as well. St. Paul did not say that Onesimus will be profitable to service, but that he “is profitable to you and to me”. How profound is that change, which occurs to man through the work of God in one’s life.

It is a radical and complete change, just like it happened for the Samaritan woman, Zechariah the tax collector, St. Moses the black and many others.

Verse 12: “I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart.”

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The words “my heart” are the same words used in verse 7 “the hearts of the saints”. They are expressive words denoting profound sentiments.

St. John Chrystom interprets this verse saying: “St. Paul reveals the depth of his feeling by not saying “you must receive him”, but rather, he expresses his sentiments saying to Philemon “pardon him and receive him in love and respect, hence, receive him, that is my own heart.”

St. Paul’s expression “that is my own heart” implies also that he cannot dispense with Onesimus because nobody can dispense with his own heart.

Verse 13 and 14: “Whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were but voluntary.”

The Lord Himself does not compel any person to do good deeds. Instead, the lord gives man side by side the possibility of free good will and good deeds so that whosoever wants to work voluntarily, would be crowned accordingly. Thus was St. Paul’s conduct, just like his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. “But without your consent” is a highly respectful expression. A Christian person must have Christ’s features in both word and conduct.

Verses 15 and 16: “for perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave as a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

Here St. Paul is trying to explain in humbleness why God allowed Onesimus to rob Philemon and run away, by saying: “perhaps” for divine wisdom so that Onesimus might meet with Paul and be saved by being transformed from the slavery and sinfulness status to interconnect with God, Philemon, Paul and all the church. It is a gladdening interpretation. St. Paul did not say about Onesimus that he “ran away”. Instead he said “departed from you” to avoid hurting his feelings. The Lord transforms evil to good for His children. He transformed Onesimus’s escape into a chance for him to move from sin to the freedom of God’s children. St. Paul’s words on Onesimus after the latter’s repentance, describing him as a beloved brother, is the same approach as that of our Lord Jesus Himself who honored us by not calling us slaves, but beloved ones, friends and coinheritors.

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Verses 17,18, and 19: “If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account. I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay- not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.”

St. Paul’s words “if then you count me as a partner”, are replete with humbleness as St. Paul being Christ’s dearly beloved disciple, had a heart full of faith and surely was Philemon’s co-believer. As a matter of fact, St. Paul’s words “receive him as you would me” are abundant in love and are a recognition that Onesimus is equal to Philemon and even to Paul himself, since he, i.e. Onesimus, embraced belief in Jesus Christ. Even though St. Paul reminds Philemon that he owes his life to him. That is St. Paul, since the former led the latter onto the path of life with Christ, the Apostle still pledges to settle the materialistic aspect lingering between Philemon and Onesimus. St. Paul even states this pledge saying, “I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand.”

Verse 20: “Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord, refresh my heart in the Lord.”

A Christian person’s life lies in his or her unity with our Lord Jesus Christ “for you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:3). That is why the Apostle says “let me have joy from you in the Lord.” Then he says “refresh my heart in the Lord.” Elsewhere, St. Paul even says about the departed “for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God, will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” (I Thes 4:14).

Meanwhile it is noteworthy that words “my heart” was mentioned three times in this short epistle: a token of profound and true love and compassion.

Verse 21: “Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.”

Here the Apostle presents “the motive” that makes his request acceptable, i.e. “having a confidence in your obedience” then he proceeds to encourage him by saying “knowing that you will do even more than I say.”

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Verses 22-25: “But meanwhile, also prepare a guestroom for me, for I trust, that through your prayers I shall be granted to you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

The Apostle Paul did seek Philemon’s reply concerning Onesimus’ issue because he was sure of Philemon’s love and obedience.

Instead, he asked Philemon to pray for him and prepare a guestroom for him so that he might be able to visit him after his release from jail. Of course, St. Paul was not forgetful of the Christian love that encompasses all. Therefore, he extends Epaphras’ greeting (Col. 4:12), that of St. Mark (who is St. Mark the evangelist and the one who preached Christianity in Egypt), Aristarchus (about whom we do not know much), Demas, (who left St. Paul during his second exile), and Luke (who is St. Luke the evangelist and writer of the Acts).

Then St. Paul the apostolic, being filled with the Holy Spirit, concludes his epistle with a prayer for Onesimus asking for a blessing for him from our Lord Jesus Christ. He has started his epistle with a prayer for Philemon and concludes his epistle with a prayer for him. No wonder, for prayer is the source of every gift and every blessing “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the father of lights (James 1:17). We should always support our life with prayer.

The following is an excerpt written on St. Onesimus quoted from the Synaxarium of the Coptic Orthodox Church:

“... the Divine has arranged for Onesimus to attend the teaching of St. Paul the Apostle. He learned it by heart and embraced belief at his hands.

His heart was filled with grace and fear of God and he remembered what he had stolen from his mater and from others. Nothing that was left with him so that he might return it to its owners. He felt sad and communicated this to St. Paul who reassured him and wrote an epistle to his master Philemon wherein he informed him that Onesimus has become a disciple of Christ, and a son to St. Paul by ministry. He recommended that he should be kind to him and not rebuking, rather put what he lost on the apostle's account. When Onesimus brought the epistle to his master Philemon, the latter was glad at the former’s belief and repentance, treating him according to the apostle’s recommendation. Moreover, he offered him more money, but he did not



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accept it saying ‘with Christ, I need nothing.’ Then he departed him and went back to Rome and continued to serve St. Paul till his martyrdom, and deserved to be ordained a priest. After St. Paul’s martyrdom, the Roman ruler arrested him and sent him into exile on an island where he taught and baptized the islanders. When the ruler went to that island and found him guiding people towards belief in Jesus Christ, he beat him painfully then broke his legs and departed in peace. May the blessing of his prayers be with us Amen.”

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**JUNE
SECOND SUNDAY**

**THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HIS EFFECT IN THE
FORMATION OF THE PERSONALITY OF THE
CHRISTIAN INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY**

Please read 1Corinthians 12:3-7, 1 Corinthians 12: 12-13, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

To learn about the effect of the Holy Spirit on the formation of the personality of the Christian person and the formulation of the church services.

MEMORY VERSE:

“likewise the Spirit also helps our weaknesses...” Romans 8:26

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

INTRODUCTION:

The part taken from 1 Corinthians 12:3-7 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 explains to us the actions of the Holy Spirit, both in the formation of the Christian personality and in the formation of the Christian Community – the church.

(A)The Holy Spirit and His work to form the Christian Individual

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“Therefore to make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:3

From the verse we can see that I cannot reach the true path with Christ and become a son or daughter of God except through the actions of the Holy Spirit inside of me.

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:12-13.

From the moment of the Christian’s second birth in baptism, the Holy Spirit gives a new vision and a new life. Just exactly as how a new vision and a new life were given to the man who was born blind, but the Lord Christ gave him new eyes.

This is why the Holy Spirit is named Parhleton and it is a Greek word that means “the Helper of the soul in everything.” The Holy Spirit helps us in all aspects of our Christian life including:

✠The understanding of the word of God.

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” John 16:13-14

✠The ability to pray

“Likewise the Spirit also helps our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered.” Romans 8:26

✠The ability to praise

“What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. 1 Corinthians 14:15

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Therefore, we cannot pray or sing effectively unless the Holy Spirit starts to work inside of us.

As well, the Holy Spirit beautifies our souls with the fruits.
“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” Gal. 5:22-23.

✝ **The Holy Spirit is a source of daily blessings so that we do not thirst for the materialism of the world.**

“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’” John 4:13-14

The Holy Spirit works within the individual to give him/her a spiritual vision to motivate for prayer, to understand the scriptures and to make out of him/her a true believer in Christ.

But there are two things that are required from us to help enjoy the actions of the Holy Spirit inside of us:

1. **Repentance**

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and civil speaking, be put away from you with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving to one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:30-32

“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness. Let it not even be named among you, as it is fitting for saints”. Ephesians 5:3

3. **Submission to God, thanksgiving, meditation and prayer.**

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

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singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.” Ephesians 5:15-21.

†The Holy Spirit and His work to form the Christian community (the Church)

In the first book of Corinthians we read:

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Service in the church is under the leadership of God Himself. He chooses the people to serve in His house and He is the one who gives them the various talents to form a well-integrated Christian community that is fruitful and lacks nothing. For example:

†In providing social services:

“Seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” were chosen to serve the people while the Disciples chose to concentrate on giving themselves “continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

“Now in those days, when the number of Disciples were multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the Disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmeans and Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they had hands on them.” Acts 6:1-6.

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✠ In the service of constructing the church:

In the Old Testament, God told Moses that he had appointed certain people, and instructed them, as well as instilled in them the gifts and talents needed to construct the tabernacle and everything within.

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘See I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Atohab, the son of Ahisamahc, of the tribe of Dan and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans that they may make all that I have commanded you, the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle – the table and its utensils, the pure gold lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base – the garments of ministry, the holy garments for Aaron, the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests, and the anointing oil and sweet incense for the holy place. According to all that I have commanded you they shall do” Exodus 31:1-11.

Therefore, in every church there are people who serve children and youth in Sunday school classes, and the Holy Spirit works in them so that they are speakers of the Holy Spirit. There are people who look after the social events and they also work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in heavenly love and self-denial. Therefore, no one can feel proud of his or her service in the church because the Holy Spirit gives them their gifts.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

The Holy Spirit – whom we receive when we are baptized – gives us the Christian life that we maintain through our regular repentance and spiritual practices. The whole body of the Church is formed from each member from the various talents that the Holy Spirit provides to each one.

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**JUNE
THIRD SUNDAY**

**HOW CAN I SHARE MY FAITH WITHOUT AN
ARGUMENT? (I)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is lesson one in a series of two lessons on the difficulties of sharing one's faith without an argument. How to share our faith effectively?

MEMORY VERSE:

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." 1 Pet. 3:15

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) How can I share my faith without an argument?

One's answer is to go low-key, relational, and long-term. "Friendship evangelism" is an important way to attract people to the difference that Christ is making in us (1 Pet. 3:15). But is that the whole answer? Have some of us been using that strategy as an excuse not to talk openly about our faith?

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life. --Paul (1 Tim. 1:15-16)

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Jesus Christ transforms lives. Just as He dramatically redirected the life of the apostle St. Paul, the Lord continues to change the lives of men and women today.

(B) OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Have you ever wanted to share your faith but chickened out?

What makes it difficult for us to share our faith?

- I'm unsure of how to guide the discussion to the Scripture.
- I fear rejection.
- I don't know how to start a conversation about spiritual issues.
- I lack confidence that the Lord will speak through me.
- I can't imagine that some people would even care to hear what I have to say.

We're going to deal with the how-to questions in the pages to follow, but we first need to clarify our role and the proper attitude.

We need to get away from a "win them" mentality. People do not put their faith in Christ because we cleverly "force" them to believe. We must realize that if we "win" someone to Christ, he's probably not saved.

We also have to believe that success in God's eyes is sharing our faith and living out our Christian life. He does not measure success by how many people we lead to Jesus Christ. Our job is to be faithful to Him.

Still we fear failure and rejection. There is no stronger feeling in the world than that. It hurts. But we must remember that it's the gospel people they're rejecting, it's Jesus they're rejecting, it's not us. It feels like us sometimes, but we have to break free from the desire to cause the conversion. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44).

The apostle St. Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth, "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). But that didn't stop him. In fact, most of the New Testament was written by that "coward."

God understands that we might be afraid. But we have no excuse not to tell others about Christ, because His strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

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Remember Moses. He stuttered. Moses would not have been a good TV personality today. God chooses the weak things of the world to shame the wise and the strong and if anybody qualifies for that, it would be me.

And finally, if you are thinking that the person you are considering talking to is an impossible case, you've got to trust that God is the God of the impossible. You and I need to remember our part and God's part in the process of sharing our faith.

OUR PART

- "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make Disciples of all nations'" (Matt. 28:18-19).
- "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making His appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20).

GOD'S PART

- " 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty" (Zech. 4:6).
- "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (1 Cor. 2:4).
- "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44).
- "No one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him" (John 6:65).

Step 1- How can I share my faith without an argument?

When you ask questions, it allows people to express their point of view. People love to give their opinions. When you ask a question, don't need to respond with your own answer.

In addition to the following questions, I sometimes use other introductory "bridge" questions. Here's one of my favorites: Do you go to church anywhere? It's so non-threatening. Try that on people at work and watch what happens. That question can serve as an effective transition into the questions that follow.

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1. Do you have any kind of spiritual belief? The first question does not ask people if they believe in God. That'll give you the response, "None of your business." But if you ask them if they have any spiritual beliefs, they'll talk to you, some for 5 or 10 minutes. Let them talk, because when they're done they'll have very little to fight with you about. If they simply answer yes without explaining, go on to the next question.

2. To you, who is Jesus? When you ask a person what he thinks of Jesus, he will usually respond, "The Son of God," or "The man who died on the cross." But if I were to ask one of you who Jesus is, I hope your response would reflect your personal relationship to Him. I hope you would say, "My Lord and my Savior." So listen carefully to the person's answer.

3. Do you think there is a heaven and a hell? The third question is safe. It is an intellectual question. It simply asks what they believe about the afterlife.

4. If you died right now, where would you go? If heaven, why? I asked a woman, "Do you think there is a heaven and a hell?" Her exact words were "Absolutely not." But the fourth question is personal. So when I asked her where she would go when she died, she said, "Heaven, of course." The issue went from her head to her heart. When you start talking about the personal aspect of a person's life, he or she will get very serious.

If people answer, "Heaven," you ask, "Why?" The answer they give will pinpoint their true beliefs. If they say, "I don't know," continue on to the next question.

5. If what you believe were not true, would you want to know it? The last question is a tough one. Jesus drove the Pharisees and Sadducees nuts with hard questions, so I make no apology for asking them. What are the two possible answers to question number 5? Yes or no. If it's yes, you go on. If the answer is no, stop. And I'll tell you what will happen almost every time you stop. The person will say, "Well, aren't you going to tell me?" Very rarely will you ever get a no that sticks. In fact, if you do get a no for an answer, remember that it is not your problem but God's.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

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1. We need to get away from a “win them” mentality; God is the One who wins them.
2. The Lord Jesus transforms lives. We must do our small part in serving others, and the Lord will do the rest.
3. In serving our faith, we must work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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Third Sunday



For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

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**JUNE
FOURTH SUNDAY**

**HOW CAN I SHARE MY FAITH WITHOUT AN
ARGUMENT? (II)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is lesson two in a series of two lessons on the difficulty of sharing one's faith without an argument? How to share our faith?

MEMORY VERSE:

"So the faith comes by hearing..." Romans 10:17

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson.

STEP 2 - THE BIBLE:

God uses Scripture to change people's lives. The next step in sharing your faith without an argument is based on two principles. The first is from Romans 10:17, "Faith comes from hearing." Hearing is the key. The second principle is in Luke 10:26, which I paraphrase, "What does it say to you?" The Holy Spirit will do the convincing and the convicting. You will just stand by and watch God work.

1. **Romans 3:23--"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."**

Fourth Sunday

When I'm sharing, I take my Bible and I put it in front of the other person-- on the table or on his lap. I point to Romans 3:23 and I ask him to read it out loud. Then I ask him, "What does it say to you?" When you do it this way, he can't say, "That's just your interpretation." He will read it and tell you what it says. Then he won't be able to say, *you* told him. When you do that, the other person will be doing the speaking, the Holy Spirit will be doing the convicting, and nobody can start an argument with you about the interpretation.

2. Romans 6:23--"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Ask the person to read the verse, and then ask, "What does it say." He or she will respond by saying that for one sin we die.

This verse can devastate a person's religion and his feeling that he's okay. In Romans 6:23, underline or circle the word *sin*. Then draw a line through the word *death*. In big letters near it, write the word *hell*. Then circle the word *in*. (Do this in your Bible before you talk with someone.)

After the person has read the verse and told you what the verse says to him, you can simply say, "Did you notice that in my Bible I've underlined the word *sin*?" (Point to the word.) He will say, "Yes." Then you say, while pointing to the word *sin*, "This reminds me that there's no *s* at the end of the word! God says for *one* sin He will send *me* to hell." You point to yourself, but the other person gets the idea.

There is a tendency in us to be harsh, but we must be loving and gentle in how we communicate the gospel of Christ. Now suppose the person you're talking to is a churchgoer. You say, "Did you notice that I have circled the word *in*? It reminds me that I am to be *in* a relationship with Jesus Christ, not *in* a religion." Right then his infant baptism, his confirmation, his church membership, or whatever other religious actions he was involved in, just went out the window. With this verse you have politely shown him that he has no hope. And you've done it nicely.

3. John 3:3--"No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

The way to get into this verse is to turn to the person and say, "I know somebody like you who walked up to Jesus Christ and asked him how to get

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into heaven. This was a religious guy, but he knew that going to church didn't cut it. I want you to read aloud what Jesus said to him." And he will read, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." *Do not* ask him what it means to him. He won't know. We know from Scripture that Nicodemus was confused.

You can then say, "You're probably wondering what Jesus was talking about. Nicodemus thought Jesus meant he had to return inside of his mother. But on the contrary, Jesus was talking about a spiritual birth."

4. John 14:6--"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

When you turn to this verse, ask the other person to read it out loud and proceed by asking him what it says. The person will tell you it says that there is no other way to go to heaven and to be with God except through Jesus.

5. Romans 10:9-11--"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.'"

One of the most difficult things for people to believe is that they can be forgiven. After you have asked the person to read Romans 10:9-11 and he has read it, ask him if the phrase "If you . . . believe . . . you will be saved" includes murderers, alcoholics, drug addicts, etc." You ask that, because if he believes God will forgive a murderer he will believe God will forgive *him* for adultery, alcoholism, drugs, unlovingness, or whatever. It's a key issue.

6. Revelation 3:20--"I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me."

As you did with the other verses, ask the person to read this verse out loud. Then ask, "What does it say to you?" He will say that when we open the door of our lives to Jesus, He will come in.

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With this verse you want the person to realize that Jesus is eager to enter into our lives. The Lord longs for us to be in the right relationship with Him.

Now you are ready to move to the final step.

STEP 3 - THE CLOSE:

This is the part that many of us fear most-- the call for a decision. Here's how to do it.

These final five questions are a recap of all the key verses you just guided the other person through.

1. ***Are you a sinner?*** This question points back to Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned." Earlier he saw that the "all" includes him.
2. ***Do you want forgiveness of sins?*** Romans 6:23 says that forgiveness is a gift provided by Jesus Christ. To have that free gift we must accept it for ourselves.
3. ***Do you believe Jesus died on the cross for you and rose again?*** In John 3, Christ explained that He would die for our sins and that we must put our trust in Him to be born again.
4. ***Are you willing to surrender yourself to Christ?*** John 14:6 says that the only way to be right with God is through Jesus Christ.
5. ***Are you ready to invite Jesus into your heart and into your life?*** Romans 10:9-10 states that we are saved when we personally accept the truth about Jesus and put our trust in Him.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. We must be loving and gentle in how we communicate the Gospel of Christ to others.
2. One of the most difficult things for people to believe is that their sins can be forgiven.

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**JULY
FIRST SUNDAY**

EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is lesson one in a series of three lessons on Evangelism and church growth. In this lesson we will talk about how we can prepare our church, hearts and church congregations to welcome and receive non-Christians and lead them to Christ.

MEMORY VERSE:

“Go therefore and make Disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matt 28:19

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Let’s start by defining some commonly used terms:

Evangelism comes from a Greek word found in the New Testament and means sharing good news. Most of us enjoy sharing good news and stories, whether of a child’s birth, a job promotion or a marriage. Likewise, many of us enjoy telling others of our positive experiences. We like to tell others about a good restaurant, a good movie or a terrific book we have read.

The Good News is centered around the salvation which is found in Jesus Christ. In the Great Commission Christians are called by Jesus “to go and make Disciples of all people (Matthew 28:19). We are called to share our faith and the good news of God’s love for us in Jesus. This happens both inside and outside the church.

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Evangelism is meeting people in situations where the Gospel is given the opportunity to change them. Our working definition will be of “welcoming the stranger.” Evangelism is sharing the hope and hospitality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Church Growth is the increase in worship attendance that happens when people hear the good news and respond to the acts of Christ Discipleship and His Holy church.

Mission involves all aspects of the work in Christ’s church. It is everything that the church does in his name. Our church’s mission is to carry on the ministry that Jesus began two thousand years ago.

Outreach can be a synonym for mission, and often refers to just one aspect or program.

Faith Sharing is a three-way conversation between a faith seeker, a faith sharer and God, where personal experiences of God are shared.

Witnessing is sharing your own story of faith.

Conversion happens when someone comes to have faith in Jesus Christ. It is the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Relational Evangelism is sharing the good news of God with another person, or with a small group of people. This is the form of evangelism that is endorsed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. This can happen when we share our faith with friends, relatives, neighbors and business associates. It is witnessing in word and action to the transforming love of God in Christ with integrity and compassion in personally, in church, and in public realms.

Where do we start?

The first step in planning your evangelism strategy is to look at your congregation. Ask these questions:

- What will new people find when they visit our church?
- Are we experiencing conflict?
- Do we have a healthy self-esteem?
- Do we have a clear vision of where we are going?
- Are we a warm and welcoming community of Christ?
- What would our community miss most if our church ceased to exist?
- What’s needed for church growth?

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The second step is to prepare the field for growth. This is the time to look at making your leadership more effective. Your responsibilities are to tend God's vision for your congregation, to plan how this vision will be achieved, and to set high and achievable expectations for you and your church.

What are the challenges facing us?

- Moving from maintenance to mission. The congregation must move beyond a survival mentality to the openness of ministry and community outreach.
- Developing a vision for the future.
- Resolving power conflicts, whether between individuals or cliques.
- Increasing money and resources and improving stewardship of those already committed to the church.
- Overcoming poor self-esteem and apathy.
- Expanding our circle of concern and friendship to include outsiders.

How do we initiate change in a congregation?

Your congregational climate can be changed. Your church can be more open to new people and new ideas, congregational self-esteem can be improved, and fear of change and of risk-taking can be overcome.

Each congregation is unique and presents different challenges. Every church has its own particular culture (who they are), congregational system (how they do things) and community context (where they are). The potential for evangelism in every congregation depends on the grace of God and the gifts, faith, and cooperation of its members. It also depends on the health of the cultural systems and the possibilities presented by its community.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

We understand mission as being first and foremost God's own purpose and activity in the whole creation with and for children, women and men of all nations and cultures. We believe that we can trust in God's love as revealed by the Lord Jesus Christ, but also that we are called to be participants in God's mission, moved by the Spirit. Thus we have to work together as church-congregation members to gain these blessings.

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**JULY
SECOND SUNDAY**

EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is lesson two in a series of three lessons on Evangelism and church growth. In this lesson the focus is on specific ideas your church can have to do the work of evangelism.

MEMORY VERSE:

“And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The Kingdom of heaven is at hand’” Matt 10:7

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) Introduction:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson. As a church-congregation we have a duty to do the Lord’s commandment and do the service of Evangelism that leads to the Lord Christ.

(B) Practical program to practice Evangelism:

Here are some practical program resources to help your congregation develop a strategy to practice evangelism.

1. **Pray first**

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We must first express the desire of our hearts to practice evangelism seeking God's help and guidance in our prayers. We can hold a weekly prayer meeting for this purpose.

2. **The ministry of Welcome**
We can hold meetings with our church's ushers and greeters, emphasizing the importance of welcoming and greeting the newcomers to our congregation in a spiritual and friendly manner.
3. **Bible Studies and Small Groups**
Start a small group or Bible study on the theme of evangelism. You can choose the subjects the group would like to talk about and get it in advance from the Holy Bible.
4. **Invite a friend to Church on Sunday**
Hold a special Sunday when everyone in your church is encouraged to bring a friend. On this specific Sunday make sure that everything is at its best.
5. **Faith Sharing**
Learn to share your faith more effectively and intentionally. Express to your friends some of your experience in living with the Lord.
6. **Attend an evangelism conference, watch a video or read an evangelism book**
Visit a church that is currently doing evangelism in an area that is of interest to you.
7. **Increase your Congregational Awareness**
Let all the members be aware that evangelism is a commandment of God that we must do with great happiness.
8. **Special Events**
And...be creative! Use your God-given spiritual gifts and religious imaginations to think of a special event. See Something Extra, which identifies special projects for congregations and groups, for ideas your church can do to encourage missionary thinking in your community and abroad.

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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. It is not difficult to practice evangelism. We must pray for God's help and do our part (as mentioned above).
2. When we help someone become Christian, we will feel great and we can move ourselves ahead towards heaven.

July

Second Sunday



For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

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**JULY
THIRD SUNDAY**

EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH (III)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the third lesson in a three-lesson series on Evangelism and church growth. In this lesson the focus is on the required capabilities for the Evangelistic ministry.

MEMORY VERSE:

“It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables” Acts 6:2

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

The Required Capabilities for the Evangelistic Ministry (i)

The evangelistic ministry requires various kinds of services, talents, qualifications...etc. All these should be established on a strong foundation of conviction, devotion, and the missionary love for the ministry evangelism. Thus, the Holy Spirit tells us that it is the Lord who founded those types of ministers in the church. He also adds, that it is God’s gift to a few, and not to everyone.

- God has appointed these in the church: (1 Cor. 12:28)

First: Apostles
Second: Prophets
Third: Teachers
Fourth: Miracle Workers
Fifth: Those Having Gifts of Healing

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Third Sunday

Sixth: Helpers – Variety of Administrators

Seventh: Those Speaking in a Variety of Tongues

‘To each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.’
(Eph 4:7)

▪ He has made some:

1. Apostles
2. Prophets
3. Evangelists/Missionaries
4. Shepherds/Pastors
5. Teachers

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach and become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11-13)

Hence, we receive confirmation that the ministry of evangelism, in addition to the ministry of pastorship are “for the building up of the body of Christ” according to the measure of talents individually given through the grace of God – not only for the building of the church but also, for the sake of perfecting the saints.

Each one has his talents and reaps the fruits of the Holy Spirit, supported by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

1. Tent Makers

Self Supporting Missionaries

St. Paul the Apostle is considered the greatest living example of the type of evangelist and missionary who covers his needs through the fruits of the toil of his hands i.e. not reliant on support from church funds. There were, in past generation and today, thousands of self-supporting missionaries working across the world.

- ‘I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.’ (Acts 20:33-34)

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- ‘I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak’. (Acts 20:35)
- “After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth...he found a certain Jew named Aquila born to Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla...and he came to them, so, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked. He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:1-4).

If we find among the Christian Coptic believers who work overseas in medical, academic, engineering fields, in whose hearts is placed the zeal for missionary work or evangelism, and if the grace gave them the conviction, the strength, and the courage for this type of vocation, the Lord may perform great works through them. Many souls may be won for Christ, spreading the message of salvation and redemption that is only possible through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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2. Church Planters

Pioneers

Church planters were the pioneer evangelists who began by patiently knocking on doors and persevering by serving small groups of believers within a certain location. As a result of this gentle and heart-touching service, the new believers responded to the church call. Their great joy increased each day upon their discovery of the spiritual depth within the church. They invited others: ‘Taste and see that the LORD is good. (Ps 34:8). Gradually, in its natural course, the church grew progressively multiplying in numbers of believers and those baptized.

Without a doubt, similar gatherings take place today in the homes of believers or under the shade of trees- on a hilltop and on the sea-shores. They assemble for prayers, singing and Bible study. As their numbers increase, and as they go deeper in knowledge and spirituality, these souls long for regular church sacraments and means of grace within their reach because He becomes part of their lives, their being, and their existence. At this stage, the dire need for a fixed altar among them became evident.

Perhaps these groups practice worship and sacraments, according to the available facilities. At best, it would be through a portable altar, or by traveling a long distances to reach the nearest church or altar.

At this stage, the church planters begin to urge the acquisition of a land suitably located to accommodate the house of God. In most cases, this land would be donated by one of the loving men or women of the church. In other instances, the land would be bought at a nominal price, then it would be officially registered in the name of the church, before the buildings were erected. (This procedure is necessary so that the landlord does not claim the property after the church is built, as was the case with a small building in the Coptic Church, and likewise, the experience of other denominations in Kenya and various other African countries).

1. The Spiritual Building at First

It is of great importance that the church planters begin by building a spiritually sound congregation as a first step; a congregation that is sound in knowledge and virtue has “taken off the old man” and been renewed mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Once their souls are spiritually built and deeply established in the love of the Lord, with a life of fasting, prayer and self-denial, may begin together in building the church. A church is built with a combined effort of money and

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donations in any kind, such as building materials, toil and communal work. This is like a communal contribution to complete the divine plan. It is a demonstration of the yearning of the faithful, by planting a church (house of God) amidst their homes, so that it may become a center for their spiritual activities and their relationship with the Lord.

3. Volunteers

The volunteers are men and women who may have fixed incomes, and who are spiritually, intellectually and physically mature. They may also be pensioners who are physically fit and capable of volunteering for the service. They may be talented with the gifts of tongues which can be of help in the mission field. In general, they must have total devotion and conviction for this type of vacation.

The volunteers can effectively contribute to the expansion of God's kingdom on earth. Usually, the church provides them with accommodation, means of transportation, pocket money if necessary, equipment and necessities for the ministry of evangelism. They offer their time, knowledge, efforts and all their talents for the service of the mission.

4. Translators and Interpreters

The book of Acts of the Apostles teaches us that the Lord Jesus Christ gave the apostles the first gifts of evangelism-strength and courage. Next, He gave them the gift of tongues (languages), through which they could spread the message of salvation to peoples and nations amongst whom they evangelized.

Therefore, His commandment was that they should not leave Jerusalem until they received the power from above. This confirmed His sight of pointless purposes of evangelism, without having the ability to communicate with the people and understanding the relevant languages of various nations.

The church needs the translations of all liturgical books used for evangelism among the various nations and tribes. Although the Bible is already translated into various local languages, the need exists for the translation of the raising the incense, the seven prayers (Agbeya), books of readings for the annual occasions, vespers, matins, prayers, Synaxarium, hymns, Sunday school programs, youth services, preparatory programs for ministers, baptismal prayers, betrothal and matrimonial ceremonies, funerals, the unction of the sick (the lantern), blessing of

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homes, biographies of saints, sayings of the patriarchs, church canons (daskalia)...etc.

5. Servants of the Word

The servants of the word include: Sunday school teachers, male and female teachers and youth leaders, preachers, theological teachers...

6. Community Development Experts-Professionals

These have resources for environmental development, since a large proportion of the nations within the mission field need technical expertise and vocational trainers: continuing, historically poor education and training have contributed to diminished work opportunities, as well as widespread impoverishment in all aspects of the lives of those affected.

7. Managers/Administrators

The Holy Spirit calls them “administrative helpers” i.e. they offer the missionaries assistance concerning any administrative matter which affects the mission function e.g. administration regarding: finance, means of living, transport, kindergartens, liaison and communication, secretarial work. ‘It is not desirable that we leave the word of God and serve tables’ (Acts 6:2)

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. Successful spiritual service in the Evangelistic field requires all capabilities i.e. not only clergymen.
2. It is a great blessing for everyone who participates in an evangelistic ministry. It is a team supported by the Holy Spirit.

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**JULY
FOURTH SUNDAY**

**“REMEMBER NOW YOUR CREATOR IN THE DAYS
OF YOUR YOUTH” (I)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the first lesson in a series of two lessons about the necessity of living with God since the earliest years of our life.

MEMORY VERSE:

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth” Ecc. 12:1

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) Introduction: This is an invitation of God’s Love to the Youth

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth” Ecclesiastes 12:1. This is not a divine command which God is asking the youth to follow since the early years of their lives without declination to the worldly ways, but it is an invitation of love from God to the youth announcing His longing for an everlasting relationship with them. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiations of our sins” 1 John 4:10.

Therefore, “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth” is an initiation of a strong relationship of love from God, but what is the purpose of this relationship? His purpose is to satisfy them and grant them happiness and not to condemn them. “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” John 7:37. Therefore, from our side, we should respond to God’s love. But in order to know

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why we should respond voluntarily, let us speak about the constituents of the human personality.

✠ **The Human Personality**

I would like to point out that the human personality depends on 2 basic components:

First: An instinctive origin which is present within us since birth, for example, the natural impulses and the feeling of belonging to the parents.

Second: An acquired origin which we obtain during our life; for example, the emotions, the traditions, the way of thinking and the different principles.

These 2 components of the human personality produce different personalities and there are no two identical personalities because the constituents are different.

What happens when a youth follows the worldly routes like being materialistic, following the physical lusts, following the route of drugs and life enjoyment? They will never have enough because “whoever drinks of this water will thirst again” (John 4:13). They lose their peace because, “there is no peace, says my God, for the wicked” (Isaiah 57:21). Then their soul will be affected by this attitude and so will the acquired origin that we talked about.

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murder, drunkenness, revelries and the like, of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” Gal. 5:19-21.

What happens when the youth follow the way of God, the loving Creator who as we said before started an initiation of love to every youth, “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth”. He will, without a doubt, obtain an acquired origin that reflects the Lord’s qualities. He becomes a partner in the divine nature, and will flee from the corruption of the world. The Holy Spirit, which he received in baptism, will grant him many blessings and qualities of the Lord Himself, because He is the Spirit of God. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Gal. 5:22-23.

There is a significant difference between the acquired origin in the personality of the person following the worldly route and that of the person following the Lord’s route. Let us draw a simplified sketch:

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Therefore it is important for the youth to start structuring his/her personality with God in order to gain the blessings of the Holy Spirit and avoid the worldly means.

(B) First of all, correct your opinion regarding God:

Why do many people shy away from God? Why do many deny God? Why do many resist God? Because they have the wrong idea about God. To them He is an isolated Creator who stays in His Heavens and dominates the world and the beings by issuing commandments and laws. He watches over the deeds to punish them later and He is distant from their human feelings, ambitions and fears. This is the wrong image of God and it does not exist in the Christian reality.

What is the true image of God? He is the Creator who loves His creations. “When he completed the world, He rejoiced, and He rejoiced in the sons of men.” Proverbs 8:31. St. John says, “He who does not love does not know God for God is love.” 1 John 4:8. From His love He descended to our world and lived like one of us to share our nature. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14. “In this the love of God was manifested towards us, that God Has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him”. 1 John 4:9. Then, God does not want a relationship of formalities with us, but He came to us and started a relationship of love which reveals His compassionate fatherhood and His wish to satisfy the needs of the soul and its happiness.

N.B. Through the Incarnation to crucifixion and resurrection, the Lord prepared for us this salvation which enabled us to live, in the faith of the Blood of Jesus Christ, without condemnation. Even if we sinned, the door of repentance and cleanliness in the blood of Christ is open.

(C) The Necessity of Following God in the Years of Our Youth.

A young deacon who chose to become a monk, wrote a letter to a priest describing the necessity of following the Lord in the early years of life. He says:

- 1) A construction has to have a solid base in order to go high with the building. Similarly, in the spiritual life, the young man needs to build a spiritual base in order to be able to grow in the spirit.
- 2) Life with the Lord Jesus Christ is full of peace and joy, therefore, we must enjoy it early in our lives. Why do we waste our life away from the peace of God which is beyond our minds?

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- 3) If God loved us and called upon us and said “Remember Now Your Creator in the days of your youth”, why don’t we respond immediately? Why don’t we give Him the best and strongest years of our lives? “I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the world of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.” I John 2:14.
- 4) The service of God for a long time to get its blessing. If the young man starts his life with Christ early, he will be filled with the love of Jesus and he will start telling others about Him.
- 5) When we start early, we will increase our knowledge and spiritual depth. The young man will grow in his spiritual state and his knowledge as long as he follows the route of Christ. Attending the mass, listening to sermons, praying, learning the hymns of the Church, reading spiritual books and books about the history of the church and the stories about the martyrs and saints, all these would make a fortune that the young man could benefit from till eternity.
- 6) Knowing God needs searching diligently, therefore, he has to start early. The search for the way of salvation, to gain the kingdom of God, needs time and seriousness in the spiritual life.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth” (Ecc. 12:1) is a call of love from God to all the youth not to be taken as an order.
2. The personality of the youth will be shaped in a beautiful way if they proceeded with God and not the world.
3. God wants to enter into a friendly relationship with us.
4. We are winners in all aspects when we enter into a relationship with God as early as possible.

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**JULY
FIFTH SUNDAY**

**“REMEMBER NOW YOUR CREATOR IN THE DAYS
OF YOUR YOUTH” (II)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the second lesson in a two lesson series about the necessity of living with God since the earliest years of our life.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and then proceed as follows:

(A) The obstacles that meet the youth in their fellowship with God.

- a) The Lord Jesus says, “Enter by the narrow gate for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life and there are few who find it.” Matthew 7:13-14.
- b) The world opens its ways to the youth without any obstacles. Everything is available and has a nice appearance. Many follow the ways of the world and get ruined. The way of the Lord looks difficult but it ends in peace beyond imagination and eternal life. In the book of Revelations, St. John tells us that despite the narrowness of the door to this way, it is possible, as many entered and obtained the eternal share.

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands. And crying out with a loud voice, saying “Salvation belongs to our God who sits

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on the throne and to the Lamb” and all the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures and fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever, Amen.’ Then one of the elders answered saying to me, ‘who are these arrayed in white robes and where did they come from?’ And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know’ so he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ Revelation 7:9-14.

I want to assure you that even if the way of Christ looks narrow, He will help you and support you. The only thing needed from you, is to have the will to go in, and follow Christ. Rejoice my dear!

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13.

“The Lord stood with me and strengthened me.” 2 Timothy 4:17.

“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades where is your victory?” 1 Corinthians 15:55.

“In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them.” Isaiah 63:9.

(B) What are the obstacles in the life of the Youth?

1. Not understanding the Holy Bible.
2. Being accustomed to formalities.
3. Doubt and giving Satan a chance .
4. Not being honest with oneself.
5. Temptations from others.
6. Not tasting life with God.
7. Pride.

(C) The possibility of purity in the life of the Christian Youth:

The deceased father Bishoy Kamel said in his book “Useful Spiritual Sections”, about the possibility of purity in youth:

- Purity is not only stopping all evil but it is being occupied with God and the love of Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

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- If God dwells in our hearts, all evil will escape from our lives.
- When you sin, do not think too much about it, but haste and look to Jesus who will save you from drowning as He saved Peter.
- As much as you love God, pray to Him and study the Holy Bible, you will live in holiness.
- We are the Altar of the Holy Spirit who purifies us, and makes us holy through prayers.
- The constant presence of God in our lives “How could I sin and do this great wrong to God.”
- Resistance of evil looks, words, and thoughts, is easy as long as it is not from within, otherwise it could be difficult to control.

(D) Examples of saints who were very young:

- 1) Daniel
- 2) The three lads
- 3) Joseph
- 4) Timothy the Apostle
- 5) St. John

(E) Resolutions:

1. Read at least one chapter of the Holy Bible daily.
2. Read spiritual books.
3. Whenever possible, take a trip to the holy places in Egypt and speak to the monks.
4. Keep praying whether alone, with the family or in church.
5. Keep confessing and receiving the Holy Communion.
6. Escape from places of sin as Joseph did.
7. Stop watching unsuitable TV. programs.
8. Take care of your talents.
9. If you sin, do not postpone repentance. Be fast in going back and confess and wash your sins in the Blood of Christ and complete your fellowship with Him.



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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. The world is opening its arms for us with plenty of temptation. However, it leads to problems and disastrous outcomes. The Christian way appears to have obstacles, but with the help of God, we can overcome these obstacles and the ultimate result will be happiness.
2. It is very feasible for a youth to lead a pure life in a world filled with darkness and lust. The light of Christ can defeat all these faces of darkness.

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**AUGUST
FIRST SUNDAY**

**COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY
WHY DOES OUR CHURCH GLORIFY ST. MARY
WHILE THE PROTESTANT CHURCH DOES NOT?**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To illustrate the various reasons for glorifying St. Mary the virgin in our Coptic Orthodox Church. Most important of these reasons is her perpetual Virginity and her motherhood to God.

MEMORY VERSE

*“..... For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed”
(Luke 1:48)*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A)INTRODUCTION: the position of the Protestant church on glorifying St. Mary the Virgin

✝The Protestant church refuses to glorify St. Mary the Virgin as a mother or as a Virgin. They say that the motherhood by flesh is not the motherhood that God honors. They also say that St. Mary the Virgin is only honored because of her faith. Therefore, what is the orthodox understanding of glorifying St. Mary the Virgin?

(B)The Coptic Orthodox understanding of glorifying St. Mary the Virgin:

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✠ We glorify St. Mary the Virgin for the following reasons:

1. Her motherhood to the Lord
2. Her perpetual Virginity
3. Her faith
4. Her holy life

✠ We glorify her for all the above reasons, especially her perpetual virginity and her motherhood to God because these two reasons make her a unique individual in the whole world.

✠ We say in one of the hymns of our church, “many women have gained honor but none of them reached your level” (Proverbs 31:29).

✠ St. Elizabeth said to her, “blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:45). Therefore, St. Elizabeth declared the faith of St. Mary and that she will become the mother of God. But, in addition to the declaration of St. Elizabeth about the faith of St. Mary the Virgin, she also declared that St. Mary is the mother of the Lord, “but why is this granted to me, that the mother of my lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:43). Also St. Elizabeth declared in glorifying St. Mary, saying “blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:42). St. Elizabeth mentioned all these in a glorifying attribute to St. Mary: her faith, her motherhood to the Lord, and her uniqueness among women.

(C) The uniqueness of St. Mary the Virgin among all the people in the world:

✠ St. Mary the Virgin is a unique individual, not only because of her faith, despite the fact that there are many women who have had faith, but the Virgin’s uniqueness comes from being a virgin and giving birth to a child, and this child is the Lord God Himself.

✠ These two characteristics: virginity and motherhood of God are related to our salvation. It would have been impossible for salvation to happen without the Incarnation. The incarnation means that God is to be born from a woman; a woman from the same nature like us, and hence He comes forth on our behalf regarding our salvation. Therefore the Lord Christ insisted of calling Himself “the Son of Man”, since through this attribute He was able to save the human race. He became the Son of Man only through His sonship from St. Mary. Therefore the

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title “Mother of God” which is only for St. Mary the Virgin, is a title intimately related to salvation.

✠ Does the virginity of St. Mary have a relationship with our salvation? Of course, the virginity of St. Mary has an intimate relationship with our salvation. It was impossible for Christ to be born as any other person, from a man and a woman and become just a normal individual. It was necessary for Christ to be born from a virgin in an unusual way through the Holy Spirit. He had a father who is God and He was not born with the original sin of Adam and hence He was Holy and was able to save the sinners. Why don't we then glorify St. Mary for her virginity and her motherhood to God especially since these two attributes are necessary for our salvation? What is the benefit of anyone or any sector of Christianity in not glorifying St. Mary while she is the mother of God and while she is the Virgin?! St. Mary the Virgin herself said, “.....for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). She did not mean because of her faith but she explicitly said, “for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and Holy is His name” (Luke 1:49). And of course these great things were the ability to give birth to the Lord Himself while she still being a virgin. Are there any greater things more than this? Faith can be found in many women. But no any woman could give birth to a child while remaining virgin and giving birth to the Lord Himself!

✠ The Lord Christ honored St. Mary the Virgin as a mother for Him. He honored her as a spiritual person and He chose the most holy woman, to become His mother.

(D) About honoring the body of St. Mary the Virgin:

✠ The Protestant church says that the body of St. Mary the Virgin is not any better or honorable than any other Christian body. They say that her body must be subject to corruption and decay, so they deny the ascension of her body to heaven.

✠ Our Coptic Orthodox Church says the following: the body of St. Mary the Virgin is very honorable and unique, because it is the body in which the Lord resided for nine months and the Holy Spirit descended on this body (Luke 1:35). Is it logical that God would leave this honorable body for corruption and decay without honoring it while He honored the bodies of many other saints?! And this body was more holy than any other human body. One would expect the Lord to give it a special honor, especially after death.

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✝ The Protestant church does not honor St. Mary the Virgin or any other saint. They ignore what the Lord said to the Saints “whoever honors you honors Me.”

✝ The body of St. Mary the Virgin will not only be honored after the Resurrection so that it will wear a glorified body, but her body was already glorified by the Lord after her death. The ascension of the body of St. Mary to heaven was recorded in the history of the church and no one can deny this history. We are not the only church to record it in history but many other churches agree with us on the ascension of her body.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. The Protestant church in their attack on St. Mary the Virgin don't benefit anything, but they lose a great blessing.
2. St. Augustine said about St. Mary “she is a role model member of the Church”. Indeed, she has been the role model in her humility, faith, holiness and love.

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**AUGUST
SECOND SUNDAY**

**THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE PERVERSION OF THE
HOLY BIBLE**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To show that the Holy Bible came from God, was preserved by God, and arrived to us free from any perversion. There must be no doubt that the Holy Bible is 100% correct.

MEMORY VERSE

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A) An overview of the Holy Bible:

- ✚ The Holy Bible is composed of a group of Holy books, written by Saints, inspired by the Holy Spirit and under His guidance and inspiration, in different times and in different places.
- ✚ The Holy Bible contains history, autobiography, laws, rules, philosophy, poetry, commandments, and prophesies.
- ✚ The Holy Bible has two parts:

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The Old Testament, which involves the call of the Hebrews, their history and law, and prophecies related to the Messiah.

The New Testament, which involves the announcement of the spiritual Kingdom of God, and the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the salvation offered by the Lord Jesus Christ.

(B) The Bible is preserved by God:

- † The Lord God said, “I am watching over My Word to perform it” (Jeremiah 1:12). And in the New Testament, the Lord said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matt. 24:35).
- † God is the author of the Holy Bible, and He is the One who is preserving His word to reach us through the generations without perversion. God’s word is very well established, and is not subject to variations, whereas, man’s word is changeable. The word of God reached us, in a miraculous way, through the various generations without any alteration.
- † The original copy of the old books was written by hand, on papyrus, then on skin of animals. They used to stick the two ends on two cylinders, winding the paper on them, so that it can be rolled.

(C) The original languages of the Holy Bible:

- † The Scribes copied the Old Testament in Hebrew. Their work was regarded as sacred. They were very precise and very careful in this work to guarantee the correctness of the copy. They counted the alphabetical letters in every copy to verify its correctness, but if the numbers were different, the copy would be burned. They were strict in the rite of the bodily purification before writing especially when one of the Divine names of God was mentioned. The Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Greek in approximately 250 B.C. at the request of King Ptolemy. This was called Septuagint because those who translated it were seventy-two of the highly learned Jews in Alexandria.
- † The New Testament was written in Greek during the first century. Later on, the books of the two testaments were translated into Syrian, Coptic, Ethiopian, and Latin and then to all the languages of the world.

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- c. There is no copy of the Old Testament that differed from the old copies preserved in the museums of the world (the copy of the Vatican, the Alexandrian copy, and the copy of Sinai).
- d. There is an agreement among the prophets in their prophecies. In spite of the long period (fifteen hundred years) bearing in mind the variation of their culture and jobs. The Infallible Spirit is One.
- e. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ affirmed the correctness of the Old Testament when He said, “you search the Scriptures.....it is they that bear witness to Me” (John 5:39).

5. Perversion of the New Testament is impossible:

- a. The Disciples, who witnessed everything related to the Lord Jesus Christ, wrote their parts from different places, at different times and it was impossible for them to agree on what each of them wrote. However, all their writings came to be 100% in agreement with each other, because they were writing what they actually witnessed.
- b. The Disciples of the Lord Jesus suffered a lot and endured death. There was no benefit for those Disciples to do all this for the sake of the Gospel. They were preaching Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23).
- c. The spread of Christianity in Europe, Asia and Alexandria, those countries known for their philosophies, science and military strength. This spread of Christianity despite the fact that the Disciples were simple, of little education, and they were preaching about a crucified Christ. They were preaching difficult things, for example, resurrection from the dead, love of God, not the world, one wife instead of many wives..... etc. In addition, the Disciples were poor from a materialistic point of view and they were not carrying any weapons(Luke 10:3).
- d. The Disciples preached the Gospel of salvation written in their hearts for a period of about thirty years, afterwards, they wrote the four gospels, from very far places from each other. Then the Holy Bible became known all over the world and has been translated into fifteen hundred languages and dialects.

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Second Sunday

6. Historical proofs that the Holy Bible is free from perversion:

- a. In the museums of the world, there are very old copies of the Holy Bible. The most important of which, is the Vatican copy (it goes back to 328 A.D.), the Sinai copy (discovered in 1844 A.D. and dates to the first century), the Alexandrian copy (dates to the fifth century) and the Ephraim copy (which is a very old copy and it is currently in Paris).
- b. The papyrus discoveries: There are many new discoveries for the old writings. For example the book of Isaiah was found lately on a papyrus in the region of the Red Sea. This copy was found to be identical to the book of Isaiah in the Holy Bible (Isaiah's book was written 850 B.C.).
- c. The witness of various historians: Josephus the historian (37 A.D.) and Tacitus (55 A.D.) and many other historians.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. The Holy Bible is a precious gift from God for each one of us to use and proceed further towards heaven.
2. There is no doubt that God Himself preserved His Word and kept the Holy Bible to be 100% free from perversion.
3. Each person must read his Bible daily.
4. Stay away from foolish discussions and disputes motivated by the devil to question whether the Holy Bible is free from perversion.

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The Fulfillment of the Prophecies

Name of Prophet	Time	Purpose of book	The Prophecy
Isaiah	742 B.C.	Christ's birth From a virgin	"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14.
Micah	710 B.C.	Place of Christ's Birth	"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." Micah 5:2.
David	1047 B.C.	He shall be the Son of God	"The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.' Psalms 2:7.
Isaiah	740 B.C.	He is God	"For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6.
Jeremiah	599 B.C.	He is God	".....now this is His name by which He will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness." Jeremiah 23:6.

August

Second Sunday

Isaiah	714 B.C.	His flight to Egypt	“Behold, the Lord... And will come into Egypt;” Isaiah 19:1.
Hosea	740 B.C.	His return from Egypt	“And out of Egypt I called My son.” Hosea 11:1.
Zechariah	487 B.C.	His entry into Jerusalem	and here, the prophet tells how Jesus entered Jerusalem in the greatest detail: “.....Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.” Zechariah 9:9.
Isaiah	712 B.C.	The passion Of the Cross	“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.” Isaiah 53:7.
Isaiah	712 B.C.	The passion Of the Cross	“There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” Isaiah 53:2-3.
David	1035 B.C.	His thirst on the Cross.	“My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws;” Psalms 22:15.

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David	1035 B.C.	Dividing up His clothes	“They divide My garments among them, and for My Clothing they cast lots.” Psalm 22:18.
Zechariah	487 B.C.	His piercing On the Cross	“.....then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son,” Zechariah 12:10.
Moses	1491 B.C.	None of His bones were broken	“.....nor shall you break one of its bones.” Exodus 12:46.
Isaiah	712 B.C.	His crucifixion among thieves	“And He was numbered with the transgressors” Isaiah 53:12.
Isaiah	712 B.C.	He took the place of sinners	“And He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” Isaiah 53:12.
Isaiah	712 B.C.	He took the place of sinners	“..... When You make His soul an offering for sin” Isaiah 53:10.
Isaiah	712 B.C.	His death	“.....He poured out His soul unto death.....” Isaiah 53:12.
Isaiah	712 B.C.	His burial	“And they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death” Isaiah 53:9.
David	1040 B.C.	His Body did Not decay	“Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see Corruption....” Psalm 16:10.

August

Second Sunday

David	1040 B.C.	His resurrection	“I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me.....” Psalm 3:5.
Hosea	870 B.C.	His resurrection On the third day	“On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight.” Hosea 6:2.
David	1040 B.C.	The ascension Of Christ	“He bowed the heavens also, and Came down with Darkness under His feet. And He Rode upon a Cherub, and flew; He flew upon the Wings of the wind.” Psalm 18:9-10.
Joel	800 B.C.	The descent of The Holy Spirit	“That I will pour out My Spirit on all Flesh.....and also On My menservants And on My Maidservants I Will pour out My Spirit in those Days.” Joel 2:28-29.

August

Third Sunday



**AUGUST
THIRD SUNDAY**

**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF
REVELATIONS (I)**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about an introduction to the Book of Revelations. In this lesson we would like to show that the book of Revelations is the book of God's infinite love towards man, it is the book of hope, the book of victory, the book of communal worship, and the book of heaven.

MEMORY VERSE

*"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophesy....."
(Rev. 1:3).*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A)The importance of the Book of Revelation:

✠ The Holy Bible started with the book of Genesis, which shows us the love of God, the rebellion of man, and the expulsion of man from paradise. Therefore, it was very necessary to show how God helped man to restore his joy and his resurrection in the second coming of Christ to live to eternity without death. And this is the subject of the Book of Revelation.

✠ The Book of Revelation shows that every suffering and tribulation has joy behind it. The Book of Revelation showed an opened door in heaven, paradise, joyful eternity for mankind and victory over Satan. Therefore, Christians in all generations frequently turned to it whenever they experienced disaster, or

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hardship or when the church suffered troubles, as if the source instinctively finds in this book a message of consolation and hope.

✝ “The Revelation” is the book of God’s perfect, infinite love towards man. It is the book of hope, the book of victory, the book of liturgy (communal worship) and heavenly hymns, the book of heaven.

✝ **The writer, place and time:** The writer is St. John the Evangelist, who was the brother of James and the writer of the gospel of John and three epistles. It is written in a small island named Patmos (Rev. 1:9) twenty-five miles away from Asia Minor (Turkey). It was written around A.D. 95.

The word “Revelation” (apocalypses in Greek) means “an uncovering” or “unveiling”.

(B) “Revelation” is the book of God’s infinite love for us:

The book of Revelation is a wonderful way to end the story that began in the book of Genesis. In the book of Genesis, heaven and earth were created so that man may find his pleasure and happiness in work (Gen. 2:15). In Revelation we see a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1), where man will find his eternal happiness in the bosom of the Lord as his beloved Father. In Genesis, sin entered into the world and in Revelation we see the defeat of the devil and sin.

(C) “Revelation” is the book of hope:

✝ It is the book of the opened door of heaven (Rev. 4:1). As the section of prophetic, heavenly visions gives support, comfort and encouragement to believers in all ages, in the midst of their many troubles, even in the midst of their persecution by the anti-Christ and his helpers, as if hope is not based on creative imagination or dreaming of a better world, but based on God’s honest promises of sharing heavenly glory in the midst of daily trouble.

(D) “Revelation” is the book of victory:

✝ In the Holy Bible, we do not find anything about the devil’s final doom as in this book. St. John, in revelation, saw the devil’s defeat and his fall from heaven. This was followed by great rejoicing.

✝ The book of Revelation concentrates on the person of Jesus Christ, who stood against evil, for He is the Lamb appearing as though it had been slain. He gave His Blood, a price for our victory over sin.

(E) “Revelation” is the book of praise:

August

Third Sunday

✠ When the heart steals some time away from the outer and inner voices, it enters with the Groom inside the book in silence, voices of praise and chanting are heard. Hence the heart learns the language of heaven, the language of love and the language of continuous praise.

(F) “Revelation” is the book of worship by spirit:

✠ He who constantly reads the Book of Revelation discovers the reality of Christian worship. It is not mere duties done or ceremonies performed, but he sees through all this a divine, invisible hand hurrying to him to embrace him and raise him to heaven.

(G) “Revelation” is the book of heaven:

✠ When the heart forgets all the things around it in this world it enters through the book of Revelation to treasures and heavenly glories, as much as words can express.

(H) “Revelation” is the book of freedom and redemption:

✠ Some people see that this book includes two main cords; one is purple and the other is golden. The first cord is the Blood of Jesus Christ, giver of salvation, where His sacrificial title “The Lamb” is repeated more than twenty-five times. The second cord is the advent (second coming of Jesus Christ) to carry His church to His glory, enjoying angelic life and continuous praise.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. No one should forget the infinite love of God. In the midst of any troubles in this world, one must realize that there is always hope.
2. There is an open door in heaven for each one of us, so that we can enjoy the heavenly glory, which has become available to us through the Blood of the Lamb.

*** Note: This lesson is based on the writings of Fr. Tadros Malaty.**

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For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

AUGUST

Fourth Sunday



**AUGUST
FOURTH SUNDAY**

**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF
REVELATIONS (II)**

Please read The attached article entitled, “Envy of the devil”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is the second lesson in a series of two lessons about an introduction to the Book of Revelation. In this lesson we would like to talk about the number “7” and its various meanings in the Book of Revelation.

MEMORY VERSE

“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this” (Rev. 1:19).

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

(A)INTRODUCTION:

✠The number “7” is repeated several times in Revelation as it is the book that sanctifies the present time (7 days of the week) based on a review of our glorious past when God granted us great salvation.

✠Number “6” (seven minus 1) is the number of imperfection, that is why the number of the anti-Christ is 666, i.e. imperfect, imperfect, imperfect, or totally imperfect.

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✝ The number $3 \frac{1}{2}$ (half of seven) is collapse and damage. It refers to the time of tribulation stirred up by the antichrist or the period of the Impostors kingdom.

✝ As for number “8” (7+1) it refers throughout the Holy Bible to crossing over time and entering the eternal heavenly life.

(B) The “7th” of revelation:

1. The Seven Churches (1:4,11) or the Seven Lamp Stands (1:12,20): The message of this book is to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ being the Son of Righteousness present in His church, illuminating her and preparing her to meet him face to face on His great day, to dwell with Him in His eternal light.
2. The Seven Spirits (1:4): Some think these are the Seven Archangels, while others think it is the perfect work of the Holy Spirit in the church of Christ.
3. The Seven Messages to the seven churches (2:1,3:22): Every message is offered for the advantage and edification of the Holy church.
4. The Seven Lamps of burning fire (4:5): If the seven churches are lamp stands then their light is not their own but a Divine gift from God’s Holy Spirit who appears as seven lamps of fire lighting the church and enflaming her with the fire of Divine love.
5. The Seven Seals (5:1,6:1-8,8:1): We need God’s Lamb to open the seals of His Holy Bible, granting us His Divine wisdom, and real knowledge by His Holy Spirit.
6. The Seven Horns (5:6): The horn refers to strength. The Lamb declares with His Cross what is greater than strength. (Luke 1:69).
7. The Seven Eyes (5:6): Our Christ has seven horns i.e. Has complete power and seven eyes i.e. Has complete knowledge. He sees all matters with all hidden details.

AUGUST

Fourth Sunday

8. The Seven Trumpets (8:2,11:9): Indicating God's warnings to the wicked ones who persecute His people.
9. The Seven Bowls and the Seven Plagues (15:1,16:21): The matter does not stop at warning (the trumpets) but God pours out His firm punishment so that the wicked ones may stop following the antichrist.
10. The Seven Personages (chapters 12, 13): These personages appear in the battle that will take place between the devil (the dragon) and the church at the end of time, as mentioned in chapters 12 and 13.
11. The Seven "new" things: New heaven (21:2), new earth (21:1), the new city (21:2), new nations (21:24), new river as crystal (22:1), new market (22:2), new tree of life (22:2). Briefly, Jesus Christ said, "behold, I make all things new" (21:5).
12. The Seven Beatitudes: As long as this book opens the doors of heaven for us, where there is no curse, we find 7 beatitudes in a specific arrangement that delights the heart: (1:3,14:13,16:15,19:9,20:6,22:7 and 22:14)

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. Read the book of Revelations and have an explanation book for it written by one of the fathers of the church. You will find in it a very joyful message of hope, victory and love.
2. There are many things in the Book of Revelation that are not completely understood yet.
3. The reading of the book is not for the sake of curiosity but for the sake of being carried by the Spirit to have a glimpse of the joy of heaven.

*** Note: This lesson is totally based on the writings of Fr. Tadros Malaty.**

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ENVY OF THE DEVIL

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

In the Holy Mass, we say in the Prayer of Reconciliation *"You destroyed the death which was introduced into the world by the envy of the devil"*.

We see that Satan envies every good and successful deed, because goodness and success are against his diabolic plan to resist the Kingdom of God on earth... either in relation to individuals or groups.

The devil always labours to fight the children of God but his labour is in vain.

When he finds out that he toiled in vain with no result, his hatred and envy to the children of God increases. His wars become more fierce, and after being waged in secret, they turn out openly and without shame pressing on the children of God without mercy. But God does not allow this *"For the sceptre of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous."* (Ps. 125:3).

Therefore, in every good deed expect the envy of the devils but do not fear them.

At the ordination of a new monk, a chapter from the Book of Joshua Son of Sirach is recited which says, *"Son, if you engage in the service of your God, prepare yourself for all trials"*.

We find the same meaning in the words of St. Evagrius to the devoted monk upon you start the holy prayer, be prepared for whatever comes upon you]. He means be ready for the wars of the devil which he will wage on you because of your holy worship.

How poor is the devil who spends his life in envy, hatred and fighting!

His envy does not harm the children of God, but in fact it harms him and increases his eternal punishment. Also, such envy causes him more grief, sadness, distress and trouble... Any harm that the devil tries to impose on the children of God is external, unreal and does not affect their eternity. For God rapidly saves them from it.

Satan might fight God's children directly as it happened with the righteous Job, and he might fight them through his human assistants.

In both ways his envy will end in vain because the grace of God intervenes and stops his evil deeds. The Lord God arises and His enemies are dispersed and all those who hate His Holy name flee before His face!

AUGUST

Fourth Sunday

Even though Satan succeeds in the beginning, he will surely fail at last...

When Satan envied Job the Righteous, it seemed that he succeeded in his plan and triumphed over Job: destroyed his house, killed all his children, struck him with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head and made his friends reproach and disgrace him... But the whole matter ended to the contrary; the Lord restored Job's losses and gave him twice as much as he had before...

Satan is tormented by his own envy before the children of God strike him.



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MAJOR

MAJOR REFERENCES (with permission)

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- (12) "Bahgat El-Aiad" by Yassa Mansour, 1970.
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- (14) All colouring books, Father Tadros Y. Malaty, St. George Coptic Church, Alexandria, Egypt.



THE FOLLOWING TABLES
OF CONTENTS REFLECT
THE CHANGES IN THE
TIMING OF EASTER AND
THE ASSOCIATED,
BEFORE AND AFTER,
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VARIOUS YEARS

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