



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

30 SPIRITUAL SUBJECTS EDITION

Edition 2019

PREPARATION AND WRITING

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Па^по^{ст}о^лос

π^απιος

Іаркос





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 Ruciis, Ramses Avenue, ABBASSIYA,

CAIRO, EGYPT.

CABLE: ELANBARUEISS, CAIRO.



Date | 17/8/1986

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إلى السنبنيه المباركه القده مرقى اليامن عبد لمسيح
والذين تادرين يتعرب ملطف

سليم ربعة سبعه ،

زار في ابنتنا د. فوندلا ربعة النجح الفرج لدارس
التربيه الكنسيه بال مجر . وقد درست منه المنهود الدراسية
للنرج ، درسه الدخول في التفاصيل . وأبدت له بعده مدخلات
سجهة منابع في العقيدة والحقائق . وفي الواقع أنه الجهد لمبذول
جهد كبير جداً يتحقق المثلث . ربعة ذلله تحتاج دروس الكتاب
المقدس إلى زيادة . وünsأل لكم مدخلات أخيه بالتفصيل جميسة

الرب .

فليبارككم رب كل ما قام به ابنتنا فوندلا سه بجهود في ابعاد
النرج ، ومن جميع المارة ، ومن عمل الترجمة . فليبارككم رب
أيضاً كل سه اشتراكاً في العمل ، ومن المراجعة
وريثة صدتنا سه ما نتطلع الوصول إليه سه كان على قدر
امكاننا ابنتنا . وحيثه تزداد النرج أيضاً بالصورة المناسبة والواقع
تقديها كليتنا سه النواحي العقائدية والطقفية والتاريخية
الرب سعكم . كدفنا جيد

١٩٨٦/٨/٢٤
عيد المقدمة لمعاذ

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate

FROM H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III

Deir Anba Ruciis, 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

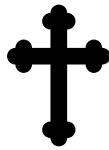
Pope Shenouda III

22 August 1986

The feast of St. Mary

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INTRODUCTION

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20

It gives me a great blessing to present to our Coptic Orthodox Churches in the Land of Immigration a collection of spiritual subjects. With the help of the Lord, I have written these subjects over a long period of time using plenty of the Coptic Orthodox resources available to me.

Spiritual life is the most important aspect to study regardless of the subjects that are being studied. The real problem in the life of anyone is being separated from God. All the rest of the problems are of direct result of this separation. If the person returned to God he or she will live in peace. This is why we must always search for the spiritual benefit as it affects everything in our life, in heaven, and on earth. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Matthew 13:44

This collection of spiritual subjects can be used at various levels covering subjects for High School students, University students, and Graduates. Applications will differ from one group to another.

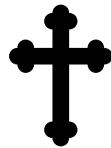
With this collection of spiritual subjects in mind, we have four categories:

- (1) Sunday School Curriculum.
- (2) Contemporary Issues Curriculum.
- (3) Servants Preparation Curriculum.
- (4) Spiritual Subjects Edition.

We present these materials for the glory of God's name and to maintain the teachings of our Coptic Orthodox Church from generation to generation.

Please pray for the Lord to bless the entire world and to help all the young generations, along with us, to grow in the fear of God.

Fr. Rueiss Awad



“YOU WERE CALLED TO THIS, THAT YOU MAY INHERIT A BLESSING” (1 PETER 3:9)

***THE BLESSING OF THE LORD MAKES ONE RICH AND HE ADDS NO
SORROW WITH IT (PROVERBS 10: 22)***

In the miracle of feeding the multitudes, we read the following in the gospel of St. John:

“Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread that these may eat?’ But He said this to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little’. One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, ‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?’ Then Jesus said: “Make the people sit down”. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, ‘Gather up, the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.’ Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten” (John 6:5-13)

Here we see a realistic picture of the little five loaves of bread and two fish, which when touched by the hands of God, “He who calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Rom 4:17), expands to fill multitudes and with much of it also exceeding their needs.

It is a true example of the blessing of the Lord Jesus and the satisfaction that fills the person who lives in the glory of the Lord’s Blessing. The same eternal power which created the world also grants blessings. This very same hand of God, filled with eternal Love, sent the manna in the wilderness to the people of Israel.

According to Philip the Disciple, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.” Andrew looked at the five loaves and the two fish, then looked to the great multitude of people and said “What are they among so many?” We, like Andrew, need to live within Our Lord’s blessing; we need to believe in it and rely on it, so that we may want nothing, and not ask “What are they among so many?”

Every person who desires to live in our loving Lord’s blessing will enjoy His grace and His work. The Holy Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, assures and reminds us to struggle to live in the boundaries of the blessings of our Lord Jesus every day of our life. The Church chose the gospel telling of the feeding of the multitudes (the gospel of benediction), which is also the gospel reading of the Ninth hour’s prayer in the Agpeya, to be read on the 5th Sunday of every Coptic month to remind us that God is the source of all goodness and all blessing, and that His Blessings are without limit.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” James 1:17

The church also named the following hymn: “We worship the Father of light and His only Begotten Son and the Holy Spirit the Comforter, the equal Trinity”, the hymn of benediction. This is to direct our attention towards the Holy Trinity, the source of every blessing and grace, Who sends the light in us, to enlighten our lives for us.

THE BLESSINGS OF GOD ARE WITHOUT LIMITS

He is God, “The Eternal One, without beginning or end, but has infinite Glory and Power. Creator of all and Savior of everybody” (The Gregorian Liturgy).

He is God, Who created man in His image and according to His likeness and gave him a special blessing. As the Bible says: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ ” (Genesis 1:28)

Adam and Eve led a good life filled with joy, purity, and holiness before disobeying God’s commandment. After the fall, they lost all these blessings, and the earth was cursed for their sake. “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Genesis 3:17). But God in His great mercy, became incarnate in the fullness of time and blessed man a second time and gave him many blessings. Prior to the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, He blessed

His saintly Disciples: “And He led them out as far as Bethany and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, that while He blessed them, that He parted from them and was carried up unto heaven” (Luke 24:50, 51)

“Yes Dear Lord, You have all the blessings and away from you is every desire and need” (The Gregorian Liturgy).

He is God who commanded the Children of Israel saying: “When you come unto the land which I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard.” (Leviticus 25:1-4) But our Lord, whose acts are mighty and without limits, tells His people:

“And if you say, ‘what shall we eat in the seventh year, since we shall not sow nor gather in our produce, then I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, and it will bring forth produce enough for three years. And you shall sow in the eighth year, and eat old produce until the ninth year; until its produce comes in, you shall eat of the old harvest.’” (Leviticus 25:20-22)

Truly, oh Lord, the sower is nothing, neither is he who waters. But You Lord, are He who makes one grow. “Your blessing makes one rich and You add no sorrow with it” (Proverbs 10:22).

All that is asked from the person, in order to receive the blessing of the Lord, is to present all he has to God, that He may bless it. The person then regains plenty for himself. Let us all live in the experience of fulfillment by not worrying about what we shall eat or what we shall drink since He who blessed us at that time, will also bless us now. The Lord Jesus Christ was yesterday, is today, and will be the same tomorrow; He is Emmanuel, which means God is with us. It is impossible for us to live within the boundaries of His Blessing and Love, then thirst or hunger. Everything we own, we surrender to God; He blesses it, and returns it abundantly and truly blessed. However, this is under the condition that we love Him and keep His word. When we move away from Him, only then do we hunger, and even the food of the swine we won’t find.

WE RECEIVE GOD’S BLESSING WHEN WE OBEY HIS WORDS

In Deuteronomy (28:1-20), we find the description of the person who lives within the boundaries of the Lord’s Blessing and that of the person living outside these boundaries.

“If you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God: Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your feet; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set our hand, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord our God is giving you. The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. Then all the people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you. And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the Lord swore to our fathers to give you. The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the Heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hands. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall no borrow. And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail, you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The Lord will send on you cursing, confusion and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken me.”

King David, the prophet, assures us that true fullness is offered to the true sons of God:

“A little that a righteous man has, is better than the riches of many wicked.” (Psalm 37:16)

Indeed, fullness is not measured according to the quantity available to the person. True sons of God, through the work of the spirit of God within them, live in complete (perfect) fulfillment without even an increase in the little they have. The Blessing of God works within the soul and fills it using even the smallest things. For with Thee, I don't need anything on earth!

On the contrary, the wicked who possesses plenty, though it may be great, also possesses a hungry soul which cannot be filled, being away from the Bosom of the Father and lacking blessing in their lives.

The rich fool wasn't satisfied with his barns. He was still in need, wanting to build greater ones.

King Aha wasn't satisfied with all his belongings and kingdoms and wanted a small piece of land owned by Nabbo the Jezreelite.

King David, before repenting, wasn't satisfied with all his wives and wanted the wife of Uriah the Hittite. He not only committed sin with her, but he also killed her husband.

On the other hand, the monks, the hermits, and the cross bearers lived with very little and were filled, felt much joy, and even had leftovers. St. Paul the hermit was satisfied with a piece of bread every day.

St. Rueiss lived in extreme simplicity and was filled with the smallest portion of food.

Truly Lord "a dried piece of bread accompanied by peace is better than tables of food accompanied by enmity."

St. Isaac the Syrian says: "He who isn't thankful for a single denarius, lies in saying he will be thankful for a thousand denarii."

The Lord Jesus, the Original Source, gives us other sources from which we receive blessings for our life: "For this you have been called, that you may inherit blessings." (1 Peter 3:9)

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY AND ORIGINAL SOURCE OF EVERY BLESSING

He grants His blessings to His children who live according to His Holy commandments. As a result of His great love towards us, His children, He also made other sources for us to receive blessings from. All these other sources receive their power and the blessings they process from the true Source, the Father

of Mercy and God of all comfort. “Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every Spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3)

BLESSINGS THAT WE RECEIVE FROM THE SAINTLY SONS OF GOD THROUGH HIS ALLOWANCE

There are people who have received many blessings from God and enjoyed great fulfillment and warmth in the Bosom of the Father. Moreover, they themselves were a blessing in their time, and were a blessing wherever they went.

Our father Abraham was told: “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)

Joseph became a blessing in the house of Potiphar “and His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord did all he did to prosper in his hand ... then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had to put in his hand.” (Gen. 39:3-4)

When Elijah went, according to God’s order, to the widow of Zarephath living in Sidon, so that she may provide for him, she only had a handful of flour in a bin, and very little oil in a jar that she was going to eat with her son then die (1 King 17:12). But Elijah, the man of God, believed that the blessing of God is unlimited. He said to her: “Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me, and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For this says the Lord God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.’ ” (1 Kings 17:13-14) Truly it was just as God spoke on Elijah’s tongue.

This same blessing worked with Elisha the Prophet to remove the hunger of the widow who had nothing but a jar of oil. She was about to lose both her sons as slaves to the creditor because of a debt she owed. Elisha ordered her, according to the words of the Lord, to borrow vessels from all her neighbours, and to pour the little oil she had into all those vessels. The vessels were all filled and their prices were not only enough to pay her debts and bring her sons from slavery, but also to live with her children from then on. (2 King 4:1-7)

The same matter was repeated with Elisha the Prophet when he said to the man from Baal Shalisha: “Give it to the people, that they may eat, for thus says the Lord: ‘they shall eat and have some leftover.’ ” (2 King 4:42-43)

Our Lord Jesus’ visit to the land of Egypt with His mother, the Virgin Mary, and St. Joseph was a great blessing for both the land and the church in Egypt. Because of

this visit, the idols in Egypt were destroyed and the churches were then founded in all the different places visited. The Blessing of our Lord Jesus and the Virgin Mary still covers the land of Egypt to this day.

We also remember the blessing of the martyrs in our country, as well as the blessing of the fathers and the hermits, who blessed many places through their prayers and their holy lives. The places of their solitude and chastity are sought by people to receive blessings. This reminds us of the blessing of “the ten” about whom the Lord said: “I will not destroy Sodom for the sake of ten” if they existed. (Gen 18:32)

THERE ARE MANY OTHER SOURCES OF BLESSING GRANTED TO US

These include the following:

Blessings we received from the blessed water. This happens in the prayers of blessing a new home. The priest prays with the inhabitants of the new house, and he sprinkles the blessed water throughout the house that it may become a house of prayer, a house of purity, and a place from which all evil spirits flee.

BLESSINGS WE RECEIVE FROM OUR FATHERS, THE PRIESTS

This happens when a priest visits homes to pray or, when he sprinkles the people with water at the end of the divine liturgy, during the final benediction saying: “God be merciful to us, bless us, cause Your face to shine upon us and have mercy upon us. Oh Lord, save Thy people, bless Thine inheritance, shepherd and uplift them forever. Upraise the Christians through the Power of Thy life-giving cross, through the intercessions and supplications of our Lady, the Queen of us all, the Theotokos, the pure and holy St. Mary.”

BLESSINGS FROM THE PARENTS' PRAYERS

As Isaac blessed his son Jacob, we receive blessings when we obey our parents. Their prayers for us, are a source of blessing.

BLESSINGS WE RECEIVE FROM THE HOLY OIL AND THE BLESSED SPICES

This happens when we receive the holy oil and spices upon visiting monasteries, churches, and other holy places.

BLESSINGS WE RECEIVE FROM THE ORPHANS, THE POOR, THE NEEDY, AS WELL AS THE SICK FOR THEY ARE CONSIDERED THE BROTHERS OF CHRIST

When we give those in need, the material gifts or spiritual ones through perfect love, we gain the blessing of their prayers on our behalf. If we keep the nine tenth of our income and receive God's blessing as well as the prayers of those in need, it will be far more prosperous than the whole.

PRAYER

My Dear Lord Jesus Christ, Source of Grace, beneficent, Who gives to all liberally and without reproach. My Lord, You are the Giver of every good gift. Grant me, Lord, to live within the boundaries of your blessing, for I have been called a Christian to inherit this blessing. Grant me, oh Lord, to lead a life of faith that I may enjoy Your great blessing. I am in need Dear Lord. I believe that if you don't bless my life, it won't bring forth fruit and I won't have any satisfaction.

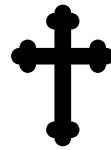
Dear Lord, I submit to You my time, that You may bless it, so that the widespread tune of complaint from lack of time would disappear from my life, and that my time may be blessed through prayers in your Holy name.

Dear Lord, I submit my weak mental, spiritual, and bodily capacities. Touch them with Your merciful hands and bless them as You blessed the water at the wedding of Cana of Galilee. Then my life will become filled with glorious joy. You oh Lord, also share in the work with me so that it may bring forth fruits to account for Your kingdom.

Lord, I submit to you my service, that You may bless it for the glory of Your Holy Name. I am a tool in Your Holy Hands. Purify me that I may become a good tool, blessed in Thine Right Hand.

My Lord Jesus, I deliver my children to You that You may guard them and bless them like You blessed the children and said: "Let the children come to Me and do not forbid them."

Lastly my Lord, bless Your people and Your church, straighten and confirm what Thy Right Hand hath planted, for Thou art our God and due unto Thee is glory and honour, worship and sovereignty, with Thy Good Father and the Holy Spirit now and unto the ages of all ages.



WHY AM I SO WEAK?

IS YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE WEAK?

Perhaps one might feel.... I am a Christian, but I have no 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, get up then fall again.....
For how long shall I live in this weakness?
How can I lead a pure life?
How can I conquer sin and enjoy living in the peace of Christ, which He promised?

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 wanted for us is 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 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 total unity, with the Lord Jesus in person. Then he will have the features and mind of Christ. This is explained 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 who lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20)
- † “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:3)

Therefore, a Christian life is not a number of laws that should be followed, neither is it a series of traditions, systems and obligations in our daily life that God put down as conditions for our salvation. In the Christian life, we become children of God Who loved us and said “I will not call you servants, you are beloved.” He did not want to keep away from us but was incarnated and became the eldest among many brothers ... He became one of us ... He took our likeness in everything except sin ... He blessed our nature ... He chose us and set us up to bring forth fruit ... He came so that we can have life and so that we can get 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 (The Non-Christian). The Bible says the following about this: “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 Corinthians 2:14)

If you examine his internal life, you could draw a simplified shape for it:

A Life led by SELF

S = Self sitting on the life control chair.

+ = Christ outside the Circle of life.

o = Personal concerns centered by selfishness.

The person who leads such a life

+ Lives in sin and is driven 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 person who is Christian only in name (The 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 life control chair.

o = Concerns that fill man's time as directed by the flesh.

This type of person is Christian only in name. He carries on with his life depending on his poor human resources in accomplishing bodily desires. He does not mind Christ being in his life, he goes to church, reads the Bible, and prays; but what applies to him is what the verse says “people honour Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.” He is not convinced of spiritual matters nor does he even absorb them; Christ is simply one other thing he 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, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)

This type of person has the ability to change into a spiritual person if he allows the Holy Spirit to work in his heart and change him in order to become pure and have the features of a true Christian.

This type of person relies solely on himself to achieve his desires and this is because:

- † He forgets God’s love and forgiveness, “But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)
- † He forgets the power of God, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” (Acts 1:8)

As a result, he does not benefit from the power of God in his life and lives weak in spirit, unable to understand himself, wanting to do the right thing but mainly failing. “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.” (Romans 7:15)

- † If you search in the internal lives of these people you will find:
- † Disbelief … disobedience to the word of God … no love for 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 aims …
- † This is a difficult unhappy life … A weak life where a 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, who went away from his father's house, choosing a life which suited his physical desires, was hungry and in need because he was far from the source of power and blessings.

Also, it is like a person whose father opens a large bank account for him, but rather than use it, he depends on his weak resources and as such lives poorly.

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

The Third Type: The True Christian (The Spiritual Person).

This person lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Although every Christian has the power of the Holy Spirit within them since their baptism, not all Christians enjoy the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The true Christian, with the blessings and power of the Holy Spirit in him, is able to live a pure life away from sin in a sort of life similar to that of Christ Himself. No one can say Christ is God except with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself teaches us and reminds us everything that Christ taught us. The Holy Spirit takes from what is Christ's and reveals it to us.

Accordingly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and His power, i.e. 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 reach the fullness of Christ. He has the mind, Christ's way of life and his internal life will become as this shape:

+ = Christ takes control of my life in place of the Self and the Flesh. This is done by the power of the Holy Spirit and His work in me.

S and F = My self and my flesh, 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 centre of power is extended from the Holy Spirit to strong prayers, love of the word of God, trust in God, and 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, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.” (Galatians 5:22)

An obvious example are the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, after receiving the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. 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 and judges with great power and were not intimidated. 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 bodily 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 dear, and surrender your life to Christ and say I will be hungry, thirsty and I will suffer, be sad, 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 mind, even in the middle of pain and trouble.

Sin and bodily desires could not overcome a young man like St. George. Even poison could not take away his love for Christ.

Anba Paul lived on very little and simple food for more than 100 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-worship with the power of her words, which came from the Holy Spirit working in 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 dear, 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.” (Romans 8:2)

The question which remains is “How can I give the Holy Spirit the chance to work in me so that Christ reigns on 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 to change my heart and lead my life from a weak to a strong life that bears the features of Christ in person?

What role do I play in enabling 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 Holy Myroon. “Because he who believed and was baptized is saved.”
2. I pray daily asking, as in the prayers of the third hour in the Agpeya, “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.”
3. Repent and confess your sins in front of God and then in front of your 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 God so that I receive the forgiveness of my sins in the Blood of Christ “because without bloodshed there is no forgiveness.” Aim 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 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 listen to God’s Word as spoken to me through the Holy Bible, when I read it at home or at Church. Reading the Holy Bible transforms the Word of God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, into spiritual nourishment and spiritual growth. “The words I say to you is spirit and life.” ... “You are pure because of the words I say to you.” The Bible is not a history book nor is it about intellect ... When I read the Bible, I should begin with “Speak, O God, Your servant listens.” God will give me, through the power of the Holy Spirit in me, the ability to hear and flourish with the word of God.
6. Trust the Lord in handling your life. “Casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7) “Therefore, gird up the loins of our 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 must 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 silence all commotion which 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 silence. Recall when Elijah 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 rather, God appeared in “A still small voice.” (1 King 19:11-13)

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.” (Galatians 5:16)

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

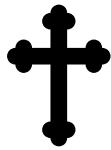
My heart ... Christ has settled in it, so I enjoy all that is Christ’s, the Cross and Resurrection of Christ in my life. “That He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”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

PRAYER

O my God, Lord Jesus Christ ... I depended on myself and relied on my strength in trying to lead the ship of my life, and I failed. I tried to pass the leadership to my flesh and its lusts and I lived in lust with hunger. Thank You, O God, because You have forgiven all this. Good Lord, I need You. Come into the ship of my life and take control. My Lord, You did not deprive me in any way. You gave Your Holy Spirit but I put off the Spirit within me by sinning. My Good Lord, help me, save me, stop me from sinning against You. Your Holy Spirit is the most precious grace to me; make Him fruitful in me so that He completely transfigures me. Change my weakness, let me know your features so that I become Your child.

Accept me in the supplications of Your saints, the Holy Virgin Mary, the great Martyr St. George, the Great St. Rueiss, the prayers of our beloved Father Pope Tawadros II, and all Your saints. Amen.





BE CAUTIOUS... THERE IS NO ESCAPE

INTRODUCTION:

Before starting a trip, one needs to plan for it. The best plan is the one built on basis and study. The person taking this trip will plan the destination and the time he will spend on his arrival, whether it will be happy or tiring. If it appears to be tiring, he will do his best to make it pleasant before starting. When does he start this trip? How long will it take? What should he pack for the way there and for his arrival? Whom will he meet on his arrival? Then, what would a person do if he is told that he has no choice or knowledge of the time of the beginning of the trip?

All these questions come to the person's mind regarding his life on earth and his trip to heaven. This is the trip in which one does not know when it will begin. This decisive trip is the most important trip in a person's life because the last point of this trip is where the person is going to spend the rest of this life indefinitely. Accordingly, his life on earth is just a short introduction or preparation to the trip to heaven. In this matter the person must make sure that he has some credit in heaven to live on and some friends there with whom he could socialize and be in love with in return. He must have an acceptable image in heaven in front of Him Who sits on the heavenly throne.

AN EXPRESSING STORY:

There was a country following a strange order. At the beginning of each year, a person is chosen to be the king over this country for a period of one year. During this year he could do all he wishes to do. After this period, the person is sent to a far uninhabited place where he spends the rest of his life. This went on for several years until a smart person once said, "During this year that I rule as king, can I do anything I want?" They said, "Yes". So, he said to himself instead of doing as those before me and spending this year eating and drinking and passing time and then they died when they were sent to that far place I will use this year more than anything else. I will restore that far city and build a factory, a farm, a big place to live in, and will prepare the place so that when my time comes to go there, I do not starve like those before me. So, all that was in his mind. In the year when he was

king, he did his best to prepare and restore that city where he will spend the rest of his life. When he was about to go, he was thankful and said, "I am looking forward to leave", and he truly went happily to his last resort.

My dear reader in this booklet in your hands, we will try with the blessing of Christ, to clarify by Verses from the Holy Bible the trip of a person's life; there are only two trips and the person lives one of them. This life will either be a dark, dull life or an enlightened, happy life. The first type is the one that the person lives when he does not think of his eternal future, but his short sight concentrates on his life on earth. The second type is the life that the alert person leads without wasting time, but concentrates on his eternal future and makes it a priority.

YOUR LIFE COULD BE DARK & DULL

† "And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry" Luke 12:19.

This is the picture of a person who is mainly concerned with his material life and body and thinks that through this he will have joy and happiness, while within his heart he will not taste joy because true joy is from God and not from materialistic things. He also thinks that it is possible that all other people could die but not him! He hears about family and friends departing from this world and there is no escape but he does not learn how to be ready.

† "But God said to him, "You fool, this night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" Luke 12:20.

Suddenly, and faster than he could imagine, this person has to leave this world against his will. He gets very upset, but there is no escape. Friends, family, money, and degrees will not be of any help; there is no escape.

† "The rich man died and was buried... then he cried out... I am tormented in this flame" Luke 16:22-24

People will mourn for him on his burial and some will say he was a good person; his body will be buried in the dust. "Naked did I come out of my mother's womb and naked will I return there." As for the spirit, which was disturbed at the moment of departure, it will go into Hades to suffer a lot with the group of villains; there is no escape.

† "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.

At this hour, the tormented soul comes back to the body and the miserable person rises on the day of the Second Coming of Christ when He will come to make His last judgment. Then that miserable person will know the dark end that awaits him and will try to come out of it, but there is no escape.

¶ “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works by the things which were written in the books.” Revelation 20:11-12.

So, this miserable person stood in front of God among a great multitude of small and great and the Book of Life was opened where everything he made was revealed because all things are open and known to God. “For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light” Mark 4:22

When his book was about to be read, this person knew that all his miserable past and sins will be known to all. He wanted to get out of this situation, but there is no escape.

¶ “For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.” Matthew 10:26

The book concerning this person, started with his childhood, youth, when the poor person did not take care of what he said or the words he used. All this was registered because, “For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:36-37.

This tormented person cried saying, “Enough... enough. I want to get out of here...” He was told that it was impossible; there is no escape. It was also mentioned in his book, among his deeds, that he used to look at the other sex in a lustful way, which caused his thoughts, sight, senses, and heart to be impure. He heard a voice saying, “Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:28. The poor soul cried out saying, “I am tormented get me out of here” He was told that there is no escape.

All his sins were mentioned one by one, including disobeying his parents, stealing, lying, swearing, cruelty, condemning others, cheating, etc.

☩ “Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” Acts 10:43

When the book was opened to this tormented soul, he was shown a picture for him in church. He was happy and said, “I used to go to church regularly.” He heard a voice saying, “Your heart was far away from God. You did not believe in Christ. You did not respond to the priest when he used to say, “You have to repent and confess regularly.” You did not wash your sins in the blood of Christ regularly. Going to church was without repentance and you did not respond to the word of the Bible. “Without receiving Holy Communion, nothing, even this will not help you. ” The poor soul cried out, “I thought this was my last hope, get me out of here...” He was told, “there is no escape”.

☩ “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels... and those will go away into everlasting punishment.” Matthew 25:41-46

☩ “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the Lake of fire.” Revelation 20:15

The poor soul cried out as loud as he could; it was his last cry and he lamented strongly, but it was to no avail. There is no escape. He will spend his eternity tormented in the lake of fire; there is no escape. It will be such an unfortunate end. There will be crying and lamenting eternal torment, which started by ignoring the word of the Bible, delaying repentance, and running after material things until one is completely lost. He found himself in a critical position in front of the Just Judge, frightened and terrified because the life spent in pleasures deserves condemnation. Could one repent at this point? It is not possible because it is too late. There is no escape.

YOUR LIFE COULD BE ENLIGHTENED AND HAPPY

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” John 3:3

Since his new birth with water and spirit in Baptism, the person was separated from his original inherited sin with which he was born and so he entered into the parenthood of God. He became an altar for the Holy Spirit living within him, and the war between this person and the evil one starts. This person admitted his faith in Jesus Christ as God and King and Saviour and refused the glory of Satan.

The days passed and this person had his moments of weakness when he was attracted and fooled by his desires.

He sinned and loved the world and all its material things, and Satan conquered this person. HOWEVER, he started to fight back and repent and every time he goes and washes himself in the blood of Christ, his sins were swept out. “Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” Isaiah 1:18

The war with the enemy continued, and the victories continued sometimes and the failure also continued sometimes. However, it was followed by warm prayers, repentance, and 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

The resistance continued because the element of perseverance is very important and the devil retreated. “Therefore submit to God, Resist the devil and he will flee from you” James 4:7. The person had his lesson from this war and he came out of it stronger than before and know that he must hold on to Christ continuously in order to overcome the evil one and there is no other means except this one. How could he hold on to Christ? He does so through prayers, fasting, reading the Holy Bible, and by receiving Holy Communion.

This person started in the stage of growing in virtue and in the fruits of the Holy Spirit within him. His inner self or his feelings, emotions, and his heart started to grow like a tree that got rid of the parasites and started a stage of growth and fruitfulness. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23

Accordingly, the spiritual growth of this person was the result of the work of the Holy Spirit within him. After his hearty decision not to submit to sin, he longed to live as a son of God in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He really tasted the true joy and peace that is above all minds.

The features of this person, his speech, actions, and attitude became different than those of the worldly people. He lives rightly in accordance with the Holy Bible, but the people of the world disliked him and persecuted him. “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” John 15:19. The evil one, after failing in war with this resisting person, made other people at work, school, or even at home, go against him. The person accepted all these persecutions and pains, thankfully. This is the unity with the Cross of Christ. This was the narrow gate.

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate” Luke 13:24. “If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Luke 9:23.

The Cross was external pain for this person, but we have already said that his heart was joyful with God. The Cross was the cause for his spiritual growth. The effect of the Cross is the same as the wind; it blows on the tree and the tree moves left and right. By doing this, the roots become stronger. As the tree cannot survive without the wind, so the Christian person cannot grow and bear fruits without the Cross and the shaking that follows. If he accepted it thankfully, he will continue to grow and bear more fruits and his heart will be filled with joy too. The Cross is a gift. “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Philippians 1:29. Beside this verse we put, “If needed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” Romans 8:17

What was this person’s life like socially or at work? Was he an ignorant, sad, sick man? On the contrary, the Christian student must be an excellent student. The Christian farmer must be a hard working person. The Christian accountant must be honest. Therefore, in all jobs and careers, the Christian person who is created according to the image of God, must be excellent. Our Lord said, “My Father has been working until now and I have been working” John 5:17. The lazy person does not have the image of Christ. The Christian person mixes his studies or his work with continuous prayer and enjoys choosing to, “Pray at all times.” Prayer does not stop him from work and work does not stop him from prayer. Also, coming to church is a priority to him.

What about properties and materialistic matters? We say that a Christian person, rich or poor in material things, is a thankful person at all times and in every way. His main objective is not the earthly properties. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Matthew 6:19-20.

If he was rich or poor in material things, he will still give of what he has to others. “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions and in the age to come, eternal life.” Mark 10:29-30. The principle of this person is, “If we have food and clothing, are we not sustained and satisfied?”

There were many materially rich saints like Abraham and David. There were many materially poor saints like St. Mary, St. John the Baptist, and St. Rueiss. However, they were all very rich in peace and joy that are above any conception.

Could the Christian person own a car, a house, and proper clothes? Of course it is possible; the children of Christ should have a life that glorifies the name of God. Our Lord Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.” John 10:10. Therefore, the Christian person will have all these things, if God wishes, BUT it should not be his major concern and the subject of his concentration. He could possess all these things if God permits, but these things should not own him. All his steps in life should be inspired by the spirit of the Bible and God’s commandment, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Every time he hears or reads the Holy Bible, he puts God’s commandments into action. When he does that, God blesses all that he does (read Deuteronomy chapter 28).

What about death for this person? Death is a great desire that this person awaits, “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:21. He welcomes death and considers it a state of moving to another place, according to the teachings of the church. The body goes into the ground being fare-welled by the church and the spirit goes into paradise where, “Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9. This beautiful place is described by the church in the Holy Liturgy as being, “In the Paradise of heaven in the place of the living forever in the heavenly Jerusalem in that place.” The spirit will meet the other saints in paradise including St. Mary, St. George, St. Mina, St. Antony, and St. Rueiss. This spirit will know these saints by name where there will be a big reception in heaven rejoicing and thankful for this person who accomplished and succeeded in the test of life.

Now he is having a good time in the arms of the saints waiting for the Second Coming of Christ when this person will hear the joyful voice saying, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Matthew 25:34. And the pleasant voice saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.” Matthew 25:23.

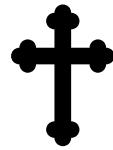
PRAYER

Thank You, O Lord Jesus Christ, because You have given me spiritual insight to know from now, and before it is too late, to be ready to meet You at any time. Grant me O Lord, to be watchful over my salvation at all times. Make me retreat, O Lord, so that I repent. Surround me and stop me from sinning against You. How many times did I make You angry with me O Lord, by being stubborn and sinful? I will hold onto You. Without You, I will not be able to do anything, but I will

struggle with the help of the Holy Spirit within me. I will struggle, O Lord, and do my utmost not to join those who crucified You and I will carry Your Cross, O Lord, that You give me, thankfully and proudly, knowing and assured that your joy will fill my heart.

My Good Lord, give me a share with You in Your Kingdom. Accept me to You, I, the sinner, through the intercession of the most Holy St. Mary, the great Martyr St. George, the Great St. Rueiss, the prayers of our beloved Father Pope Tawadros II, and all Your saints. Amen.





LESSONS BENEFITED FROM THE LIFE OF ST. RUEISS

INTRODUCTION:

What do we benefit from studying the lives of saints in general?

- † When we mention the precious story of any of the saints, we see real examples of the application of the commandments of God to the lives of ordinary individuals including both you and I, “because His commandments are not heavy.” If we did not have the lives of these saints in front of us, we might think that the commandments of the Bible are burdensome and impossible for ordinary humans to carry out and would require supernatural strength.
- † When we mention any saint, with his heart filled with peace and undisturbed contact with God, we see a living image of the hearts filled with the peace of God. “Your hearts should not be disturbed and frightened, I leave My peace with you, I give you My peace not as the world gives I give you.” This peace and true joy above all mental perception in the lives of these saints was strange because it was in the middle of difficult situations and great persecutions.
- † When we mention any saint, who was given certain gifts by God, e.g. performing miracles, we see a living image of the Glory of God. “The heavens (or the hearts) confess Thy wonders oh God and Thy right in the church of saints.” The good, the loving God, enriched the believers with wonders and miracles as a sign of His glory and love to His children the saints and as a sign of power He gave to those who love His Holy name.
- † When we mention any of the saints we see two entities working side by side. The first entity is the Holy Spirit working in a person through guidance, teaching, rebuking and consoling, and the second entity is the individual himself accepting the Spirit of God to live within him in humility and obedience.

† When we mention St. Rueiss, we see a true example that holiness is possible to all and not limited to the priests or monks, because he was not a priest or a deacon or a bishop. “He wants us to be Holy and without sin before Him in love.” “Be holy as I am Holy too.” This is God’s word to all people.

HIS BIRTH:

He was named “Fereij” at birth in the city of Bemin in Gharbiyah. His father was a farmer named Isaac and his blessed mother was called Sarah. He helped his father in farming and selling salt on his small camel “Kawood” who was also known as “Rueiss” which is an abbreviation of “Ras” meaning head. He was given this name because this camel always appeared in the pictures beside him. The camel was intelligent and obedient and used to cover him when he slept and wake him up at prayer time.

HIS ASCETICISM:

Abba Fereij lived as a stranger on earth detached from everything.

HIS ASCETICISM IN HIS RESIDENCE:

He wondered from place to place without a definite home. Sometimes he slept on the path ways and sometimes he slept with some believers. He used to sing sorrowful hymns saying “Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech that I dwell among the tents of Kedar.” He lived as his Master, “not having a place to put his head.” We concern ourselves with our homes and their appearance, while all this is rendered useless in eternity. “Because there will come a time when a stone on stone will not be demolished.” Internal peace is not guaranteed in this life because it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

HIS ABSTENTION IN FOOD:

He ate little and trained himself to go without food until he was able to complete 26 days without any food and Anba Mattheos the eighty-seven year old witnessed this. We like fancy food and seek it earnestly while neglecting what is on the inside. Our Lord Jesus taught us “Life is better than food and the body is better than clothing.”

HIS ABSTENTION IN CLOTHING:

He lived without clothes, no shirt, or cloak. Many rich people gave him presents of gold, silver and clothing but he rejected all this. Some of them used to have pity on him especially when he used to shiver from the cold, but he was content and happy with his poverty. True happiness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and not from external influences. Many people dress beautifully while they are desolate on the inside. Abba Rueiss was very poor in clothing but internally, very happy.

HIS ASCETICISM IN SLEEP:

He looked down on all earthly things, he used to sleep on the ground and take the sky as a cover.

HIS SELF-DENIAL:

He went to visit a family that was looking forward to seeing him because its members heard a lot about him. When they asked him what was his name. He said, “Taigy Aphleis”. It means “Taigy the bad”. “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself and carry his cross every day and follow Me.” The SELF is the cause of Satanael falling from the level of heavenly hosts and becoming Satan the devil. The SELF also caused Adam and Eve to fall in the disobedience of God and be expelled from Paradise. Let us deny ourselves and take an example from Our Lord Jesus Christ who denied Himself and walked on the ground as a human being while He was God the incarnated Logos.

HIS RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION CONTINUOUSLY:

Abba Rueiss received Holy Communion on Sundays and on feast days. He used to have great fear and respect while receiving it. He said, “No one deserves to receive Holy Communion except he who is pure within, as the purity of the Virgin Mary who deserved to carry Christ in her womb.” Receiving the Body and Blood of our Lord is becoming one with Christ, “He who eats My Body and drinks My Blood is in me and I in him.” This is a healing to our souls and bodies. Without Holy Communion the spirit weakens and is attacked by the evil one and cannot gain paradise. We have to always be ready and receive Holy Communion thankfully. We should come forth in a needy and humble spirit that needs God to come and dwell in it.

HE KNEW THE SECRETS:

He had an insight and God made him able to know the unknown and know the sins of people.

Once he saw a man praying in front of St. Mary's icon. He rebuked him saying: "What is this hypocrisy? How could you stand in front of a pure Lady while you are going with a sinful woman?" The man was astonished and the saint helped him to repent. He became a monk and Pope Mattheos chose him to take care of his cell.

Once he caught a young man and rebuked him for not fasting during Lent. Once he broke a water container which the workers used because he knew that there was snake inside. He used his knowledge of the unknown to save people. Once he entered the house of David Sharbatly and took a big quantity of sugar and threw it in the well. The wife was astonished. After a while, the police came to search the house, (the sugar was stolen), and they could not find anything. He saved the man and in the same manner he saved a deacon from scandal.

God gives the simple-hearted person a spiritual insight to see beyond the obvious things. Human perception and philosophy lead to disbelief and seeing only the materialistic aspects.

THE GIFT OF HEALING:

He performed many healing miracles, he healed epileptics, mutes, lames, blinds and sometimes he used to ask a person to repent before healing him.

There was a man called Michael El Bana in Minia El Sirig. He had epilepsy and during the attack he saw black slaves running towards him with firing arrows. He came to St. Rueiss, who told him, "If you stop what you are doing I will save you from them." He repented and the saint healed him. So, repentance is more important than physical healing, because what good is the human being who is healthy in body but tormented inside and has lost his peace and eternal life. In the sacrament of the healing of the sick or the Candle prayer that the priest prays in the homes of believers, it is a necessity that everyone in the house should confess and repent before being anointed with the holy oil.

Once the people brought a man called El Sayed Baraka to St. Rueiss to heal him because he broke his leg. He said, "If this man had mercy on his poor brothers I would ask for his healing". The man repented and the saint healed him and this man increased in his acts of mercy until he reached the stage when he was giving big stores of wheat yearly to the poor and took care of the monasteries and convents.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY:

At a time, the Royal Prince Yalbougha El Salemi imprisoned the Pope Mattheos together with many of his followers. St. Rueiss was in a place alone when one of

the followers of the Pope came to him and told him “What are you doing here, you man of God, while the Pope is in prison and having a hard time? Don’t you pray for him?” As he heard these words, St. Rueiss lifted his eyes and arms towards the heavens and said loudly, “Our mistress the Virgin will save him”. The follower of the Pope fell asleep and he saw an enlightened cross in the clouds of heaven and a beautiful white dove came out of it and spread her wings over the head of Pope Mattheos. He heard St. Rueiss calling, “Mattheos do not let fear into your heart because the dove that you love is out today to save you.” The follower woke and went to prison to tell the Pope. While he was there, a prince who is an enemy to the Royal Prince, attacked the prison with his soldiers, broke the doors and freed Anba Mattheos and all the prisoners. They rejoiced and knew that the beautiful dove who melted the iron in the old days, sent the prince to save them. Prince Yalbougha was imprisoned by the Sultan El Naser Barbouk. He was lashed and killed. So the prophecy of St. Rueiss came true and St. Mary heard his prayers and saved Pope Mattheos and his followers.

AVA TEIY THEOPHANEOUS:

During his last years on earth, he locked himself in a small storage room at the house of one of his followers called Michael El Bana in Minia El Sirig. He was sick in that room for 9 years. On the night that he entered that room a fire started in a corner of the room. His followers were disturbed to see this. He told them, “Do not fear this thinking it is fire. This is the light of Our Lord Jesus Christ who had mercy on us and appeared to us according to the words of the psalm saying “The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness.” This was not the only time that the Lord appeared to him but he had appeared to him before on 5 different occasions with unutterable glory. Once he even spoke to him mouth to ear. This is the reason that the church has given him the name Theophaneous, or the one who saw God. (Theophaneous is a Greek word from the word Theophania which means the Holy appearance).

HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH AND VISIONS OF THE SAINTS:

The Lord of the church who gave him the blessing of seeing Him and talking to Him, gave him also the blessing to see and talk to the saints. He glorified the Virgin Mary and took her as a personal intermediate. The day he left this world was on one of her feasts, which was Sunday 21 Baba 1121, Ann Martyri. As we know, the 21st day of every Coptic month is a day of remembrance of the Virgin Mary.

Do you have a friendship with one of the saints? Do you look up to him and follow his footsteps and ask for his help and prayer as he will be waiting for you in Paradise? Take the Virgin Mary as a mother; take St. Rueiss as an elder brother and a friend and tell him, “As you have won and lived with Christ help me to win and live with Christ too.” Take St. Rueiss as an example of self-denial, detachment, prayer, purity and sweet intimacy with Christ.

HIS TOMB:

St. Rueiss was sick for 9 years. He endured with patience without complaint. “With your patience you gain yourselves.” When he was sick he used to comfort those in trouble and heal those who were sick. He was like St. Paul who was sick but his handkerchiefs used to heal the sick. Glory be to God.

When St. Rueiss knew his time has come he blessed his followers and made the sign of the Cross on all his limbs and his pure spirit went in peace in the year 1404. He was buried in his tomb beside the church of St. Mary. Many tried to move him from there but could not. On the eighth day of his burial they stole his body. He appeared to his followers and asked them to return him to his tomb. Some tried to move his body in a ship and take it to a Monastery. A great wind came on them, so they returned him. In our modern age, during the time of Pope Cyril the fifth, they tried to pull down his tomb and build a better and more modern one. But the builder’s left hand was paralyzed and the tomb was left as it is. Also the Organization of Church renovation could not renovate his tomb.

The love of Pope Shenouda III to St. Rueiss:

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III has a great love to the saints especially St. Rueiss. His holiness served in his area in 1953 as a teacher and in 1962 as a Bishop for education and then as a Pope in the same place.

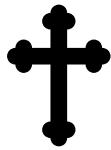
DOXOLOGY OF ST. RUEISS

1. You are truly worthy
You who were carried by angels
Into the heavenly Jerusalem
Abba Ferij who saw the Lord
2. Because of the many pains
You have endured in your body
Until your soul became an altar
To the Holy Spirit
3. Your pure name was known
In the region of Egypt
Because of the wonders the God
Performed through you
4. Your holy steps
Testify to the miracles
That you did in the region of
Egypt
With the power of Christ
5. Because the light of your body
Enlightens our bodies
And your pure spirit
Pleads in favour of our spirits
6. The story of your life is strange
Your efforts are great
Your glory is very high
Among the ascetics
7. Truly blessed are you
Our saintly father
Abba Ferij who saw
Our beloved Christ
8. Pray to the Lord on our behalf
Our saintly father Abba Ferij
Who saw our Lord
That He may forgive us our sins.

PRAYER

My Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, I thank you for renewing the human nature and making it as a temple for your Holy Spirit. When I look at St. Rueiss, I say, Glory to be God who made a person's heart like a close paradise, a living stream flowing with Your Grace and so he lacked noting. Oh Lord Jesus look upon my weakness because soon my life will fade. Save me from my sins, make me repent. Grant me Your peace above all understanding. Your people and your church, O Lord, everywhere, young and old, remember them with your mercy. Besiege your people so that no evil befalls them. Grant us, O Lord, as You have granted St Rueiss. We are so weak compared to St. Rueiss but You are capable to strengthening us as St. Rueiss.

Accept us, O Lord, in the intercession of the most pure St. Mary and the great martyr St George and the Great St. Rueiss and in the prayers of our beloved Pope His Holiness Pope Tawadros II.



LISTENING TO GOD

INTRODUCING:

God speaks to us in many ways, but do we listen to Him?

God speaks to us in many ways and calls on us out of His love, just in case we listen and like advantage.

- † The Lord calls on us in the words of David the Psalmist saying: “Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also; and your father's house.” Psalm 45:10.
- † In the parable of the True Shepherd, “But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hers his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” John 10:2. Then He confirms, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” John 10:27-28.
- † In the Book of Genesis God was calling on Adam and Eve after they committed their sin, “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and the Lord God called Adam and said to him: “Where are you?” Genesis 3:8-9.
- † In the Book of Deuteronomy there is a verse about the blessing that we get when we listen to the voice of God, “If you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today , that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.” Deuteronomy 28:1.
- † In the Book of Exodus, when the people of Israel went out of the land of Egypt on their way to the Sinai desert, “Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying: ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the

Egyptian, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me, above all people; for all the earth is Mine.”” Exodus 19:3-5.

¶ The Gospel according to St. John tells us about listening to the voice of God: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. 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 5:25-29.

Do you hear the voice of God? Can you distinguish the voice of God from the other voices of the world that fill our ears? Let me take some examples from the Bible of the saintly people who listened to the voice of God, to see how they managed to listen to His voice, how this Holy voice worked in them, and what we should do to be able to listen to the voice of God.

MARY SAT AT THE SAVIOUR’S FEET TO LISTEN TO HIS WORDS.

“Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.’ And Jesus answered and said to her: ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.’” Luke 10:38-42.

This incident demonstrated conditions for hearing the voice of God:

¶ The holy solitude..... away from the noisy city and in a small village..... in a house.

- † The humility..... Mary was sitting at the feet of the Lord.
- † The strong will of the person to listen to the voice of God..... Mary was sitting and listening quietly.

As to the result of listening to the voice of God it is very clear, “The good part that will not be taken away from her.”. Do you take holy solitude or do you keep your mind busy with worldly thoughts? You cannot hear the voice of God in the middle of worldly noise and responsibilities.

THE LORD TALKS TO SIMON..... THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

“There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: ‘Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light revelations to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.’” Luke 2: 25-32.

What are the characteristics of Simen that made him worthy to hear the voice of God? He was just, “and devout waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.” He was used to responding to the voice of the Holy Spirit, “..... he came by the Spirit into the temple.” The result of listening to the voice of God was ““..... my eyes have seen Your Salvation”, or seeing Christ.

You are the temple of the Lord and the Spirit of God is dwelling in you. Do you promptly respond to the voice of the Holy Spirit within you in humility and obedience?

THE LORD TALKS TO CORNELIUS THROUGH AN ANGEL

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming

in and saying to him: ‘Cornelius!’ And when he observed him, he was afraid and said: ‘What is it, Lord?’ So he said to him: ‘Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.’ And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.” Acts 10:1-8.

But what were the characteristics of Cornelius? “A devout man and one who feared God along with all his household , who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always. How did God speak to him? Through an angel in a vision. What was he told to do by the angel? To send for Peter to come and baptism him and to teach him the way of the Lord which is the only way to salvation. In spite of all his good characteristics, Cornelius needed to have faith in Jesus in order to receive salvation.

GOD TALKS TO PETER..... WITH A VOICE FROM HEAVEN

To prepare the salvation for Cornelius, the Lord talked to Peter through a voice from heaven, instructing him to go and baptize Cornelius. “The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetops to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter, kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’ And a voice spoke to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.” Acts 10:9-16.

In what condition was Peter when the Lord send him a voice from heaven? He was praying..... he was fasting, “..... he became very hungry”, and he was in a state of

solitude, “he went up on the housetop.” As an introduction to hear God’s voice, “..... he fell into a trance”, he was disconnected from the earthly attachments so the heavens opened to him and he heard the voice of God. Do you fast and pray regularly? Do you lead a quiet life?

GOD SPEAKS TO JACOB, THE SON OF ISAAC.....IN A DREAM

In the Book of Genesis we read about Jacob who was fleeing from his brother Esau and the Lord spoke to him in a dream. “Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he laid down in that place and sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the Angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, ‘I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendant. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold; I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.’ Then Jacob awake from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. And he was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!’” Genesis 28:10-17

What was Jacob’s condition before hearing the voice of God in a dream? “He went out “, he was alone. He was sleeping in a quiet place, “the sun had set.” How did Jacob act after hearing the voice of God? “Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel.” Genesis 28:18-19. When you leave of the circle of human dependency, as Jacob did, the Lord will speak to you and comfort you because you depend solely on him.

GOD SPEAKS TO JOSEPH SON OF JACOB..... IN DREAMS

Read about Joseph's first dream in Genesis 37:1-11 when God told him that there will come a time when his brothers will bow down to him and that he will become an important person. All these things were fulfilled.

GOD SPEAKS TO JOSEPH THE BETROTHED OF THE VIRGIN MARY..... IN A DREAM.

"The birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying: 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.'" Mathew 1:18-20.

Through this Holy dream the Lord told Joseph that the Child that was conceived by the Holy Spirit was Jesus Christ the Saviour. Therefore there was a holy reason for this Holy dream. "Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife." Mathew 1: 24. Then the Lord talked to him in a dream again. "Now when they had departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy him.' When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt." Mathew 2:13-14.

Then he came and talked to him again in a dream, saying: "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel..... Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother; and came into the land of Israel..... And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee." Mathew 2:19-21.

GOD SPEAKS TO THE BOY SAMUEL..... FROM THE ALTER IN A DIRECT VOICE.

"Then the boy Samuel ministered to the land before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation. And it came to pass at

that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down to sleep, that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, ‘Here I am!’ So he ran to Eli and said: ‘Here I am, for you called me,’ And he said I did not call; lie down again.’ And he went and laid down. And the Lord called yet again, ‘Samuel!’ So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said: ‘Here I am for you called me,’ and he answered, ‘I did not call, my son; lie down again.’ (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him). And the Lord called Samuel again the third time.

Then he arose and went to Eli, and said, ‘Here I am, for you did call me.’ Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, ‘Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.’’ So Samuel went and laid down in his place. Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, ‘Samuel, Samuel!’ and Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears.’

Then the Lord said to Samuel: ‘Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever. ‘So Samuel laid down until morning and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision. Then Eli called Samuel and said, ‘Samuel, my son!’ And he answered, ‘Here I am.’ And he said, ‘What is the thing that the Lord has said to you? Please do not hide it from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you. ‘Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, ‘It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him.’’’ 1 Samuel 3:1-18.

When you go to church tell the Lord “Speak, for Your servant hears”, as Samuel said. Be sure that you will hear his voice. “The voice of Jesus is beautiful, it heals all the sick.” This is what the hymn says. The place where the voice of God is mostly heard is the house of God. It could be heard through the reading from the Bible which the church organized by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This was how St. Antony heard the voice of God. “Go sell all your belongings and come follow me.” So he went and did what he heard from the Holy reading of the Bible. He left everything in the world for the sake of Jesus Christ and laid the foundation of the Monkhood in the whole world. Lord give me ears to hear Your voice in the church. We also hear His voice in church during the Holy Liturgy; our souls become ready to receive Holy Communion.

GOD SPEAKS TO JEREMIAH..... USING A SUBSTANCE TO SEND A HEAVENLY MESSAGE.

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, ‘Arise and go down to the potter’s house and there I will cause you to hear my words.’” Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marked in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the Lord. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying,’ Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now everyone from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.’” Jeremiah 18:1-11.

The potter shapes the clay to make a vessel of his choice, so are we in the hand of God, “As that clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.” Jeremiah 18:6.

GOD SPEAKS TO BALAAM..... USING THE DONKEY.

Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho.

Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. So Moab said to the elders of Midian, ‘Now this company will lick up all that is around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field.’ And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at the time. Then he send messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the river in the land of the sons of his people, to call him saying, ‘Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me!’

Therefore, please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed. ‘So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner’s fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak. And he said to them, ‘Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me.’ So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. Then God came to Balaam and said, ‘Who are these men with you?’ And Balaam said to God, ‘Balak the son of Zipper, king of Moabs has sent to me, saying, ‘Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and the drive them out.’ And God said to Balaam, ‘You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.’ So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, ‘Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you.’ And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak and said, ‘Balaam refuses to come with us.’ Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honourable than they. And they came to Balaam and said to him, ‘Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: ‘Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; for I will certainly honour you

greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse these people for me. Then Balaam answered and said to the servant of Balak, ‘Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me.’ And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, ‘If the men come to call, you rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you - that you shall do.’ So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. Then God’s anger was aroused because he went and the Angel of the Lord took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. Now the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road. Then the Angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam’s foot against the wall; so he struck her again.

Then the Angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she laid down under Balaam; so Balaam’s anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey and she said to Balaam, “What have I done to you, that you have strike me these three times?” And Balaam said to the donkey, “Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!” So the donkey said to Balaam, “Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?” And he said, “No”. Then the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. And the Angel of the Lord said to him, ‘Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me. The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would

also have killed you by now and let her live.' And Balaam said to the Angel of the Lord, 'I have sinned for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore if it displeases You, I will turn back.' Then the Angel of the Lord said to Balaam, 'Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.' So Balaam went with the princes of Balak." Numbers 22:1-35.

MY ABILITY TO HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD..... DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON MY OBEDIENCE.

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man deserving his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefined 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 1:22-27.

HYMN - THE BEAUTIFUL VOICE OF JESUS HEALS ALL THE SICK INTRODUCTION:

The voice of my love is coming from the mountains and the hills saying, get up my love, my beautiful. Come and show me your face and make me hear your voice.

Your voice, O Lord Jesus, is beautiful,
it heals all the sick.
The voice of Jesus is beautiful
It heals all the sick
The Voice of Jesus is beautiful
It heals all the sick
The Heaven and earth testify for it
and the Gospel testify for it
The Heaven and earth testify for it
and the Gospel testify for it

1- When I heard the voice of my love
calling Me
His sweet voice was mixed with

2- His voice silences the greatest force
it puts out the furnace
A power comes and the waves of the

Love & sympathy

He guided me, he lead me and paid
all my debts

He purified my heart and soothed my soul
and opened my eyes

He purified my heart and soothed my soul
and opened my eyes

3- Every thing is uncovered in front of him
everything is bare

He knows all the secrets of the heart
and the thoughts of man

He knew the secrets of the Samaritan woman
at the well of Jacob

She confessed to Him all her sins
she believed and repented

She confessed to Him all her sins
she believed and repented

waters will submit to him

When He calls, the dead come out
from the death

His voice is beautiful, his throat is sweet
full of desirables

His voice is beautiful, his throat is sweet
full of desirable

4- This voice lightening up the heart of
the blind

and heals all the sick

Saul becomes Paul, the Greatest
preacher of the Gospels

He changed his ways the moment
the Lord called him

Come quickly all you sinners
listen to the voice of God

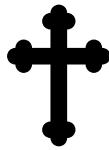
Come quickly all you sinners
listen to the voice of God

PRAYER

My Lord Jesus Christ, You loved me and gave me everything abundantly. Please make me hear your voice always. Speak Lord, for Your servant hears. Your voice is beautiful in my ears and in my heart. Please Lord silence the voices of the world. Protect me and distance me from the noises of the world. But make me hear Your voice because it is joyful and comforting and heals me from the inside. Speak to me Lord by any suitable means, let me have solitude to be able to hear Your voice. Grant me a humble heart to be able to hear You, Lord, for only the humble can hear You. Lord, I am unworthy to hear Your voice because of my many sins, but Your great love and mercy and my dire need to hear Your sweet voice.

Your voice guides me, comforts me and guards me. Accept me through the intercession of St Mary, St George and St. Rueiss, and through the prayers of His Holiness Pope Tawadros the Second.

Thank you, Lord Jesus.



CHRIST THE HEALER

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK:

Our youth are constantly asking about the miracles involving healing that they see on Television. Are these miracles real cases of healing? In fact, most of the denomination's sole purpose is to attract people's attention instead of glorifying God's name. Hence, they concentrate on what is outside, the physical healing, and leave what is on the inside, the psychological and spiritual healing. Therefore, we can see how the majority of these miracles are false.

Furthermore, our youth ask about the position of our church regarding the issue of Sickness. Does the church have a role at healing the sick? In order to answer this question we will discuss the following points:

1. The different types of sickness.
2. The cause of sickness.
3. People of Old Testament used to long to The Healing Christ.
4. Christ the healer as mentioned in Gospels of the New Testament.
5. The Disciples of Christ attended to the healing of the sick.
6. The Coptic Orthodox Church attends to the healing of the sick nowadays.

THE TYPES OF SICKNESS.

There are physical diseases in which case a person has a pain in his arm, leg or chest. There are also the psychological diseases where a person has depression or anxiety or schizophrenia. There are also spiritual diseases like pride, doubt or showing-off. These different types of diseases have quite an influence on the person. They may even cause physical diseases in the body because man is one unit and it is rare to find someone who is healthy physically and psychologically. It could be said that everyone needs healing at different levels.

THE CAUSES OF SICKNESS.

THE FIRST REASON FOR SICKNESS IS SIN:

Sin entered the world through the envy of Satan and after the sin of Adam and Eve. It was then that the different kinds of sicknesses started to spread to man after the corruption of his human nature.

The first disease that Adam experienced was fear. He said, after sinning, “I heard Your voice in the Garden and I was afraid because I was naked so I hid. Eve experienced pain in her body when God told her, “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bring forth children.” (Genesis 3:16)

Since then, the generation inherited from Adam and Eve: (1) The corruption of the human nature internally such as spiritual diseases and sin. (2) The psychological diseases. (3) Physical diseases. “Sin had conquered many and all her victims are strong.”

In the miracle of the healing of the paralytic, the man was both physically and psychologically sick. The Lord looked at him and found that the power of sin, which was controlling his life, was more dangerous than any other disease and it caused his psychological and physical disease. For that reason He said to the paralytic “Son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:5)

But the multitudes that were in the house around the Lord Jesus did not care about the spiritual diseases or its healing. Their main concern was for the body.

The Lord’s main concern is the spiritual condition of the heart. “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven or to say, Arise, take up your bed and walk?” But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins; He said to the paralytic: “I say to you arise, take up your bed and go your way to your house.” And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God saying, “we never saw anything like this.” (Mark 2:9-12)

It is obvious from His this miracle that the cause of the sickness of the paralytic was the sin that was dwelling in his soul and the most important part in his healing was releasing him of this sin. The Lord Jesus saved his soul first and then healed his body.

There are several similar diseases in the Holy Bible that developed from spiritual sin or from living in sin such as the sick man of Bethesda. The Lord told said, “You have been made well. Sin no more lest a worse thing come upon you.” (John 5:14)

Nowadays, there are still many diseases that originate from living in sin. For example, severe stress and being concerned about the materialistic and worldly issues may cause stomach ulcers. Drinking alcohol can lead to liver diseases. Smoking can cause lung disease. Exhaustion and excitement can cause heart disease. The sin of adultery can cause sexual diseases.

The evil one has a big hand at causing sin and hence sickness, but we will explain later that Christ, the true healer, is the only One Who can heal them.

DISEASES PERMITTED BY GOD FOR THE BENEFIT OF MAN AND TO GLORIFY THE LORD'S NAME.

In this case we can say, “He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your endurance”. And He will give an outlet with the temptation. Since the Lord, Who is full of love and mercy, permits these diseases then it must prove to be beneficial at the end and could not harm the person. “All things work together for the good towards those who love the Lord.”

An example of this is the sickness that St. Paul the Apostle suffered from. He said: “A thorn in the flesh was given to me.” (2 Corinthians 12:7) St. Paul prayed to God three times to release him from this thorn in his body. The answer was: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9) This thorn was given to him lest he should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations. (2 Corinthians 7:12) This sickness was permitted for his own good, so that he does not break down and fall and lose everything. St. Paul endured his physical pain with thanks. He used to preach taking his strength from the Holy Spirit that was dwelling within him, in spite of his physical weakness. He was known to preach more than the other disciples; Glory be to the name of the Lord. Therefore we can see how the Spirit is more important than the body.

Another example is the sickness of St. Timothy “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.” (1 Timothy 5:23)

The Christian person also suffers certain maladies before passing away as a warning from God that his days are numbered and it would be a good opportunity to come closer to God and repent. When the Saints become sick physically, they feel quite strong internally and enjoy a very high spiritual state welcoming the Lord of their departure from the body to be with Christ. The Virgin Mary was sick for a short time. She called the virgins of the Mount Olives and blessed them then she passed away in her Son's hands, the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are also some sicknesses that are permitted by the Lord to lead the person to the way of complete submission to our Lord Jesus Christ. This becomes an opportunity for the salvation of the soul. In other words, the physical sickness becomes the means to salvation. In the case of the healing of the born blind, our Lord Jesus declared: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.” (John 9:3) The Lord prepared the healing and He also prepared the salvation of the soul in a state of complete submission, when the Lord asked him: “Go wash in the pool of Siloam.” (John 9:7) The man obeyed, “So he went and washed, and came back seeing.” (John 9:7) He believed in the Lord Jesus as God and Savior, and worshiped Him.

PEOPLE OF OLD TESTAMENT USED TO LONG TO THE HEALING CHRIST.

As previously mentioned, the physical and psychological sickness started attacking man as a result of his sinning and the distance from God. But in spite of this, through God’s great love, He promised in the Gospels of the Old Testament that if man obeyed the commandments, He will save him from sickness: “If you diligently heard the voice of the Lord our God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you.” (Exodus 15:26)

In the case of Job, the Lord permitted Satan to strike Job with many physical diseases. But Job did not blaspheme on the name of the Lord and kept himself to God. For this reason, the Lord healed him and proved that the power of God in healing is beyond all the power of evil that strikes man with different diseases. Job’s sickness also brought him closer to God. He said: “Inherited about You with my ears but now my eyes saw You”. Job’s sickness was a blessing and a consolation to those who saw him enduring all his pain peacefully and they also saw how the Lord rewarded Job. “The Lord restored Job’s losses, “The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.” (Job 42:70)

In the Old Testament, humans failed in fulfilling the commandments and consequently, diseases were everywhere. God sent many prophets to lessen man’s pains and problems. As we say in the Holy Liturgy: “You have sent the prophets for my sake, we the sick”. But those prophets themselves were mourning waiting for Chris the Healer. Jeremiah was asking in the Old Testament: “Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people?” (Jeremiah 8:22) Isaiah was sad because his people had no healer: “From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in

it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, or soothe with ointment” (Isaiah 1:6)

Ezekiel sees Christ, through the spirit of prophecy, coming to heal humanity for all pains, he says: “When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; So I spread My wings over you and covered your nakedness. Then I washed you in water [Baptism], and thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil [Holy Chrism], I clothed you in embroidered cloth [Righteousness], I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk... You were exceedingly beautiful and succeeded to royalty.” (Ezekiel 16:7-10)

NOTE: The words between brackets are just for clarification.

CHRIST THE HEALER IN THE GOSPELS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

We all know that our Lord Jesus Christ came for the salvation of man, “For there is no other under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12) The point we want to clarify here is that our Lord Jesus came as the true Healer to all diseases. He is the doctor and the medicine, able to heal from all sickness. As we have previously stated, humanity had awaited the coming of Christ.

At the beginning of Christ’s mission on earth, “He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read, and He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recover of sight to the blind, to set a liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them; ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’”. (Luke 4:16-21) Therefore, Our Lord Jesus Christ declared that He came to heal man from all the sickness that was tormenting him.

We also read in the Gospel of St. Mathew “When John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to them to ask Him, Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said to them, God and tell John the things which you hear and see; The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended because of Me.” (Mathew 11:2-6)

SOME HEALING MIRACLES THAT THE LORD JESUS PERFORMED.

The Gospel according to St. Mathew describes the work of Christ as preaching, teaching and healing. It says: “Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torment, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics and paralytics and He healed them.” (Mathew 4:23-24) The other gospels also mention a number of healing miracles that Christ performed.

But then we realize that these healing miracles are just a part of the Lord’s miracles. St. John says: “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). In some miracles we find that the Lord healed more than one person, as in the case to the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-15). Jesus used to heal the sick and tormented people, (1) out of His sympathy and compassion; (2) to prove His power to defeat Satan’s control over man; (3) to show how precious every soul and every person is in the eyes of God, as He had declared when healing of the man with the withered hand. “They asked Him, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” that they might accuse Him. Then He said to them: “What man is these among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?” So how much more value then is a man than a sheep?” (Mathew 12:10-12) (4) This was to show God’s willingness to heal man and God’s power, which would protect him in times of need.

NOTE: Healing the sick was not the ultimate goal for our Lord Jesus. The complete Salvation of man and his eternal life, were the ultimate goal, not the temporary healing of body or soul. The most important priority is the Kingdom of God. Man should enjoy the eternal consolation that was achieved on the cross, “For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FAITH AND HEALING.

In the cases of healing performed by our Lord Jesus Christ we have to show the connection between the faith of the sick person and healing or in some cases the faith of those who intervene for the sick person. There is no point in talking about the faith of The Lord Jesus in God’s power of healing because He is the incarnated God.

In some cases the sick person does not get healed due to the lack of faith. “And when he came to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue so that they were astonished and said where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? ...And He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” (Mathew 13:54-58)

In some cases, the sick person could be healed through the faith or prayers of those who represent him. “Then one from the multitude answered and said: Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever he seizes him, he throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples that they should cast him out, but they could not. He answered him and said; O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me. Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth, so He asked his father, how long has this been happening to him?. And he said, from childhood. Very often he was thrown him, both, into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. Jesus said to him, if you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help my unbelief; help my unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to him, you deaf and dumb spirit I command you, come out of him, and enter him no more. Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said: He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he arose.” (Mark 9:17-27)

In the Epistle of St. James, “The prayers of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” (James 5:15) Therefore, God is the healer, but the prayer of faith is a necessity, the faith of the sick person?! Yes. The faith of those who pray for the sick to be healed?! Yes.

The faith of the sick person is a necessity: as in the case of the bleeding woman. “She came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped... And He said to her, Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace.” (Luke 8:43-38)

The faith of those who represent the sick is a necessity. Like the faith of the woman of Canaan for the healing of her daughter. (Mathew 15:22-31)

The faith of those who pray for the sick is a necessity the disciples could not heal the son of the man who came kneeling down to Jesus. When the disciples asked

Him, “Why could we not cast him out?” Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief.” (Mathew 17:14-20)

NOTE: In spite of the necessity of the connection between faith and the healing, yet this is the Love of God and His sympathy on us, which could heal anyone. We do not have to know why God grants some people the blessing of healing and not others. In the case of healing the woman who had a spirit of infirmity, “When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity. And He laid His hands on her and immediately she was made straight.” (Luke 13:12) The Lord Jesus has a special vision and a special calling that we do not know. Was it because of the faith of the sick woman? Or was it out of the Lord’s mercy? Or was it because the Lord saw that the healing was the beginning of her salvation, because she “glorified God”?

THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST ATTENDED TO THE HEALING OF THE SICK.

The Lord Jesus sent his disciples to preach, to teach and to heal the sick as it was mentioned in the mission of the twelve disciples. “He called the twelve to Him, and began to send them out two by two and gave them power over unclean spirits... They went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, anointed many who were sick with oil, and healed them.” (Mark 6:7-13) Therefore, using ointment for the sick was used at the time of Christ by His disciples. It is also mentioned in the Epistle of St. James, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. 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. Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:13-16)

In sending out the seventy disciples, Jesus Christ gave them power to heal the sick which was an important part of their mission. “Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick who are there, and say to them, The Kingdom of God has come near to you.” (Luke 10:8-9)

One point to be stressed here is that Christ is the true healer but He gave this blessing to the disciples as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as St. Paul said “Do all have gifts of healing?” (1 Corinthians 12:30)

The book of Acts mentions that the gift of healing was given to the disciples as a basic issue when preaching about the Kingdom of God. “And believers were

increasing added to the Lord, multiplies of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean sprits, and they were all healed.” (Acts 5:14-16) There are several miracles of healing mentioned in the Book of Acts that the reader could refer to such as: Acts 3:1-10, Acts 9:17-19, Acts 9:36-42, Acts 14:8-10, Acts 16:16-18, Acts 28:3-6, and Acts 28:7-8.

In addition to ointment with the Holy oil, they used to put their hands on the sick and they were healed as our Savior promised. “He said to them, go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, he who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe; In My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:15-18)

THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH ATTENDS TO THE HEALING OF THE SICK NOWADAYS.

The Church of Christ is eternal and Christ Himself is working in it as He truly promises. “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Mathew 28:20) Christ the healer at that time is the healer now and to the end of times.

Similar to the Lord’s concern about the sick, our Coptic Orthodox Church has a major concern about the sick too. In the sacrament of the Ointment of the Sick (which is one of the seven sacraments of the Church) the Holy Spirit works through the prayers of the priest, the submission of the sick person and his anointment with the holy oil; the Lord can heal him if He wishes so. We have to believe internally, both soul and spirit, and with a spirit of complete submission. If the Lord wishes to heal the body too, His will will prevail and His name will be glorified. “If we live we live for God. If we die we die for God. If we live or die we belong to God”. Therefore the sick person should feel relaxed psychologically. He should repent and come closer to Christ. Here we say ‘may it be your wish God’. We ask for the healing of the body too but may it be the Lord’s will and not ours because the main part takes place through the function of the sick after repentance and confession.

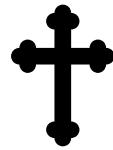
Our Holy Church prays in the Holy Liturgy during the raising of incense, the prayer for the sick, which is a beautiful long prayer. “Attend them, O Lord, with

Your mercy and compassion; heal them and take away all sickness and maladies and evil spirit ..." In the Gregorian Mass, "Healing to the sick, rest to the needy ..."

PRAYER

O Eternal King and God Almighty, my Saviour Jesus Christ, You are all I have got. You are my hope and strength. You are my physician and medicine. If I distance myself from You, I lose my peace and all the maladies attack me. The evil one crushes me and strikes me with all his might. But when I unite with You, I enjoy internal joy and health. Then, nothing else matters. If it was not for my benefit to get better, then I do not mind the physical pain. The most important thing for me, Lord, is to be with You, because even if I walk in the valley of death, I fear nothing, for You are with me. Forgive me Lord, accept me and dwell in my heart so that all my lifemingles with You. Through the intersection of St. Mary, St. George and St. Rueiss and the prayers of our beloved Pope Tawadros II, accept me and all your people. Amen.





THE APPEALING LOVE OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK:

Our youth always question the role of the church in drawing the world towards Christ. Why don't we see a growing church that has an increasing congregation? Do we have an obligation to preach among our friends at work or in school? Why do many find it difficult to bring others to Christ? Some parents fail to bring their own children to Christ? Why do some people have an aversion towards Christ?

The answer is that we preach an unappealing Christ. Our Christ is quite attractive in His deep love for each and every one of us and if He was introduced properly to any soul, no one would be able to resist. If we become a true image of Christ by reflecting His love and service in dealing with others, then we will achieve successful preaching without much effort. The others will find in us a living Christian love that will consequently attract them to our appealing Christ. We will then enjoy the work of the Lord through us and will be granted the heavenly reward.

In this book we will try to demonstrate this appealing love of Christ to all the needy souls hoping that it will be a source of blessing to the readers. We will discuss the following points:

1. Love is appealing to every soul
2. The appealing love of Christ in His preaching
3. The Apostolic Church announces the stream of Christ's love in addition to the sincere love of the Apostles towards the people
4. Does the church still obtain this appealing love in the present time?
5. The world could be won through love
6. A Prayer

LOVE IS APPEALING TO EVERY SOUL.

A person is attracted towards whatever offers love and is averse to criticism or limitation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ declared that He would be very appealing to many once He announces His love on the cross. “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32). He also said, “Greater Love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). In fact, the number of people who believed in Christ during His service on earth is nothing compared to the great multitudes who believed in Him after His crucifixion and resurrection. Why is this so? This is because on the Cross, the love was intensified. “It is this that God loved the world that He even gave up His only Son so that no one who believes in Him will see destruction but will have eternal life.”

When we look away from the Cross and the great love of Christ, we find the world offering us a fake love that attracts us strongly. This was the cause of our forefather’s fall when Satan offered them the fake love that lead them to sin.

He pretended to care for Adam and Eve and said, “Has God indeed said ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’ ... You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:1-5).

Satan, who dislikes man, pretended to love him and he was attracted to this love, which lead him to deceit and caused his downfall. Man became under the power of Satan until Christ came and declared the great love of God and disclosed the deception of Satan. Man was then attracted to Christ and corrected his ways and followed God.

The world is still deceiving man trying to pull him away from God. Therefore, it is necessary for the person who preaches to show the loving Christ and at the same time disclose the deceitfulness of the worldly love, which leads to destruction.

THE APPEALING LOVE OF CHRIST IN HIS PREACHING.

THE APPEALING BIRTH OF CHRIST:

Christ came to all the people, including the rich, poor, Jews, and Gentiles. For this reason, He was wondrous in His birth. He was born to a poor girl through the Holy Spirit, who was the Virgin Mary. There was no room in the house, so he was born in a manger. If Christ was born in a place or even in a house, a person could say that He did not come for me because I am poor and worthless. The hymn says:

Jesus is born in a manger... so that we can all see Him... we see the Lord of Humans...

We can all be attracted to this humble baby, the unlimited, whom the Angels and Archangels worship. He took the image of a servant and was born very poor. He did not prevent anyone from seeing Him. The shepherds, representing the Jews who were staying up taking care of their sheep, came and worshipped Him. They heard the Angels saying, "Glory to God in the Highest, Peace of Earth and Good will to all men" (Luke 2:14). The shepherds were filled with joy when they heard that good news from the Angels. "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10).

The Magi came representing the Gentiles and they asked where is the new born who is the King of the Jews. They offered Him gifts of, "gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11).

Why is it that King Herod was not attracted to Your wondrous love? Why were Herod and all his men disturbed? Why did he kill all the children of Jerusalem? The answer is simple. The phrase that the Magi said, "the King of the Jews" made him fear for his kingdom. A newborn makes a king and his kingdom feel threatened. Herod thought that Jesus was an earthly king who will take away his kingdom. This is the same case with all men who cannot be attracted to Christ as long as they feel that Christ is his rival and will take something away from him. He does not know that Christ will fill him with love and will not take anything, but He will give him far more than he had and will fill him with peace and joy for He said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

THE APPEALING LOVE OF CHRIST IN HIS PREACHING:

In the Sermon on the Mountain, which is considered the statue of Christianity, our Savior revealed His deep love to mankind. He said, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake" (Matthew 5:3-11). Who deserves all these blessings? Who is worthy of all this? Our Lord Jesus Christ, out of His

deep love, longs to provide His sons with all the heavenly blessings. What do you think, my dear, of our loving Christ? Shouldn't we reciprocate His love?

In His teachings, our Lord Christ gives the person the full freedom to accept or to reject. He says in Luke 9:23, "If anyone desires to come after Me...". On the other hand, the world enforces itself on man and could even use the manner of threatening. Hear Nebuchadnezzar saying, "Whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace" (Daniel 3:6).

THE APPEALING CHRIST IS FILLED WITH LOVE IN ALL CASES:

The Lord Christ supported the adulteress when the Pharisees wanted to stone her. He said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." John 8:7. When they departed He said to the woman, "Has no one condemned you? ... Go and sin no more" (John 8:10-11). We all need someone to support us in our times of weakness when the whole world opposes us and tries to destroy us. Christ is our only hope and takes care of us.

In the four gospels, we read about the many occasions of the Lord's love manifested with open arms to all men, women, and children. Some examples include the Samaritan woman, Levi at the tax office, the woman sinner in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and Peter after staying the whole night without catching any fish.

WHY WERE THE SCRIBES, PHARISEES, AND THE LEADERS OF THE JEWS NOT ATTRACTED TO CHRIST?

In spite of Christ's incredible love and the fact that He was going around doing good to all, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and consoling everyone, yet the group of Scribes, Pharisees, and the leaders of the Jews did not accept Him. The reason was that they thought He was competing with them for their positions. They thought He wanted to take the fame and the people's compliments. They thought He was the head of the devils and He was driving them out. They thought He was misleading them. They could not believe anyone could love the sinners. They preferred darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. If the cause of rejection of Christ in this case was the interference with their position and fame, then what is it in your case or mine? There is no interference between the loving Lord and any thing in my life. That group of people rejected Him because they lacked flexibility and were stuck to the wrong idea that He came to bring back the kingdom of Israel (i.e., an earthly king who would save them from the Romans and give them high posts and wealth in the world). "He 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).

CHRIST IS MORE APPEALING ON THE CROSS AND IN THE RESURRECTION.

Christ, in His incredible love, gave Himself up on the cross. He was the righteous in the place of the sinners. He was without sin, but became sin for our sake. He took all our sins. He was whipped and did not utter a word. He was crowned with thorns and slapped on His face. He was spat upon and His side was pierced with the spear. He was nailed on the cross for me and instead of me. I should have been the one to be punished and crucified for my sin because, "... death through sin..." (Romans 5:12). In the midst of all this, He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

He asked for forgiveness from those who crucified Him. He took care of His beloved mother, St. Mary, and gave her as a great gift to His beloved disciple, John, who followed Him to the cross. When you enter the church and look at Christ on the cross and do not find His arms opened to take you in, you could have the right to say that Christ is not appealing. However, as long as His arms are open on the cross, He says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28. Christ is appealing, loving, and compassionate and is able to do everything. Our Lord was crucified and humiliated in front of all the people, but He appeared only to those dear to Him after His resurrection. Even though Judas betrayed Him, Christ treated him lovingly and called him, "Friend" (Matthew 26:50).

After His resurrection, He came to Thomas and the doors were locked to make him believe and see the scars of the nails and spear. He appeared to Mary Magdalene to console her and to comfort Peter who denied Him in front of a servant. He sent him a message with Mary Magdalene saying, "Go and tell His disciples - and Peter - that He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him, as He said to you." Mark 16:7. Great is Your love, O Lord, while You are on the Cross. Great are You, O Lord and very loving in Your resurrection.

THE CHURCH IN THE APOSTOLIC ERA.

The church announces the love of Christ in addition to a true love from the Apostles to the people.

The Book of Acts shows the growth that was taking place in the first church saying, "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:47. In

one sermon, St. Peter drew three thousand people to the faith, although it was written that both Peter and John were, “common and not intellectual.” These Apostles, though few in number, managed to spread Christianity all over the world, defeating paganism, the fanatic Jews, and the Roman forces. Christianity was spread without being imposed on others and without declaring war. The principle of Christianity was whoever wanted to join let him come. At first, these teachings were not appealing. For example, there was the message saying, “go sell what you have... and come follow Me” (Matthew 19:21). “Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (Matthew 5:39). “Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two” (Matthew 5:41). “If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also” (Matthew 5:40). How could Christianity spread with such teachings? The answer is that it was spread through the following ways:

Through the love of Christ and His work inside the soul through the guidance of the Holy Spirit because no one can say that Christ is God without the Holy Spirit. Christ (was talking about the Holy Spirit when he said that, “He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” John 16:14

The personal love of the Apostles to the people

When the Lord sent His twelve Apostles and His seventy disciples, He sent them from His own power. He said to them, “Carry neither money, bag, sack nor sandals... whatever house you enter first say peace to this house... Heal the sick...”

These preachers were supported with a heavenly power and they said, “Even the demons are subject to us in Your name” (Luke 10:17).

† Let us see what St. Peter said in his preaching when 3000 people believed in Christ. He said, “Men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and for knowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death. Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it... Therefore, being exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear... God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ... Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off, as many as

the Lord our God will call..." Those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about 3000 souls were added to them." Acts 2:22-41

Peter was preaching about the crucified Christ who saved man through His crucifixion and who was raised from death, thus defeating it and all the powers of Hades. He gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to the believers and opened the door of repentance and the acceptance to God the Father.

He gave everyone a place in Heaven. What a great love? This love was the subject of preaching. As to St. Peter who loved those he preached to, he was clear in his verbal expressions. "Men of Israel" (Acts 2:22). This was a respectable manner of speech. In his first epistle, he says, "Beloved, I beg you ..." 1 Peter 2:11. This was his way of addressing them and his shadow used to heal the sick but he used to attribute the glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John the Evangelist also preached and wrote proving the theological side of Christ. He served with great love to the people telling them, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit" (1 John 4:1). He used the term, "Beloved" in all his writings and speeches. In his second Epistle, he says, "The elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth... grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." (2 John 1:1-3). St. Paul the Apostle, who preached more than all the other apostles, was also preaching the love of God that was apparent through His incarnation, His crucifixion, and resurrection. He used to love those he served with tears and bore within him the feeling of all people. He said, "I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:3).

This was the image of the first church; it was a church of prayers fortified with the Holy Spirit bearing the features of Christ, who was full of love. We never heard of Christianity being spread with war or any other means but love.

WHAT IS THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH NOW IN REFERENCE TO THIS APPEALING LOVE?

St. John the evangelist said, "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." 1 John 1:1-3

Therefore, the teachings of the rest of the Apostles and disciples was based on their personal experience with our Lord that include His teachings, His love, the miracles that He performed, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension.

What do we say now when we preach about Christ? We could say a lot with the help of the Holy Spirit who is with us. We could say that Jesus Christ, in Whom we believe, saved us. He gave us a meaningful life. He gave us a share in heaven through our unity with Him in the Holy Communion. His love was poured into our hearts and our lives changed completely. He gave us a life full of love, which is reflected on the Christian person's behaviour and which is what attracts others to him. "They may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). When others are attracted to us, seeing a smaller version of Christ, we could then talk to them about the salvation of Christ and the love of Christ. This is accompanied with prayer, follow up teaching, and explanation. If God permits, others could be attracted and convert to Christianity. However, what is the first step? They should see in us the true Christian love.

EXAMPLES:

- † St. Augustine read about the life of St. Antony and his love towards his brother including his humility and love of Christ. This was the beginning, which God used with him to change his life after living in sin. In addition, his mother, St. Monica, prayed for him, which was quite effective.
- † St. Bachomious was a soldier in a regiment that was seining a Christian city. This regiment arrived at the border of the city in the evening and it was planned to attack in the morning and kill all the Christians there. But then (However,) the Christians came out in the evening to welcome the soldiers, (remove comma) carrying food and water to relieve them from the toil of the journey. When St. Bachomious saw the love of the people of the city, he left the army and became a Christian. This was the starting point for him and then he became a great saint.

THE WHOLE WORLD COULD BE WON THROUGH LOVE.

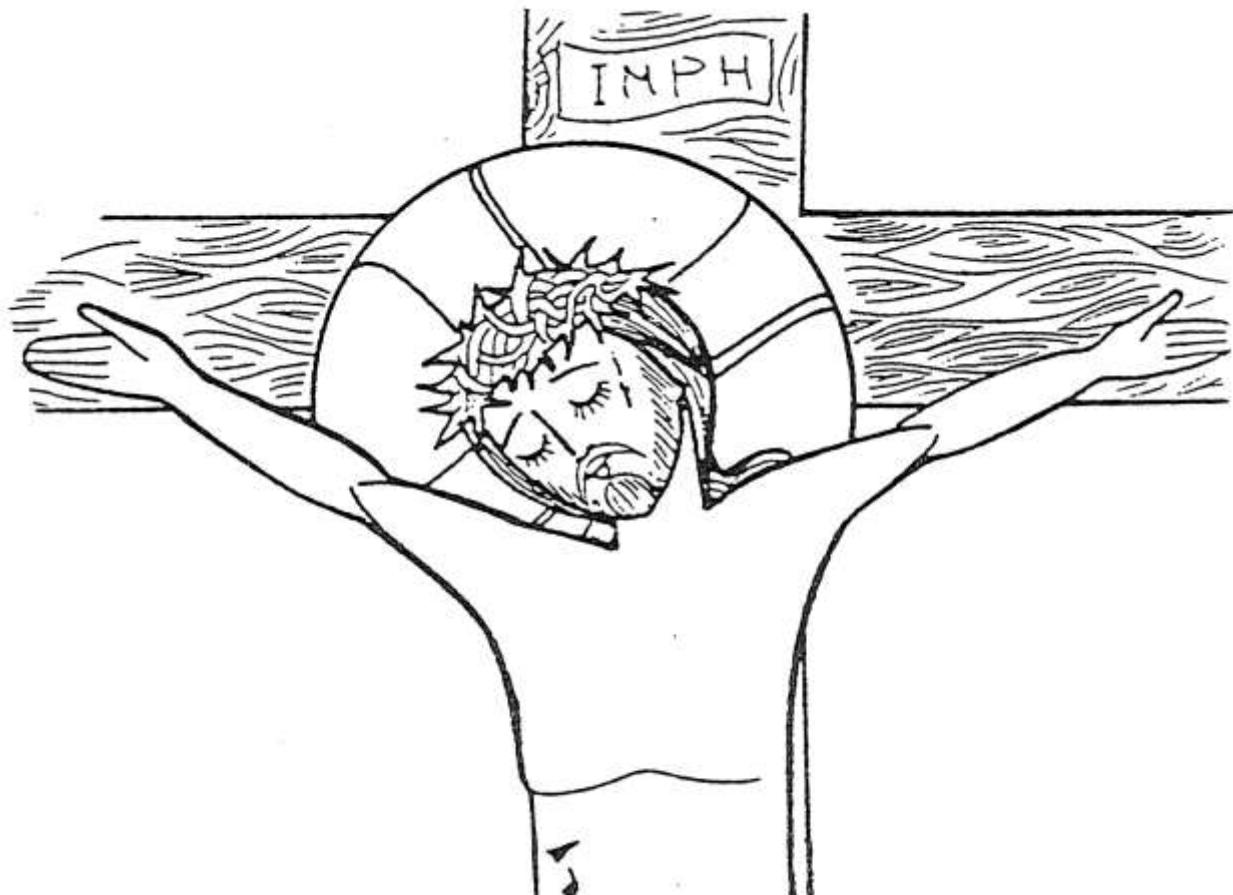
The father could win the love of his son. No matter how strong the father's spiritual condition is, unless he treats his son with love, he cannot bring him to Christ. Every member of the family cannot bring the rest of the family to Christ without love in the daily life.

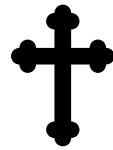
In the circle of education and work and with every person we deal with, he/she should see in us the features of Christ in His love in order to be attracted to our church and our Holy Christ. Likewise, the Sunday School teachers, the deacons,

the priest, the Bishop, and the Pope cannot win others without true love. People have to see in them the features of the appealing love of Christ.

PRAYER.

How great is Your love to me, Lord. I can count on Your sympathy and compassion on me even when I sin; Your love receives me and the door of repentance and acceptance is open before me. You have opened this door so that I unite with You to be purified from my many sins. Grant me Lord, a compassionate heart, which can treat others with mercy and Christian love. Do not allow me to be a cause of falling in temptation to anyone, but make me a smaller image of Yourself so that Your name may be glorified to win souls. Accept us Lord and Your children everywhere through the intercession of St. Mary, St. George and St. Rueiss and through the prayers of His Holiness our beloved Pope Tawadros II.





FROM THE HOLY BIBLE REGARDING ANGER – FEAR – GUILT – BEING TROUBLED – JEALOUSY – LAZINESS – LONELINESS – LUST – SICKNESS – PRIDE

INTRODUCTION:

Regardless of the needs or problems of anyone, anywhere and at any time, the answer lies within the Holy Bible. For this the Lord Jesus Christ said: “Search the scripture.” John 5:35.

Whatever our feelings, pain or hopes are: the Bible holds the word of life for the benefit of everyone. Unfortunately, quite often we search for solutions concerning our problems outside the Holy Bible, which contains the word of God. This booklet which you are now holding my dear friend, is a humble attempt to gather some of the verses of the Holy Bible to help you if you encounter one of the following circumstances:

1. Anger.
2. Fear.
3. Guilt.
4. Troubles.
5. Jealousy.
6. Laziness.
7. Loneliness.
8. Lust.
9. Sickness.

10.Pride

ANGER

- † “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion.” Psalm 145:8
- † “But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them.” Nehemiah 9:17
- † “Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.” Ecclesiastes 7:9
- † “A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated.” Proverbs 14:17
- † “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” Proverbs 16:32
- † “A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.” Proverbs 15:18
- † “An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression.” Proverbs 29:22
- † “Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lets you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.” Proverbs 22:24-25
- † “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret – it only causes harm.” Psalm 37:8
- † “Be angry, and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath.” Ephesians 4:26
- † “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.” Proverbs 19:11
- † “Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman.” Proverbs 21:19
- † “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.” Proverbs 21:19
- † “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” Matthew 5:22

- † “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving on another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:31-32
- † “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” Romans 12:19
- † “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” James 1:19-20

FEAR

- † “Do not fear, the flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32
- † “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” Matthew 10:28
- † “But He said to them, ‘Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?’” Mark 4:40
- † “But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil.” Proverbs 3:25-26
- † “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.” Proverbs 3:24
- † “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.” Proverbs 29:25
- † “For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you’” Isaiah 41:13
- † “In righteousness you shall be established: You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you.” Isaiah 54:14
- † “I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of a man who will be made like grass?” Isaiah 51:12
- † “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.” Isaiah 43:2

- † “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” 1 Peter 3:12-14
- † “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’” Romans 8:15
- † “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1
- † “He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge: His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.” Psalm 91:4-6
- † “Yea, though I walk 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.” Psalm 23:4-5
- † “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?” Psalm 27:1
- † “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” John 14:27
- † “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created things, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:37-39

GUILTY

- † “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
- † “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.” 1 John 3:20
- † “I write to you, little children, because our sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.” 1 John 2:12

- † “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 sins.”
1 John 1:7
- † “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: Let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah 55:7
- † “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.” Isaiah 43:25
- † “For if you return to the Lord, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him.” 2 Chronicles 30:9
- † “As far as the east is from the west, so far had He is able to removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:12
- † “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things had passed away; behold, all things have become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17
- † “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” Jeremiah 31:34
- † “I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me.” Jeremiah 33:8

BEING TROUBLED

- † The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their strength in the time of trouble.” Psalm 37:39
- † “The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raises those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.” Psalm 146:8
- † “Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand.” Psalm 37:24
- † “You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance.” Psalm 32:7

- † “You who have shown me great and server troubles, shall revive me again from the depths of the earth.” Psalm 71:20
- † “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.” Psalm 42:11
- † “My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Psalm 73:26
- † “No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.” Psalm 91:10-11
- † “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him.” Psalm 126:5-6
- † “Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints! For the Lord preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud person.” Psalm 31:23
- † “For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard.” Psalm 22:24
- † “The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.” Psalm 9:9
- † “For You will light my lamp the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.” Psalm 18:28
- † “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” Psalm 34:19
- † “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me.” Psalm 138:7
- † “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” Psalm 18:2
- † “Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the

Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness.” Micah 7:8-9

- † “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” John 16:33
- † “He shall deliver you in six troubles, yes, in seven no evil shall touch you.” Job 5:19
- † “For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” Lamentations 3:31-33
- † “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him.” Nahum 1:7

JEALOUSY

- † “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.” Psalm 37:7
- † “You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife; and you shall not desire your neighbour’s house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour’s.” Deuteronomy 5:21
- † “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.” James 3:14
- † “Do not envy the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.” Proverbs 3:31
- † “As sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones.” Proverbs 14:30
- † “Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, but who is able to stand before jealous?” Proverbs 27:4
- † “Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them.” Proverbs 24:1
- † “Do not let your heart envy sinners, but be zealous for the fear of the Lord all the day.” Proverbs 23:17

- † “Do not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” Galatians 5:26
- † “For where envy and self-seeking exists, confusion and every evil thing are there.” James 3:16
- † “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.” 1 Corinthians 10:24

LAZINESS

- † “That you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.” 1 Thessalonian 4:11-12
- † “Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Romans 12:11
- † “He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough!” Proverbs 28:19
- † “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. He who gathers in summer is a wise son; but who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame.” Proverbs 10:4-5
- † “I went by the field of lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler and your need like an armed man.” Proverbs 24:30-34
- † “Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with bread.” Proverbs 20:13
- † “The way of the lazy son is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright is a highway.” Proverbs 15:19
- † “The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.” Proverbs 21:5
- † “The hand of the diligent will rule, but the lazy man will be put to forced labour.” Proverbs 12:24
- † “He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, but he who follows frivolity is devoid of understanding.” Proverbs 12:11

- † “Be diligent to now the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds.” Proverbs 27:23
- † “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.” 2 Thessalonian 3:10-12
- † “The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.” 2 Timothy 2:6
- † “Here is what I have seen: it is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labour- this is the give of God.” Ecclesiastes 5:18-19

LONELINESS

- † “Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am’. If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness.” Isaiah 58:9
- † “Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored and I have loved you; therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life.” Isaiah 43:4
- † “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.” Genesis 28:15
- † “But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God.” Psalm 40:17
- † “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” John 14:18
- † “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:18
- † “And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ and they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus

spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.’” Matthew 14:26-27

LUST

- † “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” James 4:1-4
- † “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts you double-minded.” James 4:7-8
- † “For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” 1 John 2:16-17
- † “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:27-28
- † “Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, not let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a curst of beard; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life. Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbour’s wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent.” Proverbs 6:25-29
- † “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” 1 Peter 2:11
- † “As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” 1 Peter 1:14-16

- † “By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” 2 Peter 1:4
- † “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:22
- † “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, 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, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Chris tour savior.” Titus 3:3-6
- † “Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, Who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by His grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:3-6
- † “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that , denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.” Titus 2:11-12
- † “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:24
- † “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, not does He Himself tempt anyone.” James 1:13
- † “How they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Jude 1:18-21
- † “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and

these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things you wish.”
Galatians 5:16-17

- ¶ “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. And do not present your members as interments 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.” Romans 6:11-14

SICKNESS

- ¶ “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 forgive, confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” James 5:14-16
- ¶ “And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes Lord’. Then He touched their eyes saying, ‘According to your faith let it be to you.’ And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them saying, ‘See that no one knows it.’” Matthew 9:28-30
- ¶ “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame when throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people, who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were with demon-possessed, epileptics and paralytics; and He healed them.” Matthew 4:23-24
- ¶ “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.” Jeremiah 17:14
- ¶ “For I will restore health to you and heal you of your wounds, says the Lord.” Jeremiah 30:17
- ¶ “But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’--- then He said to the paralytic, ‘Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’ And he rose and departed to his house.” Matthew 9:6-7

- † “So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you.” Exodus 23:25
- † “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes you were healed.” 1 Peter 2:24

PRIDE

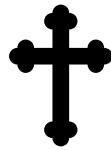
- † “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Proverbs 16:18
- † “Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” Proverbs 26:12
- † “A haughty look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked are sin.” Proverbs 21:4
- † “He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered. He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses.” Proverbs 28:25-26
- † “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.’ Proverbs 8:13
- † “Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger and not your own lips.” Proverbs 27:2
- † “Look on everyone who is proud, and bring him low; tread down the wicked in their place.” Job 40:12
- † “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” Isaiah 5:21
- † “You rebuke the proud – the cursed, who stray from your commandments.” Psalm 119:21
- † “And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your heats. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” Luke 16:15
- † “How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?” John 5:44

- ☩ “And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.’” Mark 9:35
- ☩ “But he who glories, let him glory in the Lord. For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.” 2 Corinthians 10:17-18

PRAYER

I thank You, O Lord Jesus Christ for all the love, peace and quietness that You grant me. O Lord Jesus Christ, Your word is my only condolence, it is the only reliable source of every thought and for every situation I encounter in my life. Enlighten me with the meaning of Your word and help me to abide by it, and apply it in my daily life. Your word of life purifies my heart, my soul, cleanses my thoughts, my senses and lightens my way. Surround me with Your angels so I can enjoy the beauty of Your words and live peacefully with You. With the intercession of the Virgin Mary, all Your martyrs, and saints who satisfied You since the beginning of time and by the prayer of our honorable Pope Tawadros II, hear me and accept me.





HOLY BIBLE STUDY

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT...” PS. 22 (23)

This Psalm is one of the Psalms of the third hour during which we recall the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. This Spirit continues to work among the members of the church through the divine sacraments. The Psalm tells of God's supreme care and His personalized work tailored to each member in the church.

VERSE 1 “THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT...”

The word Lord here means God. He is God who created heavens and earth and all that are in between. This God has a personal relationship with me since He “shepherds” me. Therefore, I am neither alone nor I am lost or gone astray amongst the many nations and creatures. No wonder! It is God Himself who is “shepherding” me. That is why I do feel that I have a good relationship with God and, from this perspective, He is “shepherding” me.

Moreover, I have absolute trust and a great blessing from Him because He is personally shepherding me and, as such, I lack nothing. The one who is taking care of me is not an angel or archangel or proto father, or even a prophet. Rather, it is God Himself who is taking care of me. Hence, I do enjoy a personal relationship with Him, he is very kindhearted towards me so much so that I feel as if I were a little sheep placed under the care of the Great Shepherd Himself. Even though I go through hard times and distresses, I still maintain a good relationship with the “Good Shepherd”, and, therefore, I lack nothing.

This personal relationship is elaborated on in the Divine Liturgy according to St. Gregory where we say, “Thou, as a Lover of mankind, hast created me, a man. Thou hast no need of my servitude, but rather, I had need of Thy tender mercies, Thou broughtest me into being, whence I was not. Thou hast raised heaven as a roof for me, and established the earth for me to walk on. For my sake, Thou hast bridled the sea. For my sake, Thou hast manifested the nature of animals. Thou hast subjected all things under my feet. Thou hast not left me in need of anything of the works of Thine honor. Thou art He who formed me, and laid Thy hand upon me, and inscribed in me the image of Thine authority.

Thou hast placed in me the gift of speech and opened unto me the Paradise to enjoy, and hast committed to me the precepts of Thy knowledge...”.

Then “Thou, O my Master, hast turned the punishment to salvation for me. As a Good Shepherd, Thou hast sought after that which had gone astray. As a true Father, Thou hast labored with me, who had fallen.”

The reference to God as “the Good Shepherd”, as mentioned in the Divine Liturgy, is quoted from the Holy Bible as the Gospel reports, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” (John 10:11). As well, the Gospel says “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” (John 10:27-28). So, chapter 10 of St. John’s Gospel is known as the chapter of the good shepherd.

In the Book of Song of Songs, the human spirit turns toward God saying “Tell me, O You Whom I love, where you feed you flock, where you make it rest at noon...” (Song 1:7). As well, the same book says, “My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feeds his flock among the lilies” (Song 2:16). The book also reinforces this statement in chapter 6:3 saying about him that he “Feeds his flock in the gardens.” (Song 6:2).

It is worth mentioning in this context that, in the Old Testament, God described Himself as being the “good shepherd.” As per the Book of Ezekiel, chapter 34 - which is also the good shepherd chapter – the Lord God said “‘I will feed my flock, and I will make them lie down,’ says the Lord God. ‘I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick.’” (Ezekiel 34:15-16).

It is noteworthy here that this Psalm of the good shepherd is closely connected to the one right before it, Psalm 22. In this Psalm one, we see a lovely image of Jesus Christ. We see the good shepherd suffering as He was fastened to the wood of the cross in order to carry away the sins of His people, and passing to them through His crucifixion, the divine glories. That is where the flock is filled with the joy and blessings of the Holy Spirit saturating the inner hearts of believers by His bloodshed on the cross. Now, the rest of this wonderful Psalm explains what this good shepherd presents me with so that I may lack nothing.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures.

Green pastures are the best place for sheep, where they eat and feel comfortable. However, for human beings, a green pasture symbolizes internal blessings.

The green pasture represents the joy of having the Holy Spirit dwell inside us, granting us satisfaction so that we may lack nothing. As well, the Holy Spirit gives us His word in the Gospel so that our soul may be nourished and, whereby, we might live pursuant to the Gospel as we take onto ourselves a life full of peace and joy. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4).

David lived on and by the word of the Gospel and he used to mediate day and night. As a matter of fact, the word of God has not been given to us to read but rather to experience and ingest it in our daily life.

The Holy Church, with its seven sacraments, is the green pasture that provide us with the Lord’s divine body and blood through them I get united and attached to Him. “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:54).

That is why we pray and chant in the Psalmody saying, “Keep the doors of the churches open for the believers.” Believers enter the church, find all their needs there and enjoy profound peace. The church is heaven’s icon on earth. As well, we say, “If we stand in Your Holy altar, we would be considered as if we were standing in heaven.”

Whoever walks in the way of God feels the pleasure of God’s presence and feels that the Lord’s commandment, just like green pastures, is not burdensome. (1 John 5:3). Rather, he or she would feel that “the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” (Ps 19).

VERSE 2: “LEADS ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS.”

The words “leads me” mean that the shepherd guides his sheep to fresh running water so that all might drink and quench their thirst. Likewise, God and His Holy Spirit being in charge of all, leads me through His love to full comfort. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” (Ro 8:14). Contrarily, whosever drinks from the water of the world’s evil thirsts, just as what Jesus Chris told the Samaritan women about. “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).

Baptism is undoubtedly “the still waters” because it cleanses man of all his or her past unrighteousness, inequities and impurities, thereby, relieving him or her of all old evils and sins “through the washing of regeneration.” (Tit. 3:5).

The Holy Spirit in our hearts is the water of life and comfort “he who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:38-39). Indeed, it is the life giving water by which a believer would be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.

Therefore, the church blesses the congregation by spraying water at the end of each and every liturgy. God Himself is the Still Waters for whom our souls thirst just as David said: “as the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” (Ps. 42:1-2). In this context, St. Augustine says: “You have created us in Your image. No wonder! Only with You do we have rest.”

However, still waters could be tears of real repentance by means of which man enjoys abundant rest and peace because sin is misery and getting rid of it is rest. “Grant me, O God, tears of repentance just as You had given the woman in olden times.”

VERSE 3: “HE RESTORES MY SOUL; HE LEADS ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME’S SAKE.”

The words “restores” and “leads” mean that God gives each and every one of us absolute freedom since He has created us like Him in terms of holiness, freedom and eternity. As such we all are free. Yet, one might fall in wrongdoing if we are weaken “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” (John 1:8). I thank You, O Lord, that even though I walk down the wrong path, You diligently look for me, leaving behind the 99 until You find me, restore my soul and guide me.

By the same token, the good shepherd always leads his flocks through well-trodden roads while waiting so that they might not come across rough terrain whereby the sheep legs maybe broken or injured. Likewise, You, Lord direct and guide me to sound and safe tracks in my life thereby leading me up to righteousness and salvation. I so much wish to hear Your voice constantly and follow this voice so that I may be in utter peace and success. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who restores my stray soul to repentance.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to our advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

And when He has come, he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” (John 16:7-11).

Indeed, we do not belong to this world. After all, our ultimate goal is to seek God and our eyes are constantly looking up to our heavenly homes. Should we love this world and cling to it, we will tire and perish. But God always searches for us and restores us to Him “working for our guidance. Therefore, I am reassured that I am not alone. Even if I fall, I would cry “restore me, and I will return.” (Jer. 31:18). Similarly, David chants in his Psalm saying: “show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths.” (Ps. 25:4).

And in another Psalm says: “Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You.” (Ps. 143:8). So, You, my Lord, knows the appropriate way for me to walk, the way that conforms to Your good will. Let us all work jointly with God so that He might work jointly with us. The phrase “for His name’s sake” means that all these blessings are not due to my righteousness or own worthiness, rather due to His own love and paternity because “God is love”.

In the meanwhile, “For His name’s sake” also means for the sake of His name’s glory and exaltedness, and so that the enemy might not glee, and so that people might not stumble because of me. St James the Apostle warns us against those “who blaspheme that noble name by which they are called.” (James 2:7). But, through Your support, O God, we act according to Your words. Let Your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16).

Furthermore, in the Lord’s Prayer we say “Hallowed be Thy name” which is synonymous to “for the sake of the glory of Your name which is worthy of all holiness and dignity.”

VERSE 4: “YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR YOU ARE WITH ME.”

What else would the sheep want after all that? Green pastures, pure and fresh cool still waters as well as paths well-trodden by the shepherd. No wonder then that sheep would say: I am not alone in anything. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because You are with me.” What is the valley of the shadow of death? It is the following;

First: It is the trials, pains, distressed and persecutions believers undergo in this world.

Second: For believers, the death of the body is called the valley of death because through it we pass over to a better life. However, sinner's death is an eternal death. Therefore, as long as God is with us, we would always be alive even if we die in terms of the flesh. That is why Jesus Christ said: "he who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." (John 11:25).

You are with me and live within me, O Lord. It is only through You, and with You, that I pass over the valley of death fearlessly, the reason being You are holding my hand. The Lord was with Joseph and hence Joseph was a successful man. Likewise, the Lord was with David and that is why none of David's enemies hurt him.

VERSE 4 “YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF, THEY COMFORT ME.”

The rod is used to beat wolves and the church enemies cruelly. That is why I do not fear the devils even if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death because Your rod protects me. By the same token, David chants through divine inspiration saying: "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust." (Ps. 16:1). The same rod is also used to discipline corrupted sinners. "For whom the Lord loves He chastens" (Heb. 12:6).

So, this rod reassures me when I look at it. As well, "Your staff, O my Shepherd, comforts me". The staff is for support and it is a symbol of the cross, which supports us all throughout our alienation. When a believer looks up to the cross and sees the love of God embodied on the cross and the arms of Christ are wide open welcoming all to Him, then his or her soul would enjoy profound peace, comfort and joy.

VERSE 5: “YOU PREPARE A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES.”

God, seeing the enemy fighting us, would Himself prepare whatever necessary and adequate to face this enemy.

The word "prepare" implies that He will arrange prudently the armour for His people, because it is a fully prepared table. This table is the Eucharist Sacrament. It is the Holy Body, which the Lord described as the bread of life. It is the bread descending from heaven, which if anyone eats of, will live forever, and abide in God and God in him and shall have everlasting life. (John 6:47-56).

However, there is another table, which You, O Lord, have prepared before me. It is the table of the Holy Bible with all its verse and Psalms, which I can put before me so that it might guide me in Satan's fights.

I thank You, O Lord, because You did not leave me alone in my spiritual struggle. Rather, You have given me Your word to pursue in full strength and stability so that the evil one might not conquer me. By the same token, Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, through His triumph over the devil in the temptation on the mountain, when He said: "It is written." Therefore we ought to use God's commandments in the Holy Bible in a comprehensive and mindful way thereby we can overcome all of the devil's plots.

VERSE 5 "YOU ANOINT MY HEAD WITH OIL."

Oil was used to anoint kings and priests in the Old Testament. However, in the New Testament, we have been anointed with the holy oil i.e. Chrism, because He elected us to be His children, monarchs and priests. It is only through this ointment what we are called Christians and are led by the Holy Spirit abiding in us. Oil ointment indicates that there is a personal relationship between the Shepherd and His flocks. As well, it reflects a state of joy and satisfaction. When people were in sadness in the olden times, they used to cover themselves with dust and ashes. However, when they were happy, they used to wash up and anoint themselves with oil (2 Sam. 12:20). On the other hand, anointing guests was a sign of hospitality and welcome to them. (Luke 7:38, 46).

Therefore, during Chrism anointment, we would accept from God's hands the spirit of joy and cheerfulness, the spirit of worship and holiness for the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit abides in me and guides me into all truth. (John 16:13). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit will teach me all things, bring to my remembrance all things that You said to me (John 14:26), and abides with me forever. (John 14:16).

Moreover, it is by means of this holy anointment that I have become a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corin. 6:19). However, when David specifically prays to God saying: "You anoint my head with oil", he recalls God's kindness when the prophet Samuel poured the oil on his head thereby he became anointed for the Lord. "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." (1 Sam. 16:13). It is as if through this he was offering God all thanks, praise, glorification. Likewise, we should always recall God's exuberant blessings when He granted us His Holy Spirit, Who dwells in us and never departs from us, through Chrism.

VERSE 5 "MY CUP RUNS OVER."

Thus read the Septuagint translation. Wine gladdens man's heart as it symbolizes the presence of the Spirit of God, being the blessing giver and the One who gives life to man's spirit and steers it towards heaven.

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church in fullness on Pentecost (Acts 2:17). The Coptic translation reads this verse as "And Your cup sates me strongly." The words "Your cup" are replete with all Christ's abundant gifts that bring joy to the spirit-just like good wine.

Indeed, God relieved the enslavement of our spirits, by drinking from His cup of suffering, with the gift of His table offering His Holy body and Blood, and finally through the blessing and anointing of His Holy Spirit whereby our spirits are intoxicated with His love.

VERSE 6: "SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER."

David did not talk about his woes but rather remembered God's mercy, which accompanied him all throughout those woes. He recalled God's mercy that did not depart from him since his youthfulness. When David stood before Goliath, King Saul and when he was faced with the infidelity of his son Absalom and throughout the rest of his wars.

Hence, David says in another Psalm "Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me" (Psalm 129). And it is for all these blessings that we find his saying: "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord all my life."

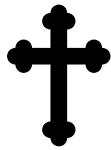
There used to be a tradition in the church requiring the believers to perform the early morning and sunset prayers in the house of the Lord. That meant that Christian believers would start their day by stopping by church thereby getting filled with a treasure of its blessings and gratifying food as well as its thirst-quenching water. That treasury would last throughout the day, sustaining them amidst the wilderness of labor and the hunger of the world. Then, they return at sunset to make up for what the world would take from them throughout the day.

It goes without saying that those who are tightly connected to their church throughout their lives here on earth would certainly be equally connected to the divine church in paradise. That is why the Psalmist says: "I dwell in the house of the Lord all my life."

PRAYER

I thank Thee, O my Lord, because with Thee, I shall not want. With Thee, O Lord, I shall not feel alone because Thou art with me. Thou art my Shepherd, my Lord. That is why I am very pleased dwelling in green pastures and drinking Thine still water, O Lord. As well, I am satisfied with Thine holy table of the sacrament of Eucharist. Additionally I am glad I enjoy Thy divine protection and preservation, O Lord. And even though I walk through the valley of the death, I will fear no evil because Thy mercy is always abiding in my heart throughout all the days of my life. O Lord. I wish to live in Thy house forever and ever more. O my Lord. I pray this through the intercessions of the Mother of God, St. Mary, the Great Martyr, St. George and the Great St. Rueiss as well as the blessed and blessing prayers of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II. Amen.





HOLY BIBLE STUDY “ANGELS”

INTRODUCTION:

Presumably due to divine wisdom, the Holy Bible, our basic reference, provides us with only incidental or very little information about angels. “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:12). What we know about angels is by way of deduction. Our thick corporeal body that we wear makes a lot of things obscure to us. This body is dependent on physical senses, which fail to recognize invisible spiritualties, as these are more sublime than the nature of those senses. Hence, when some angels appear to human beings, they lower themselves to the level of our senses. Furthermore, angels, in their manifestations, try to give human beings reassurance since the latter become fearful and disturbed just like what happened to Zacharias, the priest, when Angel Gabriel appeared to him. “And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.” (Luke 1:12).

THE WORD “ANGEL” AS A BIBLICAL TERM:

The Holy Bible describes the pure angels as: “Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire.” Psalm 104:4. By the same token, Saint Paul says about angels: “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” Hebrews 1:14

The word “Angel”, however, could also refer to the devils as they were angels in origin. That is why it was said in the Book of Revelation, “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.” Revelation 12:7-8. As well, St. Paul said the following about the disease that God allowed for him to have: “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.” 2 Corinthians 12:7

The word “Angel” was also sometimes used in the Old Testament in the Lord’s manifestations prior to His incarnation. An example of this is what was narrated in

the episode of the Lord's appearance to Moses through the burning bush in the following verse: "And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush ... the Lord called to him saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'" Exodus 3:2, 6. This was a manifestation of God in the Old Testament in the form of the Lord's Angel. As well, the Lord's appearance to Abraham declared Abraham's love for God in the incident of offering his son Isaac to the Lord, (in) Genesis 22:11-12. The same thing applies to the Lord's appearance to Abraham by the terebinth trees of Mamre, (in) Genesis 18:2, 22.

In the Lord's announcement of good news to Manoah and his wife concerning the birth of Samson, phrases such as "The Angel of God" and "The Angel of the Lord" were used more than once in this context, (see Judges 13) when Manoah asked the angel "What is your name?", the angel answered him "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?" Judges 13:18. This is identical to what Isaiah said in the following verse: "And His name will be called wonderful" Isaiah 9:6. Towards the end of this episode of the announcement of the good news and when the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar, Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." Judges 13:22.

Besides, the word "Angel" indicates church shepherds – as what was said concerning the angels of the seven churches in Asia, (in Revelation 1:20) to which the Lord sent messages, through His servant, St. John the Divine, saying, "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write," "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write," etc. This is so because the word angel in the Greek language, "Angelos", means the messenger. Likewise, the priest is a messenger from God to serve the people according to the following verse: "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." (Mal 2:7) Furthermore, the following was said about John the Baptist: "Behold, I sent My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me." (Mal 3:1).

Note: In this issue we focus, by the grace of Christ, on one species of angels, namely the pure angels.

WHO ARE THE ANGELS?

They are celestial spirits created by God (Gen 2:1, Nehemiah 9:6, and Colossians 1:16). Likewise, they are called the, " Angels of the Lord" (Matthew 1:20; 1:24; 2:13; 2:19; 28:2, Luke 1:11, Acts 5:19; 7:30 & 35; 8:26; 12:7 & 23). Moreover, they are sometimes given the name "morning stars" (Job 38:7) and "the host" or "army" (Gen 2:1; 32:2, Joshua 5:14, 1 Chronicles 12:22, Ps 33:6; 103:21, and Lk

2:13). Also, we know that Angels do not die. “Nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are the sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.” (Lk 20:36).

Being spirits, angels do not marry. “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.” (Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, and Luke 20:35) Angels are instead dedicated to worshiping God and bowing before Him. “Let all the angels of God worship Him.” (Heb 1:6, Nehemiah 9:6, and Phil 2:9-11) Therefore, angels should not be bowed before or worshipped “Then he said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God.’ And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!’” (Rev 19:9, Col 2:18, and Rev 22:8-8) On the other hand, angels are aware of, and interested in, what occurs on earth. “Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Lk 15:10).

CHARACTERISTICS OF ANGELS:

Angels have many divine characteristics. As children of Christ, we can have at least a fragment of these heavenly characteristics:

- † Obedience: “Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word.” (Ps 103:20) Likewise, we pray saying, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Mt 6:10, Lk 12:2, 1 Pet 3:22, 2 Pet 2:11, Jude 1:6) Hence, we ought to obey the voice of God just like the angels who follow His word, heeding the voice of His word, rather than obeying the voice of the world and the devil.
- † Meekness: “Whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.” (2 Pet 2:11) Also, “Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (Jude 1:9)

We, as well, should act in meekness and dare not bring a reviling accusation against anyone. Rather, let our manners be in meekness and let us condemn no one - just like Michael the archangel - who did not want to condemn the devil. When we condemn, we put ourselves in the place of God, who is the only fair judge.

- † Wisdom: “Your maidservant said, ‘The word of my lord the king will now be comforting; for as the angel of God, so is my Lord the king in discerning good and evil. And may the Lord your God be with you.’” (2 Sam 14:17) Likewise, “To bring about this change of affairs your servant Job has done this thing; but my Lord is wise, according to the wisdom of the angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth.” (2 Sam 14:20) [To read about divine wisdom compared to earthly wisdom, please see James 3:13-18] In our prayers, we ought to ask God for celestial and angelic wisdom and not for the wisdom of this materialistic world.
- † Strength: “Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word.” (Ps 103:20 & 2 Pet 2:11) We, as well, obtain an internal and celestial strength, “Strength from above”, which we desperately need.
- † Holiness: “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.” (Matthew 25:31 & Mk 8:38) We should always remember that God wants us to be holy and savour the sweetness of holy life.
- † Electiveness: “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angel that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.” (1 Tim 5:21) Likewise, God has elected us prior to the establishment of this world to be His own children.

THE ANGELS AND US:

God wants us to be spiritual human beings whereby our thoughts are spiritual ones that tower the level of earth. “Friendship with the world is enmity with God.” (Jas 4:4) Moreover, God wants us to feel like strangers on earth: “I am a stranger in the earth.” (Ps 119:19) We long for heaven and firmly believe that it is our permanent and ultimate home. One of the things that help us long for heaven is meditation and getting acquainted with the heavenly family of Angels, the saintly spirits, and above all, the heavenly father, so that we may become members of this holy family from now, that is, “The household of God.” (Eph 2:19).

Our attachment to heavenly creatures makes us attached to heaven itself and is not oblivious. For St. Paul said, “While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Cor 4:18)

Such is the teaching of the church. “Let us praise with heavenly host saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!’” (Lk 2:14)

It is exceptionally noteworthy here that in each and every time we say, “Let us praise with heavenly host”, a spirit of splendid ethereal joy spreads through us. Moreover, that in each and every time we think about the word “angel” or say it enthusiastically, our hearts melt in joyfulness and look up unto heaven, toward God Himself. Mentioning the word “angel” inspires us with holiness, purity, chastity and luminous, supreme spiritual life that God wants us to lead.

THE CREATION OF ANGELS:

We do not know specifically when God created angels. However, there are a number of opinions and approaches of which the following are the most notable:

The divine revelation states in the Book of Genesis, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1) What “The beginning” here means is the beginning of the theme of creation. It is worth mentioning in this context that “the heavens” preceded “the earth”, due to the former’s superiority and highness.

As well, “the heavens” is in the plural form since there is more than one heaven. For instance, there is the heaven of birds, which is the airfield where birds and aircraft fly. Then, there is the heaven of galaxies where the sun, planets and stars exist. Finally, there is the third heaven where the paradise is and where St. Paul ascended as reported in (2 Cor 12:2, 4)

However, this third heaven could also mean the dwelling place of the residents of heaven i.e. the angels. “Who makes His angels spirits.” (Ps 104:4) This suggests that God created His angels first. They are celestial creatures that belong to heaven. Accordingly, the Lord calls them, “The angels in heaven.” (Mk 13:32) In this connection, the Lord said to the Sadducees, “.... For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.” Matthew 22:30.

As well, with regard to God’s creation of angels, they might have been created on the first day of creation when God created light and darkness, “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” (Gen 1:2) This probability is supported by means of angels’ luminous nature.

Saint Gregory the Theologian, however, says that creation of angels had likely preceded all others, based on what the Book of Job narrated, “I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurement? Surely you

know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid it cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” (Job 38:3-7) In this verse, “The morning stars” and “The sons of God” imply angels.

THE FALL OF ANGELS:

According to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, God has created angels as free, rational spirits. They have undergone a probationary period in which some fell (i.e. Satan) and all his angels in the way as mentioned in the Book of Revelation. “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and, the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” (Rev 12:7-9)

These are what the Holy Bible calls, “The prince of the power of the air.” (Eph 2:2) Additionally, they are called in many places as impure spirits or evil spirits. As for the pure angels who passed their probationary period, they were crowned with righteousness and would not fall. Those we call the holy angels, thereby differentiating between them and the hosts of evil who fell. This expression of “holy angels” was used by the Master Lord Himself (Matthew 25:31)

If angels were to sin, we would not ask for their intercession. Just as the spirits of the righteous who moved from earth to heaven do not sin while in heaven, the place of purity, so do angels while in heaven, the place of purity, and we request the intercession of these and those. Had it been possible for angels to sin, they would have been at a level lower than that of the human beings who moved.

In this case, they would have turned into devils and, consequently, Satan would have had a role now in heaven, similar to his role of temptation on earth. Such a situation cannot be accepted. After all, would not the righteous who moved from earth and ascended into heaven stumble in reaction to the fallen angels there, seeing that evil got into heaven as well? As a matter of fact, angels are at the top when speaking of the ideal purity.

Therefore, some people tend to liken their holy men – being the top among their people – to them, and adorn churches and altars with pictures of those angels – considering them as an example of purity and perfection. Therefore, if it were possible for these angels to sin, given all their idealism, co-existence, association with God and proximity to Him, then this would crush people’s morale –

something that would be rejected by all. On the other hand, the probability that some angels fall now would send people into despair.

The Bible did not mention anything about the probability of the fall of angels nor did any of the saints make reference to it. As we previously stated, angels went through the probationary period and were crowned with righteousness of which they would never be deprived. As for this probationary period and the fall incident whereby an angel was transformed into a devil, the Bible says, “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! … 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 congregational the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like Most High.’ … Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.” (Is 14:12-15)

St. Jude explains that the angels voluntarily abandoned their habitation saying, “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” (Jude 6)

RANKS OF ANGELS:

When St. Paul talked about the church of the new covenant and the stature of the angels in it, together with that of the church assembly, he said that there were enormous numbers of angels. “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels.” (Heb 12:22, Deut 33:2, 2 Kings 6:17, Ps 68:17, & Jude 1:14) Additionally, angels have numerous ranks according to the following verse: “Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to him (1 Pet 3:22, 1 Thess 4:16, & Is 6:2).

In the Liturgy according to Saint Basil, the priest ministering the mass prays saying, “Before Whom stand the angels, the archangels, (1) The principalities, the authorities, the thrones, the dominions and the powers.” (2) These ranks, of course, are quoted form the Holy Bible as follows:

- † “And the angel answered, and said to him, ‘I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.’” (Lk 1:19)
- † “For the Lord Himself, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God …” (1 Thess 4:16)
- † “Yet Michael the archangel in contending with the devil …” (Jude 9)

- † “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come ...” (Rom 8:38)
- † “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” (Col 1:16)
- † “Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.” (1 Pet 3:22). Then the priest continues with the liturgy prayers in hymns, co-praising with the heavenly bodies and says, “Thou art He around Whom stand the Cherubim, full of eyes, (1) and the Seraphim, with six wings, (2) praising continuously, without ceasing, saying; (3)”.
- † “Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were our living creature full of eyes in front and in back.” (Rev 4:6)
- † “In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.’” (Is 6:1-3)
- † “And the four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.’” (Rev 4:8)

WHAT ANGELS DO:

FIRST: PRAISING GOD.

The psalmist says, “Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His hosts.” (Ps 148:2) While living on earth, we also practice praising and singing to God. In early morning prayers, we say, “We praise with the heavenly host saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!’” (Lk 2:14)

As we long for celestial life, we try savouring it while we are still in the flesh, by chanting, singing, and praising God through the church’s lovely songs and hymns. “Arise, O children of the Light, let us praise the Lord of the powers.” Let us all attend the midnight hymn and enjoy it regularly since it is the best and most

appropriate preparation for the Divine liturgy whereby we get united with Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The Book of Revelation tells us about the sentiments of joy, power, and awe, side by side with those of worshipping, that accompany the hymns by saying, “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing.’ (Rev 5:11-12). Elsewhere, the same book’s writer says, “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.’” (Rev 7:11-12).

SECOND: SERVING HUMAN BEINGS.

God’s wonderful love for human beings is as such that He has allowed His angels to serve them. In this context, St. Paul says, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth for those who will inherit salvation?” (Heb 1:14) However, this does not mean that angels are less in rank or glory than believers. Rather, it means that the love of God, and the love of angels, for us make the latter servants of our salvation. In this respect, let us mention some of the services that angels perform for us:

† When we experience tough times, God sends His angels to rescue us just like the angel who was dispatched to free Peter from jail (Acts 12:7-11). Another example is the angel who went to reassure St. Paul saying: (,)“Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar.” (Acts 27:24) Scholar Origen elaborates on the communion of the heavenly bodies with the church saying, “If the angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them” (Ps 34:7), then it appears that once a number of people gather together for the glory of Christ, each and everyone of them would have his or her own angel that encamps around him or her.

They are Lord – fearing. Every one of us has an accompanying angel that guards and guides him or her. Thus, once saints meet together, two churches rise: one of human beings and the other of angels.” Furthermore, scholar Origen speaks about the roles of the angels in serving the ecclesiastic sacraments and the repentance of spirits as well as supporting the believers in prayer. That is why we pray at the end of the prayer of the offering of the evening incense saying, “O angel of this vespers flying up to the highest with this hymn, remember us before the Lord.” As well, at

the end of the Divine Liturgy, the priest says prayerfully, “O angel of this sacrifice, flying up to the highest ... glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

THIRD: DECLARING THE WILL OF GOD AND SENDING INFORMATION TO HUMAN BEINGS.

- † “And I heard a man’s voice between the banks of the Ulai who called, and said, ‘Gabriel, make this man understand the vision”. (Dan 8:16)
- † “Yet, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, ‘O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand.’” (Dan 9:21-22)
- † “And beheld, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. ‘Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come.’” (Dan 10:13)
- † “Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying ‘Arise, take the young child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay thee until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him.’” (Matthew 2:13)
- † “But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Arise, take the young child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel.’” (Matthew 2:19-20)
- † “And the angel answered and said to him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.’” (Luke 1:19-20)
- † “And having come in, the angel said to her, rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women.” (Luke 1:28)
- † “But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.’” (Acts 5:19-20)

- † “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians.” (Acts 8:26-27)
- † “About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, ‘Cornelius.’” (Acts 10:3)
- † “For there stood by me this night an angel of God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying ‘do not be afraid, Paul, you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’” (Acts 27:23)
- † “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.” (Rev 1:1)

Based on the foregoing, it is evident to us that angels may show up during day or night. They may even appear in dreams. Additionally, they may bring forth a certain message to human beings as to what they must do.

Moreover, angels may help human beings understand what is going on and may even declare to human beings what will happen.

FOURTH: CARRYING OUT THE JUDGMENT OF GOD IN MATTERS.

ANNOUNCING THE JUDGMENT OF GOD ON BALAAM:

- † “Then God’s anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the Lord took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him.” (Number 22:22)

DECLARING THE RESURRECTION:

- † “And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.” (Matthew 28:2)

HEALING THE SICK:

- † (Jn 5:4) “For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water, then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.”

† Protection the children of God:

† (2 Kgs 19:35-36) “And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty – five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh.”

† Punishing the proud:

† (Acts 12:23) “Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.”

† (Rev 16:1) “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on earth.’”

FIFTH: REJOICING AT THE REPENTANCE OF SINNERS.

† “I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.” (Lk 15:7)

† “Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angel of God over one sinner who repents.” (Lk 15:10)

SIXTH: WILL BE ACCOMPANYING CHRIST IN HIS SECOND COMING.

† “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 work.” (Matthew 16:27)

† “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.” (Matthew 25:31)

† “And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.” (2 Thess 1:7)

SEVENTH: INTERCEDING IN BEHALF OF AND ON BEHALF OF HUMAN BEINGS.

† “Then the Angel of the Lord answered and said, ‘O Lord of hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which you were angry these seventy years?’ And the Lord answered the angel who talked to me, with good and comforting words … Therefore, thus says the Lord: ‘I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be

built in it.’ ... The Lord will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem.” (Zech 1:12)

EIGHTH: TAKING CARE OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD [THE GUARDIAN ANGEL].

- † “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.” (Ps 334:7)
- † “For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.” (Ps 91:11)
- † “My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, (Dan 6:22) because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.”
- † “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10)

SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT ANGELS:

- † How can it be that angels eat although they assume ethereal bodies when they appear to human beings?

Angels do not eat nor do they need food. However, they seem to man as if they were eating. The following are some examples:

- † The appearance of three men to our Father Abraham.

It was God and two angels (Gen 18:1-8). In reality, none of them were eating. Yet, this was what they looked like. To Abraham, they seemed to be eating: a token of communion, simplicity, and love.

- † The two angels that appeared to Lot.

The Bible says that they ate (Gen 19:1-3). Again, this was what Lot believed was happening. Nevertheless, angels do not really eat, neither do they need food. This is so because the ethereal body angels do not need food nor do they consume any food any way. However, angels look as if they were eating, so that to whoever the angels appear to, they may feel reassured.

- † Is a priest greater than an angel, when he holds the Lord's Body and Blood? If this is so then why does he say in this situation, "Things which angels desire to look into." (1 Pet 1:12)?

[Quoted from an answer given by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III]. Broadly speaking, angels are greater than human beings, because angels are spirits (Heb 1:14). From this perspective, angels are detached from and not associated with material, unlike man who is united with matter. On the other hand, angels have been crowned with righteousness whereby it would be impossible for them now to sin, whereas human beings are vulnerable to fall and sin. It was (the) angels about whom the Bible said, "Who excel in strength?" (Ps 103:20)

As previously stated, there are so many examples in the Holy Bible about angels' might. In the meantime, angels are spiritually greater than human beings as far as their immediate response is concerned. "Who do His word, heeding the voice of His word?" (Ps 103:20). In the preparatory prayer for the Divine Liturgy, the ministering priest acknowledges who he is by saying, "Thou, O Lord, knows that I am not worthy or prepared, for this holy service, which is Thine. I am not entitled to open my mouth. Rather, according to the multitude of Thy mercy forgive me, I am the sinner."

However, when it comes to this sacrament of the Eucharist in particular, the priest would be in a better position than angels, because he would be witnessing the Body and the Blood of the Lord.

- † Do angels know the developments of our life on earth? If so, do our prayers reach them?

The angels' awareness is clarified through the Lord's words: "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." (Lk 15:7)

This means that the happenings of our earth reach heaven's inhabitants whether they are angels or spirits of saints. Indeed, angels do know who repents and they rejoice at a sinner's repentance. As well, angels hear our prayers since they are the ones who lift up those prayers to the throne of God.

“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand.” (Rev 8:3-5)

In so much as angels are aware of our prayer, raising them to heaven, so are the twenty-four elders. (Rev 5:8): “Each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” This is evidence that angels know the prayers that they raise to God.

- † What is the difference between the concept of the Coptic Orthodox theology and that of the western theology toward angels?

[Extracted from the Coptic Orthodox Church and Spirituality by Rev Tadros Yacoub]

When Calvin talked about angels, he maintained that we should keep aloof from what wouldn’t be instrumental to us. On the other hand, Barth initiated his own argument on angels rather hesitantly. It is worth mentioning to point out here that western theologians tend to avoid talking about heavenly bodies to a large extent. Their plea in this context is that the mentality of contemporary men does not accept talking about angels from a psychological perspective even though it does not challenge their existence logically or theology-wise. Some of those western theologians even go to the extent of talking about angels as if they were legends or ghosts.

As for the Coptic Church, the divine bodies have left their own clear and strong prints in the writings of the fathers of the School of Alexandria, particularly scholar Origen. The same thing applies to hymns, feasts, icons and buildings etc.

With regard to writings, they occupied a prominent status in the pioneering church, especially the School of Alexandria, imitating the Holy Bible about which the divine bodies talked starting from the Book of Genesis all the way up to the Book of Revelation. Such extensive and inter-testament talk was not without significance or objective.

As for hymns, the church, while welcoming the token of the heavenly life and looking forward to imitating the angels of God, the church

praises with them, beatifies them, and asks them for their prayers. Moreover, the church holds feasts for some of them, particularly archangels Michael and Rafael, as well as the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders etc.

The church paid close attention to the icons of the heavenly bodies by portraying them either alone or associated with the incidents and events pertaining to the Lord Jesus or included into the saints' icons - where they are depicted holding crowns on the saints' heads-indicating the opening of heaven unto the believers and likening the believers to the heavenly bodies. As well, angels occupy an important position in church buildings to assert that the church is indeed the icon of heaven. In early morning doxology [praise], we sing "Peace to the church, home of angels."

† Do angels know all things?

There are things that angels do not know. In one of the parables on the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:24-30), it is evident that angels cannot tell who is righteous and who is unrighteous before the last day [i.e. harvest time].

As for the time of the end of the world and the Second Coming, Lord Jesus Christ said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven." (Mk 13:32)

Some of the fathers' sayings about angels:

† The angels' role in spiritual struggle.

St. John El-Daragy says, "Do not be surprised that you fall every day. Do not despair; rather, take heart and rest assured that your guardian angel will reward your patience."

The angels' role in our church attendance.

St. Philemon says, "When you attend church to partake of communion, do not leave church without being filled with entire peace. Keep standing in one place and do not leave it until time is due for departure. Just think that you are standing in heaven, surrounded by a company of angels, meeting with God and receiving Him in your heart. Get yourself prepared in fear and trembling lest you proceed to the sacrament unprepared."

† Our humility before angels.

St. Patrom says, “Even if an angel happens to appear to you, say to him in humility, ‘I am not worthy to see an angle because I am a sinner.’”

† Our friendship with angels.

St Basil the Great says, “Adorn yourself with virtues so that you can be a companion or friend of the angels.”

† Job of angels on the last day.

St. Dioscorus says, “If we wear the wedding dress, then we are no longer naked. However, if we are without the wedding dress, then we will hear this voice, ‘Cast them into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (Matthew 22:13). Thereby we would be in shame and severely punished by angels.

† The angles’ job in prayer

St. John Chrysostom says, “When you are praying alone, when you are in perfect retreat with God, just remember that God is looking at you with eyes brighter than the sun and that all the angels, including your own guardian angel, together with all the saints, are also looking at you. For wherever God exists, these and those are always with Him.”

† The angels’ intercession.

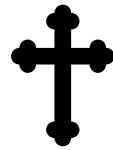
A saint once said, “It is great that we serve our families while we are in the flesh. However, it is far greater that we serve God. It is good that we have friends in Christ, yet it is far better that we have friends who are saints so that they may intercede on our behalf before the Lord. However, the greatest of all these, is the angels’ intercession on our behalf.”

PRAYER

We praise Thee, we serve Thee, and we worship Thee day and night, O Lord, for Thy great love and great work for us. Thou art the One Who created the heaven, the earth and all that is therein. Thou art the One to Whom all angels bow, we beseech Thee, O Lord, to include us in the divine hosts so that we, too, may say with them, “We have cast away all our evil thoughts. Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.” Grant it to us, O Lord, that we

savour the sweetness of celestial life while we are still here on earth. We offer our prayers through the intercessions of the pure Saint Mary, the archangels and angels as well as the heavenly hosts, together with the intercessions of the great martyr Saint George the great Saint Rueiss, and his Holiness Pope Tawadros II. Amen.





SLEEP FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION:

Although sleep has its own vital role to play in man's life, it has not been studied adequately enough, especially from a Christian perspective. Medically and scientifically speaking, there have been many theses on this issue. Even though the Holy Bible has handled "sleep" in a lot of contexts, unintentional as they may be, this important subject has not had its fair share of research on the part of the Holy Bible scholars.

This booklet represents a humble forum through which we will talk about sleep from a Christian perspective in light of the following points:

- 1) The word "sleep" in the Holy Bible.
- 2) Information on sleep in the life of some of the Holy Bible personnel.
- 3) The scientific importance of sleep based on the Holy Bible.
- 4) Obstacles that prevent quality sleep and how Christian life treats this.
- 5) How to overcome insomnia.
- 6) Dreams.
- 7) The relationship between sleep and divine gifts.
- 8) The relationship between sleep and divine guardianship.
- 9) "Sleep" in the Book Song of Songs.
- 10) Good habits that induce healthy sleep.
- 11) Some of the fathers' sayings on sleep.

THE WORD "SLEEP" IN THE HOLY BIBLE.

† The word “sleep” meaning death and ending in resurrection.

The Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to Him, called corporeal death sleep so as to denote that bodily death is not the end or cessation of life since there will be resurrection associated with His second coming. Hence, our Lord called death “sleep” because those who sleep get up from their sleep. When Jesus raised Lazarus, He said to them, “our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up” (John 11:11). As well, when Christ, glory to be Him, raised Jairus’ daughter, “He said to them ‘why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping’” (Mark 5:39).

When it was time for St. Stephen, the archdeacon and proto martyr, to repose in peace, the Holy Bible narrates that, ‘He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.’ Acts 7:60. Likewise, when David the prophet reposed (1 Kings 2:10 and Acts 13:36), the same words of either “fell asleep” or “slept” were used to express the death of the body and the end of life in the flesh on earth.

† The word “sleep” meaning spiritual laziness and indulgence in sin.

Oftentimes, the Holy Bible talks about spiritual vigilance and watchfulness for salvation of the soul, the opposite of that, being laziness or “sleep”. Our Lord Jesus says, “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming - in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning - lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.” Mark 13:35-36. Similarly, St. Paul the Apostle advises the Thessalonians saying, “There - fore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.” 1 Thess. 5:6. By the same token, St. Paul says in his epistle to the Ephesians, “Therefore He says: Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” Eph. 5:14

† Normal sleep

This is the subject of this booklet throughout which we will refer to this kind of sleep using just the word “sleep”. Sleep in man’s life occurs when the human body ceases to perform normal deeds and when it does not see or hear what is going on around it unless the sound or voice is too loud. As well, sleep happens when muscles relax, respiration and heartbeats become lower than their normal rate

accompanying work, and other common physical activities which take place during non-sleep hours.

INFORMATION ON SLEEP IN THE LIFE OF SOME OF THE HOLY BIBLE PERSONNEL.

† Sleep should be at night.

The Holy Bible said the following about Father Abraham's sleep: "Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham." Genesis 15:12. The same thing applies to Jacob, "Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set." Gen. 28:10-11. Therefore, up to this very day, we see that man normally rests and sleeps at night, after sunset, after spending his day time working, meditating, and serving others. The question here is about prayerful nights. The gospel according to Luke 6:11 says about our Lord Jesus, "Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." Indeed, in our Coptic Orthodox Church, prayerful nights are well known at the level of the many saints and followers of Christ. However, this does in no way mean that man does not sleep or rest daily spending every night in prayers. No one can do this on a daily basis.

† Sleeping on a pillow.

While running away from his brother Esau, our father Jacob made himself a pillow to rest his head against during sleep. "And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep." Gen. 28:11. That is why we see that man up to this very day usually places a pillow under his or her head to give rest to both head and shoulders. Nowadays, there is a specially designed pillow for whoever wants to sleep on his or her back and another specially designed one for whoever wants to sleep on his or her side. God had made all this for human comfort during sleep.

† Sleep being a gift from God for man's rest and comfort.

Psalmist David says in the Book of Psalms, "For so He gives His beloved sleep." Ps. 127:2. God who created us knows exactly our

weak human nature as well as man's need for sleep so that he or she may rest and have comfort both psychologically and bodily.

One of the clearest examples of this is when God used sleep to comfort Elijah the great prophet while he was running away from Jezebel, King Ahab's wife (1 Kings 19:1-18). Elijah was very exhausted and disheartened and God wanted to blame him for his fault and fear of Jezebel. However, God gave Elijah comfort first through peaceful sleep, the angel's service to him, and food to strengthen him. Then God spoke to him, "... he (Elijah) went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God. And there he went into a cave and spent the night in that place" (1 Kings 19:8-9).

Thus sleep is God's gift for us so that we might re-energize our power and have some rest. In doing so, God has established daytime for man to work and night time to rest and sleep. "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety." Ps. 4:8. In the same context, the Holy Bible says about sleep, "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep." Ecclesiastes 5:12

THE SCIENTIFIC IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP BASED ON THE HOLY BIBLE.

We always observe that authentic science must agree with the Holy Bible. We all need sleep. Children need adequate sleep (could reach up to 12 hours a day or perhaps more) so that their bodies might have some rest to make up for their hyperactive movement and so that bones, muscles, and all the body systems might grow. All of us need sleep because our bodies' resistance to diseases is generated during sleep. Hence, sleep insufficiency for all ages causes overall weakness and collapse of the body and results in auto accidents. Therefore, sleep is not just a time out of our day-to-day engagements. It is, as a matter of fact, absolutely essential for both psychological and somatic health. Researchers have found that persons who do not have enough sleep suffer from psychological and somatic ailments.

People's need for sleep varies from one person to another. On average, most adults need around eight hours of sleep even though some persons can work without weakness or emaciation with only six hours of sleep. Others, however, might need about ten hours of sleep; otherwise, they become tired and cannot work efficiently enough. In order for a person to determine the number of sleep hours needed, he or

she should notice if there is a lack of concentration throughout the day or if he or she feels tired quickly. This clearly indicates that that person needs more hours of sleep.

THERE ARE THREE DISTURBANCES RELATED TO SLEEP:

- † Sleeplessness known in medical terminology as insomnia: This phenomenon may happen due to life stress on man or many other factors such as jet lag for persons flying from one country to another.
- † Momentary breathlessness during sleep known in medical terminology as sleep apnea: This phenomenon may happen because of hypertension or problems in the lungs' airways.
- † Man's abrupt sleep throughout the day and his or her inability to continue concentration: a phenomenon known in medical terminology as narcolepsy. These three sleeping disorders have become widespread and millions of people suffer from all or some of them.

OBSTACLES THAT PREVENT QUALITY SLEEP AND HOW CHRISTIAN LIFE TREATS THIS.

- † Worry.

Many suffer from worry, which entails serious consequences on both psychological and somatic health. Worry is caused mainly by lack of faith and lack of dependence on God. In the Holy Bible, there are many instances on the inability to sleep caused by worry or fear. For one, King Ahasuerus was unable to sleep because of his worry, "That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the Chronicles; and they were read before the king" (Esther 6:1).

A Christian person looks up in meditation to the love of Christ and focuses on it rather than on crises, which render him or her worried and tired.

In this context, our Lord Jesus Christ says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

† Somatic or psychological sickness.

During the ordeals that befell Job the righteous, he suffered insomnia of which he said, “When I lie down, I say, ‘When shall I arise, and the night be ended?’ for I have had my fill of tossing till dawn. My flesh is caked with worms and dust, my skin is cracked and breaks our afresh” (Job 7:4-5). St. James says in his epistle, “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).

† Preoccupation with money.

The Book of Ecclesiastes maintains that whoever works and eats little or much can sleep. However, the rich who have abundance of everything may go sleepless. “The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep” (Ecclesiastes 5:12). Our Lord Jesus teaches us in the sermon on the mount, which is the charter of Christianity, “Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on... Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:25-26).

† Excessive sadness.

When Daniel was thrown into the den of lions, King Darius was exceedingly sad because he ordered Daniel to be thrown into the den of lions under pressure from his ministers. “Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions.” (Daniel 6:18-19). We should all place our hope in the Lord Jesus and not in, “Sorrow as others who have no hope.” (1 Thess. 4:13).

HOW TO OVERCOME INSOMNIA.

Should continuous sleeplessness persist for a few days, a person ought to realize that there is a problem requiring a solution; otherwise that person’s life could suffer deterioration. A doctor has to be spoken to in order to check matters with

him or her. Help and consultation from the father of confession should be sought in order to obtain spiritual guidelines.

If sleeplessness is found to be due to health factors, then the physician is to treat the person through Christ's blessings and ointment of the holy oil. If sleeplessness is due to spiritual factors (since there is a close interconnectedness between spiritual life and the ability to have peaceful) then we ought to check with the father of confession. Thus, life might be restored peacefully and consequently, get back to normal balance, accordingly, to sound and healthy sleep. Needless to point out, disturbance or irregularity that hits man's life is liable to result in discomfort and insomnia. Man, as such, would be deprived of sleep until such time when things get back to normal and inner peace is ultimately regained. That is why David the Psalmist says, "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety." (Ps. 4:8).

Therefore, we should be able to sleep in peace as long as we remember that God never sleeps and that His eyes are watchful all the time to protect us and takes care of us and never ever neglect or ignore us among billions of people. In the same context, the psalmist says, "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me." Ps. 3:5. As well, David says, "When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice." Ps. 63:6-7

On the other hand, we ought to pray, read the Holy Bible and other spiritual books before sleep. As well, we should cross ourselves several times before bedtime. Indeed, all of these practices keep our mind and feelings with God then we realize that God is all-vigilant and in charge of our protection and safety whereby we can enjoy sound and healthy sleep.

SLEEP IN THE AGPEYA PRAYERS.

The Coptic Orthodox Church has established a system for prayers that secures man's sound thoughts, feelings, relationship with God, and his or her belief in the Lord Jesus. In doing so our church has come up with the Agpeya (the book of the Seven Hours). At each of these "hours", there are several and various psalms, which suit that "hour" throughout the day thereby giving the prayer spiritual satisfaction and gratification. This, of course, comes in addition to the gospel readings side by side with the other prayers in the Agpeya. "Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments..." (Ps. 118 [119]:164).

In this connection, we find a lot about sleep throughout the Agpeya. The morning prayer rituals have been established with the purpose of thanking God for the end

of a peaceful night's sleep and asking Him for help so that He may give us a day of fruitful and righteous deeds. The morning's prayer, in the meantime, comes also as a commemoration of our Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection early in the day. In the introduction to the morning's prayer, we say, "The night has gone by, we give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, and we pray Thee to keep us this day without sin and deliver us." In the same context, we say in the morning's prayer psalms, "I laid me down and slept; I awakened; for the Lord sustained me." (Ps. 3). Likewise, we say, "Commune with your own heart upon your bed." (Ps. 4).

Thus, sleep ought to be a tranquil spiritual period involving a spirit of repentance and attachment to God rather than detachment from Him. As well, David says in psalm 6, "All the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears... Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity..." Those who are attached to Christ and prayer have sleep that is also attached to God and close to Him via repentance and rebuking the evil forces saying, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." By the same token, David says in psalm 62 (63) "When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help.

In the Morning Prayer absolution, we say, "O Lord, God of the powers, who is before the ages and abides forever; who created the sun for a light of the day, and the night for rest of all flesh. We thank Thee, O King of all ages, for Thou hast made us to pass through this night in peace and hast brought us unto the beginning of the day." On the other hand, the twelfth hour prayer has been established to commemorate the burial of our Master and Lord Jesus Christ and also to mark the end of the day, whereby we ask the Lord for divine protection throughout night time as well as salvation for ourselves.

In this prayer we say in psalm 131 (132): "How he swear unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed. I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord and a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." Here we would like to say that we as faithful Christians should always have merciful and kind hearts towards the poor and the needy.

In this respect, before we go to bed we ought to make sure that we have given a hand to any person who sought our help throughout the day. In doing so, we would be as if we have found out, "a place for the Lord and habitation for the mighty God of Jacob". In the twelfth hour prayer verses, we do find that the element of repentance for each and every sin we have committed throughout the day is crystal clear. "Had life been unending and this world eternal, O my soul, You would have had an excuse. But when your vile deeds and ugly evils are exposed before the Just

Judge, what will you give in answer, while you are lying on the bed of sins and negligent in controlling the flesh... I the defiled wretch who is slugabed and careless about my life..."

Likewise, the twelfth hour prayer absolution is very deep and expressive. There we say, "Lord, all things wherein we have sinned against Thee this day, whether in deed, or in word, or in thought, or anywise, do Thou graciously forgive unto us for the sake of Thy Holy Name, as a Good One and as a Lover of mankind. And grant unto us, O God, a peaceful night, and this sleep free from all trouble. And send unto us an angel of peace to keep us from all evil, all pestilence and all temptation of the enemy."

The absolution of the monks' Setar prayer reads, "O Mater Lord Jesus Christ, give us comfort in our sleep, repose in our bodies and purity in ourselves. Keep us free from the darkness of sin... grant us an undefiled bed and a clean couch and awaken us for the night and morning hymns..."

DREAMS.

In sleep, dreams are a major subject worthy of deep and focal research. However, the following are some of the fundamentals to this effect:

- † Some dreams stem from the sub-consciousness based on what man is dramatically affected by throughout the day. Such daytime strong effects are transfigured in the shape of night time/sleep dreams that borrow their essence from these data and occurrences stored in the sub-consciousness. It is just similar to storing data on the computer, then retrieving them later on for use.
- † Some other dreams are part of the satanic wars that are meant to bother and disturb man through dreams thereby depriving man of peace throughout the next day. Some of such dreams cause panic and fear whereby they awaken man who tries hard, exerting much effort, to interpret such dreams.

In so doing, man is inwardly shaken and disturbed thereby enabling the devil to use a good means by which to fight man. Yet, those who are closely connected to Jesus Christ need not feel worried about that since Satan can in no way approach them whether at daytime or night time. Should Satan attempt to get close to those close to the Lord Jesus, there would be guardian angels protecting and defending them against the devilish attack. "Thou who has given us the authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy."

¶ The third kind of dreams is a celestial one carrying a divine revelation that is sent from God to man. These type of dreams actually occur to God's children. This was the case with Joseph the righteous. "Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph, son of David do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20).

A humble person should not be preoccupied with the interpretation of dreams since we ought to remember that we are not as righteous as Saint Joseph to whom God spoke in a dream. We, as such, ought to consider ourselves not worthy to witness such a type of divine revelation. Based on this, we should not worry about those satanic dreams; otherwise, we would open the door and pave the path for the devil whereby he would find the way to fight us and divert our attention towards his dreams and their interpretation rather than focusing on our spiritual well-being.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SLEEP AND DIVINE GIFTS.

When sleep was first mentioned in the Holy Bible, it was referred to as a gift from God. This occurred with Adam, the father of all our fathers, when God wanted to give him a wife. "And the Lord God 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 man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man." Genesis 2:22

Likewise, in Genesis 15, God promised our father Abraham in a dream His gift to him through posterity from his wife Sara who was barren and Abraham, therefore, was reassured. Similarly, in Genesis 28, God reassured our father Jacob in a dream that He would be taking care of him and would return him safely to his land out of which he was taken.

That is why David the prophet and king talks about God's gifts to His children even when they are asleep and says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows, for so He gives His beloved sleep." Ps. 127:1-2. This simply means that God gives His beloved ones gifts even in their sleep.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SLEEP AND DIVINE GUARDIANSHIP.

In Ezekiel 34:11-31, the prophet talks about God's guardianship for His children who then sleep fully reassured. Ezekiel likens God's care for His children to that of the vigilant herdsman who constantly keeps a watchful eye on his sheep which, accordingly, sleep in full reassurance now that the good shepherd is in charge. "I will make a covenant of peace with them, [that is, with sheep] and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods... but they shall dwell safely, and no one shall make them afraid." (Ezekiel 34:25-28).

"SLEEP" IN THE BOOK SONG OF SONGS.

The Book of Song of Songs talks about Christ's bride, i.e., the human spirit, which leads a life where the Lord Jesus is the corner stone. Thus, a spirit like this would enjoy a blissful and peaceful sleep in the bosom of its Caretaker the Good Lord, and sing in praise, "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me." (Songs 2:6).

No wonder, then, such a spirit is always in close and continuous contact with its Lord Jesus Christ and would in no way whatsoever stand in departure or separation from Him even during sleep, as there it would say, "I sleep, but my heart is awake." (Songs 5:2).

GOOD HABITS THAT INDUCE HEALTHY SLEEP.

- † Have regular schedules for your sleep and rise.

In doing so, we would be accustomed to a stable timetable thereby making both sleep and rise more convenient. Some people tend to go to bed late towards the weekend whereby they get up late on Saturday and Sunday even if this results in failure to go to church early for Sunday liturgy. This, of course, is not the right thing to do because it would simply make both sleep and rise on weekdays rather challenging and inconvenient...

- † Physical training and exercise.

Physical training and exercise are undoubtedly instrumental for our overall health and well-being. Indeed, this is a scientific fact ignored by many whereby many physical and psychological maladies ensue accordingly. There is no question that physical training and exercise are extremely helpful for sound and healthy sleep. However, this activity should be performed no less than five or six hours prior to bedtime.

† Avoiding caffeine.

Being a central nervous system stimulant, caffeine has been well and widely known to deprive us of a sound and healthy sleep.

† Keep quiet and inactive before going to bed.

There is no doubt that a warm shower or soft holy reading induces nerve relaxation and a quick smooth lapse into sleep.

† **Do not lie in bed without sleep.**

If you fail to go into sleep following repetitive attempts to do so, rise and start reading the Holy Bible or a spiritual book or just any other simple useful book. Bear in mind here, that it is actually man's worry about sleeplessness that makes him or her worry all the more and this, in turn, renders sleep even harder to obtain, thereby throwing man into an endless and fruitless vicious circle. Discontinue this cycle right away and try to have some

SOME OF THE FATHERS' SAYINGS ON SLEEP.

† Prayer before.

When you approach your bed, say to it, "This very night, perchance, you will be my tomb, O bed; for I know not whether tonight instead of a transient sleep, the eternal sleep of death will be mine.' And so, as long as you have feet, run after work, before you are bound with that bond which cannot be loosed again once it is put on. (St. Isaac the Syrian)

† Heaviness of sleep makes the soul unready.

Take provisions for your long way, O wish man! Remove the heaviness of sleep from your heart, O invited guest! Set your baggage in order for departure, O sojourner! The morning tide is night at hand, O wayfarer: why do you sleep? Arise and prepare yourself, O mariner who is to voyage on the sea! Arise and make ready the tackle of your ship, for you do not know at what hour the wind will carry you out! (St. Isaac the Syrian).

† Angels fanning during sleep.

An old man came to Abba John's cell and found him asleep with an angel standing above him, fanning him. Seeing this, he withdrew. When Abba John got up, he asked his disciple, "Did anyone come in while I was asleep?" He said, "Yes, an old man." Then, Abba John knew that this old man was his equal, and that he had seen the angel. (The Paradise of the Holy Fathers).

† Spiritual awakens required of pastors.

All who undertake the pastoral charge, besides a thorough acquaintance with the divine law, the maxims and spirit of the gospel, experience, discretion, knowledge of the heart of man or his passions, must have seriously endeavoured to die to themselves by the habitual practice of self-denial and a rooted humility; they must have been so well exercised in holy contemplation, as to retain that habitual disposition of soul amidst exterior employment, and in them to be able still to say, I sleep, and my heart watches; that is, I sleep to all earthly things, and am awake only to my heavenly friend and spouse, being absorbed in the thoughts and desires of the most ardent love. (Butler's Lives of the Saints - St. Titus Disciple of St. Paul)

† Sleep does not interrupt union with God.

St. Abraham converted his desert into a paradise because he found in it his God, whose presence makes Heaven. He wanted not the company of men, who enjoyed that of God and his angels; nor could he ever be at a loss for employment, to which both the days and nights were too short for heavenly contemplation. While his body was employed in penitential manual labor, his mind and heart were sweetly taken up in God, who was to him All in All, and the center of all his desire and affections.

His watching was but an uninterrupted sacrifice of divine love by the ardour of his desire, disposition of his soul, and its virtual tendency to God. His sleep itself was a continuation of his union with God and exercise of loving him. He could truly say with the spouse, I sleep, but my heart watches. Thus, the Christians who are placed in distracting stations, may also do, if they accustom themselves to converse interiorly with God in purity of heart and all their actions and desires have only his will in view. St. Abraham, Hermit & His niece St. Mary, a Penitent.

† Sleep in the ascetic life.

Marcellina in her practice went beyond the most perfect lessons. She fasted every day till evening: and sometimes she passed whole days without eating. She never touched any fare, but what was of the coarsest kinds, and drank only water. She never laid herself down to rest till quite overcome with sleep. The greatest part both of the day and night she devoted to prayer, pious reading, and tears of divine love and compunction. St. Marcellina - Virgin, sister of St. Ambrose.

† On the Mystery of the Cross.

“And bearing his own cross, he went forth to that place which is called Calvary”. Be not, then, ashamed of the cross, in order that Jesus Christ be not ashamed of you, when He will come, clothed in the Majesty of His glory, accompanied by this sign of our redemption, which will then, shine more brilliant than the sun. It is by means of the cross that the devils have ceased to appear formidable, and are now only to be despised; it is through that, that death is now no longer death, but only a long sleep. In fine, it is through the cross that all our enemies have been conquered. St. Chrysostom on the Sixteenth Chapter of St. Matthew.

INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING SLEEP.

Sleep he orders to be moderate, and never allows it in the day: he requires the night to be begun by repeating the divine praises, and that we rise several times in the night to pray, and get up in the morning before day. (St. Clement of Alexandria - Father of the Church - early third century - Butler's Lives of the Saints).

SLEEP REPLACED WITH HEAVENLY CONTEMPLATION.

He watched a great part of the nights in heavenly contemplation; and sometimes, when the rising sun called him to his daily tasks, he complained that its visible light robbed him of the greater interior light which he enjoyed and interrupted his close application and solitude. He always rose after a short sleep at midnight and continued in prayer on his knees with his hands lifted up to heaven till sunrise and sometimes till three in the afternoon, as Palladius relates in his Lausiac history. St. Anthony

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS BEFORE SLEEP.

St. Cyril, in his thirteenth catechesis, thus addresses his catechumen, “Be careful to form with your finger on your forehead boldly, the sign of the cross for a signet and standard and that before everything, while we eat our bread, or drink from our cups, in coming in and going out, before sleep, and in rising, in walking, and in standing still.” St. Cyril of Jerusalem

**Q: TELL ME, MASTER, HOW CAN THE DEVIL DARE IN A VISION OR
A FANTASY DURING SLEEP TO SHOW THE MASTER CHRIST OR
HOLY COMMUNION?**

A: He cannot show the Master Christ Himself, nor Holy Communion, but he lies and presents the image of some man and simple bread; but the holy Cross he cannot show, for he does not find means of depicting it in another form. Inasmuch as we know the true sign and image of the Cross, the devil does not dare to use it (for our deception); for on the Cross his power was destroyed, and by the Cross a fatal wound was given him. The Master Christ we cannot recognize by the flesh, which is why the devil tries to convince us by lying that it is He, so that having believed the deception as if it were truth, we might perish. And thus, when you see in a dream the image of the Cross, know that this dream is true and from God; but strive to receive an interpretation of its significance from the Saints and do not believe your own idea. May the Lord enlighten the thoughts of your mind, O brother, so that you might escape every deception of the enemy. (Saints Barsanuphius and John: Guidance Toward Spiritual Life)

Abba John related with regard to another old man living in the desert, that he has asked God to grant him never to become sleepy during a spiritual conference. However, if someone uttered slanderous or useless words, to be able to go to sleep at once, so that his ears should never be touched by that poison, this old man also said that the devil, enemy of all spiritual instruction, works hard to provoke useless words.

He used the following example: “Once when I was talking to some brothers on a helpful topic, they were overcome by sleep so deep, that they could not even move their eyelids any longer. Then, wishing to show them the power of the devil, I introduced a trivial subject of conversation. Immediately, they woke up full of joy. Then, I said to them with many sights, ‘Until now, we were discussing heavenly things and your eyes were heavy with sleep, but when I embarked on a useless discourse, you all woke up with alacrity.’

Therefore, brothers, I implore you to recognize the power of the evil demon; pay attention to yourselves, and guard yourselves from the desire to sleep when you are doing or listening to something spiritual.””

PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS BEFORE SLEEP.

† Prayer 1 of St. Macarius the Great.

O eternal God and King of all creation, Who hast granted me to reach this hour, forgive the sins I have committed this day in deed, word, and thought. Cleanse, O Lord, my humble soul of all impurity of flesh and spirit. Grant me, O Lord, to pass the sleep of this night in peace; that, rising from my lowly bed, I may please Thy most holy name all the days of my life, and thwart the enemies, fleshly and bodiless, that war against me. And deliver me, O Lord, from vain thoughts and evil desires, which defile me. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen

† Prayer 2 of St. Antiouchus.

O Ruler of all, Word of the Father, O Jesus Christ, Thou Who are perfect: For the sake of the plenitude of Thy mercy, never depart from me, but always remain in me, Thy servant. O Jesus, Good Shepherd of Thy sheep, deliver me not over to the sedition of the serpent, and leave me not to the will of Satan, for the seed of corruption is in me. But do thou, O Lord, Who is worshiped God, holy King, Jesus Christ, guard me as I sleep by the Unwavering Light, Thy Holy Spirit, by Whom Thou didst sanctify The disciples. O Lord, grant me, Thine unworthy servant, Thy salvation upon my bed. Enlighten my mind with the light of understanding of Thy Holy Gospel; my soul, with the love of Thy Cross; my heart, with the purity of Thy word. Keep my thought in Thy humility, and raise me up at the proper time for Thy glorification. For most glorified art Thou together with Thine Unoriginated Father, and the Most Holy Spirit, unto the ages... Amen.

† Prayer 3 of St. Macarius the Great.

What shall I offer Thee, or what shall I give Thee, O greatly-gifted, immortal king, O compassionate Lord Who loves mankind? For though I have been slothful in pleasing Thee, and have done nothing good, Thou hast led me to the close of this day that is past, establishing the conversation and salvation of my soul. Be merciful to me a sinner, bereft of every good deed, raise up my fallen soul which hath become defiled by countless sins, and take away from me every evil thought of this visible life. Forgive my sins, O only Sinless One,

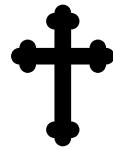
in which I have sinned against Thee this day, known or unknown, in word, and deed, and thought, and in all my senses. Do thou thyself protect and guard me from every opposing circumstance, by Thy Divine authority and power and inexpressible love for mankind. Blot out, O God, blot out the multitude of my sins. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me from the net of the evil one, and save my passionate soul, and overshadow me with the light of Thy countenance when Thou shalt come in glory. Cause me, liberated now, to sleep a dreamless sleep, and keep Thy servant untroubled by thoughts, and drive away from me all satanic deeds; and enlighten for me the eyes of my heart with understanding, lest I sleep unto death. And send me an angel of peace, a guardian and guide of my soul and body, that he may deliver me from mine enemies; that, rising from my bed, I may offer Thee prayers of thanksgiving. Yes, O Lord hearken unto me, Thy sinful and wretched servant, in confession and conscience. Grant me, when I arise, to be instructed by Thy sayings; and through Thine angels cause demonic despondency to be driven far from me; that I may bless Thy holy name, and glorify and extol the most pure Theotokos Mary, whom Thou hast given to us sinners as a protectress, and accept her who prayeth for us. For I know that she exemplifieth Thy love for mankind and prayeth for us without ceasing. Through her protection, and the sign of the precious Cross, and for the sake of all Thy saints, preserve my wretched soul, O Jesus Christ our God; for holy art Thou, and most glorious forever. Amen.

PRAYER

I thank Thee, O my Lord Jesus Christ for Thine heavenly peace that Thou implant unto me. Thou never let me in need of anything whatsoever. My life is all yours and is always, always in Thine safe hands. Thou art my Father who are in heaven and Thou takes care of me and even my hair is being taken care of by Thee and not even one of it would fall without Thy permission. Make me look upon Thee, O Lord, so that thou become my everlasting and permanent food, drink, labor, and sleep as well. Thy holy left arm is under my head and thine right arm embraces me. Please let me feel Thine perpetual guardianship whereby I shall never sleep alone, but rather let me spend my whole day and night, indeed all my entire days on earth with Thee, O my Lord please forgive me all my sins, vices and transgressions and lead me into (remove extra space here) repentance in order that I may repent and thereby enjoy total inner peace, comfort, and joy once I quit once and for all my inequities and trespasses.

I pray to Thee, O Lord through the merciful intercessions of Thine Holy Mother, the ever Virgin Saint Mary, all Thine pure saints and the great martyr Saint George, the great saint Anba Rueiss as well as the blissful prayers of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II. Amen.





ENVY

INTRODUCTION:

A person's belief in God impacts directly on his or her practical pursuits and life. Should faith be sound and strong, and then man's life would be stable, experiencing spiritual and social practices, which are both balanced and impurities-free. On the other hand, should that faith be shaky and improper, then a person's practices and feelings would grow infirm.

Envy is one of the most vital subjects around which opinions and views may vary considerably. There is no doubt that an envious person commits a capital sin and harms himself or herself at the same time. This is unanimous. However, the question around which many differ is the extant of harm which befalls the begrimed and, in the meanwhile, how to overcome Satan's and people's envy.

As usual, our prime reference and authority is the Word of God, our Holy Bible, as well as our saintly fathers' interpretations. "For whatever is not from faith is sin." Rom. 14:23

THE DEVIL IS THE PRIME SOURCE OF ENVY AND THE EVIL ONES ARE HIS EXTENSION IN INVIDIOUSNESS:

The church firmly believes that the devil is the prime source of envy and has been the one who introduced this spiritual sickness into the peoples' life over ages. Indeed it was through Satan that envy, jealousy, and hatred went into the hearts of the evil ones from generation to generation and throughout the entire world. Much to our regret and sorrow the devil still works actively unto the hearts of the wicked everywhere, worldwide.

The story of the first incident of envy dates back to the time when Satan fell and was therefore cast out from celestial divinity. Thus Satan's heart became a wicked one and, consequently, grew envious of Adam and Eve for the so many blessings that God bestowed upon them in the Garden of Eden. So the evil one embarked on tempting them so persistently until they bent their ears to him and, hence, both

joined him in this fall from grace, worse still, their posterity even inherited this fall and this spiritual ailment.

Hence, we pray in Saint Basil's Liturgy saying: "And death, which entered into the world by the envy of the devil, thou hast destroyed." (The Book of Wisdom 2:23).

No wonder, therefore, that our world has always been full of many spiteful or malicious hearts at individual, community and nation level alike. Those with such wicked hearts are Satan's siblings since an evil person's heart - just like the devil's - becomes saddened when God bestows blessings upon others and, conversely, becomes delighted at their losses and mishaps. "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul." Acts 13:45

In the same context, Saint James the Apostle talked about envious and hateful hearts when he said. "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there." James 3:14-16

- † Some biblical references to envy:
- † Envy is a wrongful approach in life.

"Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy." Rom. 13:13. "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking." 1 Peter 2:1

ENVY OCCURS DUE TO DETACHMENT FROM GOD'S COMMANDMENTS:

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wrangling of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself." 1 Tim. 6:3-5

ENVY DEPRIVES MAN OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD:

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies,

outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissension, 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

ENVY DESTROYS THE INVIDIOUS:

"A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones." Prov. 14:30. In other words, envy is a malady that eats into man's hearts, thereby inflicting his or her inner being with exasperation, fury and grudge, and, as a result, deprives man of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking as newborn babies, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby." 1 Peter 2:1-2

+ No one is able to stand before jealousy.

"Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, but who is able to stand before jealousy? Prov. 27:4. That is to say it is a chronic disease and a raging sin of which we should not only be wary but also cured through all possible venues.

ENVY IS A COMPOUND SIN.

Envy is a compound sin, which means it embraces a number of sins embedded into it. As well, envy is a serious spiritual ailment that infiltrates into man's mind and heart whereby driving him or her far and away from God's righteous path. How far from God the chief priests, ascribes and Pharisees were when they delivered our Lord Jesus Christ to be crucified! "Because of envy they had delivered Him." Mathew 27:18. Indeed, Satan filled their hearts with envy.

A jealous person desires to surpass others materialistically or morally or even spiritually, i.e. (egoism). If this person fails to attain that, then fury infiltrates deeply into his or her heart where it accumulates over time thereby breeding malice which ultimately ferments, and gives birth to envy. On the other hand, pride and vanity do have a significant role to play in this connection. Here people simply forget all about their personal life and evils and start to monitor others' manners, behaviors and higher levels.

Rather than working on mending themselves, by attempting to be like those others, blind jealousy just gets hold on these people and their hearts are eaten out with envy.

Still even worse, invidious persons start to be inflicted with psychological disturbance as indignation boils within their hearts and they consequently end up leading a gloomy and saddened life style. Envy, as such, is a major sickness and sin. Once it makes its way unto man's heart, it becomes like moth eating into wood. Likewise, Satan domains over hearts whereby inner peace is entirely lost.

Therefore, both Satan and the envious person find comfort in others' calamities and mishaps. That is why Saint Peter commands us to "Lay aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy." 1 Peter 2:1-2

There is no question or doubt that envy, malice, jealousy, abhorrence, and hatred are but maladies assuming the shape of five highly explosive sticks of dynamite which destroy their holder. Of course, the devil was the first one to ruin himself and destroy others with it. Hence, the Book of Proverbs says, "Who is able to stand before jealousy?" Prov. 27:4

Below are just some examples of envy in the Holy Bible:

- † Cain envies his brother Abel and murders him (Gen. 4:1-16)
- † "And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry and his countenance fell." Gen 4:4-5. "Cain rose against Abel his brother and killed him." Gen. 4:8
- † The Philistines envy Isaac (Gen. 26:12-19)
- † "Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous, for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him." Gen. 26:12-14
- † Esau's envy of his brother Jacob (Gen. 27:30-41)
- † "So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, 'the days of mourning for my father are at hand, then I will kill my brother Jacob.' " Gen. 27:41
- † Joseph's brothers' envy of him (Gen. 37:1-31)

"And his brothers envied him." (Gen. 37:11). "Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit." (Gen. 37:20). "Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it." (Gen. 37:24). "And they sat down to eat a meal." Gen. 37:25

OTHER STORIES ON ENVY

It was envy that made Dathan and Abiram rise up before Moses the prophet and the earth opened up and swallowed them and a fire was kindled in their company (Num. 6:13 & Ps. 106:16). When Saul was very angry and jealous of the women's singing for David, a distressing spirit came upon him (1 Sam. 18:6-10). When Jacob began to prosper and continued prospering until he became very prosperous, his nephews, Laban's sons, envied him and turned against them (Gen. 31:1-3). However, God even blessed him more. Sanballat the Horonite and Tobia the Ammonite were deeply disturbed when they found that Nehemiah the prophet came to seek the wellbeing of his people. (Neh. 2:10)

When Haman saw the glory which was bestowed upon Mordecai, he hastened to his house, mourning and with his head covered. Esther 6:12-13

When Daniel the prophet distinguished himself above all Babylon's governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him, they sought to find some charge against him. Nevertheless, they could find no charge or fault, so they consulted together and designed a plot to have him cast into the den of lions.

However, God saved him from the lions, which overpowered and broke all the bones of those men who had accused Daniel (Dan 6:3-10). As well, the chief priests envied our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 15:10). Also, the Jews envied the disciples and apostles (Acts 13:45 & 17:5)

THE POSITION OF THE BEGRUDGED PERSON.

It is evidently crystal clear throughout all those Biblical examples mentioned above that it is actually the envious - rather than the begrudged - that bring upon themselves, many evils and severe damage or destruction. It is equally clear as well that those begrudged who are closely attached to God can not ultimately be harmed by envy since God is far more powerful than the devil and all his evil forces. Even though the begrudged may suffer some temporary trouble, God invests such trouble for the ultimate benefit of those begrudged - as evidenced in the story of Joseph the righteous that was envied by his brothers. However, all such transient trouble that the envious may inflict upon those whom they begrudge may still be largely avoided or eliminated through the following channels:

PRAYER.

In the thanksgiving prayer we say, "All envy, all temptation, all the work of Satan, the counsel of wicked men and the rising up of enemies, hidden and manifest, take

them away from us.” Thus, perpetual prayer asking for God’s protection and elimination of envy coming from Satan, and all his forces and the evil people supporting him, is of utmost and vital importance. The more success in spiritual and social matters is evident, the more highly demanded prayer is.

When it comes to deactivating Satan’s envy and evil deeds, our prayers ought to be even deeper and more powerful. Otherwise should this success be visible and evident without being supported by prayer, praise and thanksgiving, then Satan is sure to envy and cause trouble. In such a case of poor prayer we would say “But who is able to stand before jealousy? Prov. 27:4. We should always remember, as our church teaches us, to ask God to deactivate and eliminate Satan’s envy as well as that of his evil supporters and send it away from us.

PRUDENCE AND DISCRETION.

Satan does not know everything and all things, as it is only God that knows about everything and we, together with whatever we do and say, are all revealed and exposed before His eyes. On the other hand, Satan’s knowledge and intelligence are both limited. In other words, Satan knows about things when we divulge and declare them proudly. Just as we start to do that, Satan begins to launch his war right away since he hates man.

Therefore, we ought not to boast and take pride or utter words of praising and bragging because this would bring about a lot of trouble. Saint James the Apostle talks about the tongue and the necessity of controlling it as well as the necessity of cutting down on speaking. James 3:1-12. “If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man.” James 3:2

“Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.”James 3:5

Thus, a spiritual person utters only meticulously spiritual and pried - free words. Even if one has to say words that entails praise, then he or she should glorify God first and utmost, then mention the blessed name of the holy cross and even make the sign of the cross whereby dismissing Satan from the whole place.

You, therefore, ought to be prudent and discreet towards Satan by mentioning and glorifying the holy name of the Lord and curtailing your talk. “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or

that. But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil." James 4:13-16

You can never find a spiritual person who boasts or attributes any glory to himself or herself but rather to God while mentioning the blessed name of the holy cross. A spiritual person would always, always say "Who am I but a weak and poor fellow who survives in this world only through the grace of God who loves me?" A spiritual person never ever forgets his or her weakness and always recalls this weakness no matter what. In his struggle against Satan and upon finding a multitude of evil spirits fighting him, the great Saint Antony said: "Why have you all come out against me when I am such a weak person?" Here Satan and all his evil forces would run away from him and disappear.

FAITH.

It is the belief in the word of God that says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Rom 8:31

That is to say: if we live with God, for God, and in God, then there is absolutely no power that can hurt us. It is God who promised to defend us whilst we stand still. It is God Who confirms to us that He has drawn our names on His hand palm and whoever dares touch us would be as if he or she has touched God's eyeball. It is God Who tells us in our Holy Bible that He is with us always - even to the end of the ages. It is only upon this straight and robust faith that we should in no way fear envy or any of the evil powers' games and tricks. Let us always place our full trust and confidence into the hands of our Lord of hosts with the firm and unwavering belief that He is always in charge, always in control, all throughout our lives in the world. We ought to always recall that as long as we are adamantly attached to God, then we are under His unsurpassable care and unparalleled protection. We, as such, are too safe to be hit with any harm coming from the envy of those who wish us ill.

EXAGGERATED AND UNREASONABLE FEAR OF ENVY.

There are some commonly circulating notions, which are void of any Biblical relevance and are without any logical basis. Such notions are associated with a lot of harm to both the begrimed and envy.

For instance, once a lady mentioned that her neighbors, who were full of envy and hatred, happened to visit her husband at his business place. As soon as they had left, a representative from the city government showed up to check her husband's goods and commodities, which they found to be in a bad condition and, as such, were not

valid for human consumption. Therefore, the man's business was ordered to shut down.

The lady attributed the incident to envy, which had absolutely nothing to do with the whole episode, because that occurrence would indeed have happened regardless of the lady's "envious" neighbors' visit to her headband's business place. The fact of the matter here is that the problem is not with envy as much as it is a problem with that lady's husband's dishonesty and malpractice at his work place. Accordingly there are always such misconceptions when it comes to the subject of envy and, in truth; the subject in its entirety involves not only lack of faith and lack of dependence on our Lord but condemnation of others as well.

A deeper look into such infirm sentiments reveals an invalid faith and baseless fears which can all be effectively treated and healed through repentance and spiritual consultations with the father of confession as to how best to get rid of all such morbid sentiments stemming from unorthodox faith. Instances similar to the case we have just mentioned are plenty.

THE FATHERS' SAYINGS ON THE SUBJECT OF ENVY.

Saint John Chrysostom says: "Satan is envious. However, he envies humanity but does not envy another Satan. You, man, are envious of your human fellows, particularly your own kinsmen, something Satan does not do." Saint Bayomoun says: "Envy is one of the worst sins and one of the hardest to cure." Saint Shenouda the prime recluse says: "My son, do not be envious or abhorrent as this would goad you to murder."

Saint Cyprian says: "All evils have ceilings save envy. And adulterer's adultery ends at the end of the evil doing. A thief's felony does not go beyond theft. A killer's crime is restricted to murder. A usurper's greediness may cease at a certain limit. Yet, the day may come when all these sinners repent their wrong doings. However, invidious people's sin remains deeply embedded unto them and they may never repent." A saint once said, "No one can harm you except you yourself."

† "By the envy of the devil death came into the world, and they follow him that are of his side (Wisdom 2:24, 25). OH YE who are envious, let me tell you that however often you may seek for the opportunity of injuring him whom you hate, you will never be able to do him so much harm as you do harm to yourselves.

He whom you would punish through the malice of your envy, may probably escape, but you will never be able to fly from yourselves. Wherever you may be your

adversary is with you, your sin rankles within. It must be a self-willed evil to persecute a person whom God has taken under the protection of His grace; it becomes an irremediable sin to hate a man whom God wishes to make happy.

Envy is as prolific as it is hurtful; it is the root of all evil, the source of endless disorder and misery, the cause of most sins that are committed. Envy gives birth to hatred and animosity. From it avarice is begotten, for it sees with an evil eye honors and emoluments heaped upon a stranger, and thinks that such honors should have been, by right, bestowed upon himself. From envy comes contempt of God, and of the salutary precepts of our Savior.

The envious man is cruel, proud, unfaithful, impatient, and quarrelsome; and, what is strange, when this vice gains the mastery, he is no longer master of himself, and he is unable to correct his many faults. If the bond of peace is broken, if the rights of fraternal charity are violated, if truth is altered or disguised, it is often envy that hurries him on to crime.

What happiness can such a man enjoy in this world? To be envious or jealous of another because such a one is virtuous and happy; is to hate in him the graces and blessings God has showered down upon him.

Does he not punish himself when he sees the success and welfare of others? Does he not draw down upon himself tortures from which there is no respite? Are not his thoughts, his mind, constantly on the rack?

He pitilessly punishes himself, and, in his heart, performs the same cruel office which Divine Justice reserves for the chastisement of the greatest criminal. St. Cyprian

O envious man, you injure yourself more than he whom you would injure, and the sword with which you wound will recoil and wound yourself.

him the greatest good, for he caused him to pass to a better and a blessed life, and he himself was plunged into an abyss of woe. In what did Esau injure Jacob? Did not his envy prevent him from being enriched in the place in which he lived; and, losing the inheritance and the blessing of his father, did he not die a miserable death? What harm did the brothers of Joseph do to Joseph, whose envy went so far as to wish to shed his blood? Were they not driven to the last extremity, and well-nigh perishing with hunger, whilst their brother reigned all through Egypt?

It is ever thus; the more you envy your brother, the greater good you confer upon him. God, Who sees all, takes the cause of the innocent in hand, and, irritated by

the injury you inflict, deigns to raise up him whom you wish to lower, and will punish you to the full extent of your crime.

If God usually punishes those who rejoice at the misfortunes of their enemies, how much more will He punish those who, excited by envy, seek to do an injury to those who have never injured them? St. Chrysostom.

Envy is a gnawing pain, which springs from the success and prosperity of another; and this is the reason why the envious are never exempt from trouble and vexation. If an abundant harvest fills the granaries of a neighbor, if success crowns his efforts, the envious man is chagrined and sad. If one man can boast of prudence, talent, and eloquence, if another is rich, and is very liberal to the poor, if good works are praised by all around, the envious man is shocked and grieved.

The envious, however, dare not speak; although envy makes them counterfeit gladness, their hearts are sore within. If you ask him what vexes him, he dare not tell the reason. It is not really the happiness of his friend that annoys him, neither is it his gaiety that makes him sad, nor is he sorry to see his friend prosper; but it is that he is persuaded that the prosperity of others is the cause of his misery.

This is what the envious would be forced to acknowledge, if they spoke the truth sincerely; but because they dare not confess so shameful a sin, they, in secret, feed a sore which tortures them and eats away their rest. As the shadow ever accompanies the pedestrian when walking in the sun, so envy throws its shadow on those who are successful in the world. St. Basil.

“Riches are good to him that has no sin in his conscience.” Sirach 13:30. The love of riches is far more pernicious and more powerful than the devil himself, and many obey this love more blindly than the pagans, who put their faith in idols. For there have been many pagans who did not obey their devilish idols at all times; but people who hanker after riches unreservedly respect everything that tends to feed their covetousness; as if covetousness said to them: “Be revenged on society, forget the feelings of nature, despise God.” They obey this to the letter.

To the idols were sacrificed animals; but covetousness seeks to force their worshipers to sacrifice their own souls, and they sacrifice these without remorse. If you despise worldly blessings, you will be more worthy to possess heavenly blessings. St. Chrysostom.

You possess many acres of land; some are planted with trees; some fields are well tilled. Besides these you have vineyards, undulating hills, beautiful prospects

woods, rivulets, and pleasant promenades. Of what use are all these blessings to you? Six feet of earth await you at the end.

HOW TO HEAL JEALOUS PEOPLE'S ENVY?

† Love.

The Holy Bible says that love does not envy, thinks no evil and does not rejoice in iniquity and never fails (1 Cor. 13). Let us all love one another just as we love ourselves and let us all act just like our loving heavenly father. Let us all act lovingly for, as the celestial light of pure love shines unto our hearts, it dispels all darkness, grudge and wrath away from our hearts.

† Reconciliation.

Reconciliation should come just at the heels of enmity lest we grant the devil a good opportunity to embitter our hearts with envy (Ephesians5)

The party at fault should rush to the prejudiced in full humbleness and seek the blessings of reconciliation. In this context Saint Anthony says: “Enmity, when stored unto the heart, turns into grudge and envy.”

† Meekness.

Meekness puts out flames of envy. Envious Satan used to harass King Saul, so severely. However, it was David's meekness, and his melodies played on the lute that alleviated his acute psychological pains (1 Sam16:14-23)

PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO DO US HARM.

Our Lord has asked us to pray for those who trespass against us and those who envy us, because they are wretched and captured into the devil's fist. They, as such, are sickened with sin, and are in a desperate need for our hearty prayers and supplications, so that God may forgive them their sins and guide them to the path of righteousness. By being responsive to our prayers offered in behalf of those malicious sinners, God delivers them from Satan's grip whereby they may live in true light and real peace.

Indeed, there does exist envy directed from Satan, and his supporters, whose hearts are filled with sins and evils. Such envy primarily hits the invidious persons and devastates them. Additionally, envy is a compound sin that gives birth to a number

of other sins of which such malicious people will be held accountable on the great day of judgment. As for the begrimed whose sole weapon is full attachment to God, they are indeed fully immune against envy. Even if invidiousness bring about some temporary turbulence, disturbance and trouble into the begrimed's life, ultimately such envy and malice would not really harm them because, being tightly held in God's powerful hands, such people are sure to conquer all evil and come out victoriously.

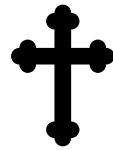
Having said that, our church still teaches us in each and every prayer to ask God to drive away from us all satanic envy and begrimed of the evil ones. As well, our church instructs us to exert our utmost efforts to keep prudent and discrete and avoid all vanity and pride. Moreover, our church tells us to shield ourselves with faith, which would help us to dispel all envy and malice, thereby, live in peace and quiet, far and away from all the transient trouble which envious Satan inflicts upon us during our fights with him.

By the same token, let us all remember to always say unto ourselves that, without God, we are weak and poor, and let us always act in self-denial ascribing whatever blessing and all blessings we have to God and God alone. Let us always recall the absolute importance of crossing ourselves so that God may indeed provide us with protection against all the evil of Satan and his evil supporters.

PRAYER

I thank Thee, O my Lord Jesus Christ because Thou art with me all the day and all the night. I thank Thee, my Lord, because Thou always send Thy holy angels to escort me day and night so that Satan and all his evil powers may not get close to me. I pray to Thee, O my Lord, to take them away from me and from all Thy people. Satan and all his evil powers do Thou trample and humiliate under our feet speedily. All offences and their instigators do thou abolish. May all dissension of corrupt heresies cease. To Thee, O Lord, we fervently pray to facilitate our life and to guide us so that we may behave in full accordance with Thy holy commandments. We, in full humility ask you, O Lord to sanctify our souls, purify our bodies, rectify our thoughts, cleanse our conscience, and deliver us from all evil affliction and heartache.

We pray this through the intercession of the Holy every-virgin Saint Mary, the Great Martyr Saint George, the Great Saint Rueiss and the blessed and bless-giving prayer of the father of our fathers, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II. Amen.



THE GIVING THAT BRINGS JOY (I)

INTRODUCTION: GOD GIVES TO US AND TAKES FROM OUR HANDS.

The Bible says, “Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble” Psalms 41:1. Moreover, the Bible says, “Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard.” Proverbs 21:13.

God does not need anything; however, out of His love He gives us a way to seek His blessings and be rewarded. The Lord does not need our prayers, but He established prayer for us and advised us to pray at every moment. That is because He loves to hear our prayers and wants us to benefit. He loved us first, and we exchange with Him this love through the different ways that He Himself has prepared for us. One very important form of this exchange is the giving to the poor and the needy as well as to the churches. Everything that we have in our hands and in our lives is from Him. At the same time, He is very capable of giving to the poor with His endless and special ways. He also can arrange for and take care of the building of the churches through His extraordinary ways and even without donations. Nonetheless, He has given us the gift of donations so that we (who are undeserving) can deal with His Majesty to gain some of His characteristics and get sanctified by more and more of His precious blessings. God even takes the form of a needy person to give us His blessing just as He had done with the Samaritan woman when He told her to give Him water to drink while He had given her everything. There are many such examples are in the Bible.

St. Paul describes the joy and blessings that the giver gains when he called the Ephesians elders and priests of the churches at Ephesus and said to them, “And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Acts 20:35.

With this small booklet in your hand, we will, with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit’s guidance, talk about the gift of giving through the following points:

WHAT IS GIVING?

For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You. Tithes, a very early command.

Giving, in Christianity. The characteristics of the accepted giving that leads to joy.

Examples of role models in giving. The Elderly Saints sayings about giving.

CONCLUSION.

Let us examine each of the above points in more detail even though each topic cannot be contained easily.

WHAT IS GIVING?

Someone might say that giving is a way of describing the love towards others or towards the church. Others may say that giving is to give attention to others first. Examples of this include:

When Elijah the prophet visited the widow of Zarephath at Sidon during the famine as per the Lord's order; she only had a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar. He asked her to make for him a small cake from it first. She gave him priority at this difficult time, and as such she gained an enormous blessing. The flour bin did not get used up nor did the oil jar run dry until the day the LORD sent rain on the earth.

The young boy at the centre of the miracle of feeding the multitude in the store of the five loaves and two fish. This young child had only five loaves and two fish as his own meal; however, he did not keep anything for himself. When they asked him to give what he had to the Lord Christ, he did happily. He gave them all the food that he had, preferring others over himself. Yet, he was astonished by the amazing miracle that the Lord had performed when He blessed the five loaves and two fish so that all the people were fed and twelve baskets of the fragments remained and were collected.

Also, the poor widow that gave the two mites. The Lord Jesus Christ has praised her when He noticed how the rest of the people put their gifts into the treasury and said "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had." Luke 21:4. That woman preferred others to herself while she was at her time of utmost need. How deep is this giving? And what is its purpose?

There is no stronger purpose of this giving except for the fact that it is a giving to the Lord Himself and developing a sincere relationship with Him, all while. The Lord does not leave Himself in debt to others, but rather gives generously in return. The Lord Jesus Christ described this exact purpose when He talked about those who would enter the kingdom of God and said, “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’”

“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’” Matthew 25:34-40.

Hence, in giving, the person who receives the gift is the Lord God in the form of the poor and needy person and in return, He gives endless blessings.

It is such a huge humility and love of the Lord to receive from us while He is the giver and provider of all things. He takes from us earthly gifts to give us many precious gifts such as joy, peace, blessings, and the heavenly share in the kingdom of God.

“For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You.” 1 Chronicles 29:14

The Holy Bible provides us with a beautiful example of giving and the joy that comes with it. This is the example of building the Lord’s Altar at the time of David the prophet (1 Chronicles 29:9, 14, 16): “Then the people rejoiced, for they had offered willingly, because with a loyal heart they had offered willingly to the LORD; and King David also rejoiced greatly … But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You… O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and is all Your own.”

The expression “For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You” is such an amazing expression. We do not own any thing. Every one of us should say with our father Job, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And

naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.” Job 2:21. Everything that we have is from the Lord and we must say with our father Job “The Lord gave” and also we must say with David the prophet “From Your hand, and is all Your own.” Therefore, it would be wonderful to remember to say “For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You” every time we give. We thank God that He gives us the chance to express our feelings when we donate just as when the father feels happy when his son gives him a gift or a card even though the gift’s price itself is essentially from the father. God is the source of everything and the giver of all good just as the Bible says, “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein” Psalm 24:1.

Our beneficent Lord is the giver of all good for everyone and He wants to give us and take back from our hands so that He can become a partner with us in something. He wants to take care of the poor and needy through us and He builds His house through us. As a result of our giving, He gives us many blessings now on earth and later in heaven.

The Lord gives us our life, existence and time. Do we give Him one day of the week to be “the Lord’s day” –Sunday- to be the prayer day, the hymns day, and the day during which we do loving work such as visiting the sick?

The Lord had given us the health, strength and talents. Do we use these gifts that the Lord has given us towards serving Him and say to Him “For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You.” The health is from Him just as the strength is from Him “The LORD is my strength and song.” The talents are from Him as it is said “You have not made me need anything of your gracious work.” Do we use what God has given us to build the kingdom of God and say “For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You.”

Tithes, a very early command

The tithes commandment is a very early one, even older than the written scripture itself. We read about our father Jacob, when he saw the ladder extending from earth to heaven, and he said “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God.” Genesis 28:20-22. Perhaps Jacob learned about the tithes command from his grandfather Abraham who offered the tithes to Melchizedek, the high priest, when “he (Abraham) gave him (Melchizedek) a tithe of all” Genesis 14:20.

Moreover, the Lord has commanded His people the tithes command at the time of Moses the prophet:

- † “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.” Deuteronomy 14:22-23
- † “And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD’s. It is holy to the LORD.” Leviticus 27:30,
- † “You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand.” Deuteronomy 12:17
- † “And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD.” Leviticus 27:32
- † Even the priests that take the tithes from the people used to give out one tenth of these tithes to the Lord. This type of tithes is called “heave” as mentioned in “Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: ‘When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the LORD, a tenth of the tithe.’” Numbers 18:26

Further, the person who does not pay the tithes is considered to be a thief stealing out of the Lord, as mentioned in Malachi 3:8-10, “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ in tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”

It should be noted that donations in the Old Testament were not only limited to the tithes, but rather included other yearly and occasional donations:

- † “At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied,

that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.” Deuteronomy 14:28-29

- † Exodus 23:10, “Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove.” You see how in this command that God does not only take care of humans, but also takes care of the beasts of the field.

GIVING, IN CHRISTIANITY

The Lord has given man the tithes command in the Old Testament; yet, at the grace Testament it is written in John 1:17 “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Hence, giving is not limited since the grace that the Lord has given to us in the New Testament is extremely generous and gracious. That is why the Lord has said, “Sell what you have and give alms.” Luke 12:13. Also in

- † “Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all.” Luke 21:3
- † “Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.” Acts 11:29

Therefore, when the Lord had spoken about the three corner stones of Christianity which are giving alms, prayer and fasting, He stated by giving alms and said in Matthew 6:1, 4, “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.... that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”

GIVING IN THE EARLY CHURCH:

In Acts 4:32-37, the spirit of love and utmost giving that used to exist is described “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.” Acts 4:34-35. This is why the early Church was spiritually strong and prosperous and hence is considered our source of reference today.

One of the greatest examples of the love of giving is what our teacher St. Paul reminds us with when he mentions the people of Macedonia who were extremely

poor and how it is that they insisted to partake in the gift of giving for the benefit of the service; he says “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I dear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.” 2 Corinthians 8:1-4.

When St. Paul encouraged the people of Corinthians to give generously with joy, he says in 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever. Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.”

Also, when St. Paul encouraged the people of Corinthians to give without asking for the glory or without pride, he says in 1 Corinthians 4:7, “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

Additionally, on encouraging the people of Corinthian to give regularly and weekly as well as not to delay giving, St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”

And in the epistle of St. Paul to his disciple Timothy, he stressed the importance of taking care of the needs of the relative and that it would not be appropriate to see one of our family members in need and do not give him or her so that he or she can get over the need situation, so he says in 1 Timothy 5:8 “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACCEPTED GIVING THAT LEADS TO JOY.

- † Charitable deed should be done in secret – “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven... that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.” Matthew 6:1, 4
- † Not for glory or for boasting – “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” 1 Corinthians 4:7
- † With generosity – “He who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” Romans 12:8 and “For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” 1 Thessalonian 4:7
- † Without being asked to give – “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” Luke 6:38 and “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was like a robe and a turban.” Job 29:14
- † With cheerfulness and with no delay – “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it, when you have it with you.” Proverbs 3:27-28 and “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7
- † Without expecting a return – “Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back.” Luke 6:30
- † With choice and not with reluctance – “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7

The Holy Bible is full of verses and scenarios that describe the same characteristics as we have mentioned some (not all) of them as above.

EXAMPLES OF ROLE MODELS IN GIVING

There are numerous role models for demonstrating the blessings of giving; a few of them are mentioned here:

† David the king and Araunah the Jebusite: 2 Samuel 24:18-25: “And Gad came that day to David, and said to him, “Go up, erect an altar unto the LORD in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” So David, according to the word of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded. Now Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him. So Araunah went out, and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. Then Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” And David said, “To buy the threshing floor from you, to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people.” Now Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take and offer up whatever seems good to him. Look, here are oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and the yokes of the oxen for wood. All these, O king, Araunah, has given to the king”. And Araunah said to the king, “May the LORD your God accept you.” Then the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will surely buy it from you a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD heeded the prayers for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel.” It is such a wonderful story representing a person being motivated for giving and how people race towards gaining the blessing of the giving. It is also amazing to see how the blessing and peace come through the giving.

† Tabitha:

The Holy Bible witnessed to her doings: “This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.” As such, St. Peter the Apostle raised her from her death in Acts 9:36-41

† Saint Peter the worshipper:

This saint started his life as a cruel tax collector. He also had an extreme tight grip on his money with unwillingness to help others to the extent that they named him the unmerciful. One day a poor person approached him and asked for alms, but he never gave the poor person anything. The poor person kept insisting on getting something. Coincidentally, Peter’s servant arrived while carrying lots of bread. So Peter took one slice of bread and threw it to the poor person intending to hurt him and not to help him. The poor person picked up the slice of bread and left. Nonetheless, God wanted to change the heart of Peter. As such, he sent him a dream , as if he was standing at judgement day

in front of the angels; nothing good was found that he had done except that one slice of bread that he threw at the poor person. When he woke up , he repented and sold everything that he owned and finally sold himself as a slave and used the money to give alms to the poor. The Church celebrates his feast on the 25th day of Toba every year.

† Bishop Abraham the Bishop of Fayoum:

He loved the poor whom he used to eat with. He did not renovate the bishopric building but rather gave everything that he collected to the poor. This saint performed many miracles. We wish, our dear reader, that you spend the time and read Bishop Abraham's story.

† Bishop Sarabamoun Abu Tarha of Monofiah:

This saint also used to love the poor very much. This love is to the extent that he gave away his own clothing (Tonia) to a poor naked person. He also has sold his own Bible and gave its price to one of the poor people.

† Saint Milania and Bishop Bemwa:

One day, Saint Milania approached Bishop Bemwa before her start of the celibacy life and gave him a bag full of golden pieces representing all what she owns. He took the bag from her and gave it to his disciple and told him give it to the poor and needy monks. She then asked him to open it first and know how much is inside before he would do that. Bishop Bemwa then answered and told her it is good enough that the Lord knows how much is in it since you have given the bag to Him and not to me. Saint Milania then learned a huge lesson in her spiritual life.

THE ELDERLY SAINTS SAYINGS ABOUT GIVING

† Saint John Chrysostom has written some interesting things about performing good deeds and said "Mercy raises man to a high level and creates a deep personal welfare between God and man." He also said "Mercy proceed other good deeds and has an endless power. That is because if you fast but are unmerciful then your fast will not benefit you... not only that... but if you kept yourself pure and clean which is higher than the best deed (so you are similar to angels), you will stand outside the gates of heaven if you were not merciful."

- † Saint John Chrysostom also said “The poor would extend his hand asking for alms, but it is God that accepts your alms.”
- † Saint Basil the Great said “Since you did not have mercy on others, mercy will not be done to you. Since you closed your door in front of the poor and needy, the gate of heaven will not be opened to you.”
- † Saint Augustine said, “We should not be satisfied with the prayer only but also give alms... break your bread to the hungry and let the poor and those that are without a shelter into your house. If you have seen the poor naked, put cloth on him. If you do so, you offer your prayers with trust and wings would be created to your prayers.”
- † + Saint John the Tabaysy said “The person who loves the poor has an intercessor at the house of the ruler. That who opens his door to the needy, holds in his hand the key of God’s door.”
- † + Saint Keprianous the Bishop and martyr said “The Holy Spirit talks in the holy scripture saying “In mercy and truth Atonement is provided for iniquity” Proverbs 16:6 and in addition to that, He also says “Just as the water puts down the fire, giving alms takes away sins.” Sirakh 3:30
- † + After Saint John Chrysostom has talked about giving alms and how much better it is than fasting and prayer and many other things, he said “With the condition that it should be from an honest and just source and effort. It should be free of greed, deprive, and force as unclean alms anger God more than it pleases Him.”
- † + The teacher Oreganous say about the tithes “It is the minimum that the Christian add to it as the Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:20

CONCLUSION

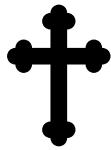
If you reviewed your life and found that you have a lot of tiring issues or no blessings at home, at work, with your children, or with your spiritual life, then you must review the subject of giving as it might be the reason behind all that the suffering. The person who does not give to the Lord from the blessing that the Lord gives to him, is in essence stealing from God. As a result, that person will lose a great blessing and God will allow all the troubles to affect him even though

God loves him so much. However, God will allow that to happen to give that person an opportunity to give the Lord what is the Lord's, from the Lord's money and blessings. As such one will receive great blessings on this earth and in heaven.. Yet, "that who shuts his ears from hearing the scream of the poor, he too would scream and no one would hear him."

Giving should be done with generosity and with the utmost so that the person can reach a place where he will cheerfully give all things that he owns just as the young child that gave all his food (the five loafs and two fish), and how wonderful was the result.

Giving should be in secret and without any pride or delay so as to not allow the devil a chance to fight you and take this great blessing of giving away. Give the Lord His right first. What is the Lord's give to the Lord.





THE GIVING THAT BRINGS JOY (II)

INTRODUCTION:

In our first booklet titled “The Giving That Brings Joy (1)”, we have mentioned that the Lord Christ has considered the act of giving alms to be more important than fasting and prayer as in Matthew 6:1-4 “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself rewards you openly.” This is not because the Lord is in need, nor is the Church or the Priests in need, but rather because giving carries in it several things such as:

- † Interchanging love with the Lord, as the person frees themselves from earthly matters, separating themselves and advancing towards the Lord and eternity.
- † Sharing in the pain of the Lord Christ, being one body in Christ, and building the person’s kingdom in heaven,
- † Following in the Lord’s command and receiving endless heavenly rewards for obeying His words.

As we have described in the previous booklet, everything that we have is from the Lord and when we do give then we fulfill the verse “And of Your own we have given You” 1 Chronicles 29:14. We have also showed how Tithes is a very old command and in the current grace era there is no limit to the giving that is because the blessing that the Lord has given us in this era is very great. As a result, the Lord said: “Sell what you have and give alms” Luke 12:33. Therefore, giving Tithes in the New Testament is considered to be the minimum that Christians should give. Instead, they should give more just as the Lord Christ said: “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and

Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” Matthew 5:20. Therefore, one of the symbols of love between Christians is for someone to first give more than the Tithes from his income before spending that share on himself. We have also mentioned in the last booklet the different characteristics of the accepted giving that brings joy such as: it should be secretive, with generosity, not for glory or fame, and with joy. We have also mentioned many of the giving heroes in our Church.

In this booklet, we will, with the grace of the Lord, cover the following:

1. The offerings.
2. The first of all the products.
3. The Vows.
4. Some of the blessings of giving.

1. THE OFFERINGS

The significance of the offerings include incense, the Altar’s vessels, books, curtains, the church’s furniture, and decoration, etc. It is not in its price or value but rather in the love behind offering it and how joyful the person would be while he/she is offering it. The significance also lies in the utmost care that the person gives to these offerings to be able to present it at its best. Therefore, when the sinful woman poured the ointment on the Lord Christ’s feet, He has smelled in it her love to Him even though Judas has smelled in it the waste of money and that it should have been sold and its money should have been given to the poor. That does not mean that we should not be compassionate towards the poor, but He was asking us to show the love to our poor brothers and sister before giving the offering. Hence, if you want to glorify the Lord’s body, then do not forget Him when He is hungry or naked so as not to be generous to Him by offering the Church golden vessels and not to have mercy on your poor brother who is in need of the basic food and necessities. That is because the Lord Christ said: “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ ‘Then they also will answer Him, saying: ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ ‘ Then He will answer them, saying: ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’” Mathew 25:41-45.

Therefore, it is important to have mercy on the poor and consider it a priority. It is also a must to give the appropriate offerings but not with arrogance or pride in the case the offering value might be expensive. Would you offer a golden cup to the Alter but not a cold glass of water to a needy person? Listen to what the Lord says: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” Matthew 9:13. We do not undervalue the significance of the offerings, but it should always come with our love towards our brothers and sisters of Christ so that the Church would not pay attention to the expensive vessels and huge buildings over paying attention to the spiritual and materialistic needs of the poor and needy brothers and sisters of Christ.

St. John Chrysostom said: “If you see that a group of people had created expensive vessels to be used for the Liturgy and offered them or they have offered expensive decorations to the Church to be put on the walls or the ground, then do not order to sell these offerings so that you do not put down the people’s enthusiasm. However, if someone asked you before giving an offering, then order him to give the poor.”

2. THE FIRST OF ALL THE PRODUCTS

Definition of the first-giving of all matter:

It is to offer to the Lord the first thing that the hand of man gets from income/matter so that the rest of the income/matter would be blessed. This is a sign of appreciation and love to the Lord who is the giver of this exact income.

Examples of the first-giving of all matter from the Bible:

- † The first of all the produce of the ground: “And it shall be, when you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him: ‘I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the country which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.’” Deuteronomy 26:1-3.
- † The offering to the Lord for every male who opens the womb: “As it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD, and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons” Luke 2:23-24.

¶ The Levites to serve the tabernacle instead of the firstborn who opens a womb: “For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel. For all the firstborn among the children of Israel are Mine, both man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them to Myself. I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel. And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel, that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary.” Numbers 8:16-19. Also, in Sirach 3:33 it states “.... and alms resisteth sins.”

3. THE VOWS

Definition of a vow:

¶ A vow is a pledge or a promise between a human being and the Lord. This is different from the Tithes. This is because any person is required to pay the minimum of the Tithes whether that person has taken a vow or not. A vow is a private and voluntary choice that a person takes in response to a request that he/she has asked God for and the Lord has heard him/her.

The conditions of a vow:

¶ A vow must be fulfilled by the person as is: A person cannot cancel a vow or postpone it or change it. In this the Bible says in Numbers 2:30 “If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth”. Also, in Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 “When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed – Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.”

If the person could not fulfill the vow all at once, then it must be paid in installment and the person must do all his/her efforts to pay it even it takes a while since this is better than not paying the vow at all.

Taking on the vows and the Lord’s response:

¶ **JACOB’S VOW:** Genesis 28:20 “Then Jacob made a vow, saying: “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on” Then the Lord heard and accepted Jacob’s vow – Genesis 31:12 “And He said, ‘Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams

which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.”

† **THE VOW OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL:** Numbers 21:1-2 “The king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South, heard that Israel was coming on the road to Atharim. Then he fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners. So Israel made a vow to the LORD, and said, ‘If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.’”

Then the Lord heard the people of Israel – Numbers 21:3 “And the LORD listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and their cities. So the name of that place was called Hormah”

The vow of Hannah mother of Samuel the prophet:

† 1 Samuel 1:11 “Then she made a vow and said, ‘O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.’”

Then the Lord heard the vow of Hannah – 1 Samuel 1:20 “So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, ‘Because I have asked for him from the LORD.’”

The book of psalms mentions many examples of taking on the vows and how the Lord remembers the requester.

- † Psalm 50:14 “Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vow to the Most High”
- † Psalm 66:13-14 “I will go into Your house with burnt offerings; I will pay You my vows, which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble.”
- † Psalm 116:14 “I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people”
- † Psalm 116:18 “I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people”

The vows in the New Testament:

- † The vow of St. Paul – Acts 18:18 “So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow”
- † The vow of the four men with St. Paul – Acts 21:23 “Therefore do what we tell you; we have four men who have taken a vow”.
- † “Give, and it will be given to you” Luke 6:38

SOME OF THE BLESSINGS OF GIVING

Giving makes us God-like:

- † The Lord God is the Beneficent of all good and He with His love gives generously to all without disgrace. When the hand of a human being is used to give, then the person would look alike God in this virtue. St John Chrysostom says: “Nothing makes us closer to God resembling Him like giving.” We remember here the Bible words: “Therefore be merciful, just as our Father also is merciful” Luke 6:36.

With giving we gain closer affection with the Lord:

- † Mercy on the poor makes the person’s prayers acceptable in front of the Lord because He loves mercy.
- † St. John Chrysostom says: “Mercy lifts up the person to a high level and gives him a great affection with God. Just as the queen wants to enter the king’s place, no one can forbid her from doing so and no one can ask her of where she is heading; instead, everyone receives her with happiness, the same happens with whoever performs mercy and gives alms as that person would stand in front of the King while he is sitting on His throne without barriers since He is the Lord that loves the mercy so much and mercy stays near Him. Therefore, the Bible says: “The queen sat at the right hand of the King” that is because mercy is most favourable for God since You made Him became human for our salvation. Also, the spiritual elder father says: “Whoever has mercy on a human being, the door of the mercy would be open for all his requests at every hour.”

Giving intercedes even for the nonbelievers:

- † Mercy for the nonbelievers opens for them the faith door and enters them into the sheepfold. This is what the Lord has done with Cornelius, a centurion who worshiped idols, which the Bible has described by “who gave

alms generously to the people” so he saw an angel in a vision and the angel said to him “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God” Then the angel led him to St. Peter through which he got baptized as in Acts 10.

Giving does the greatest miracles even saving from death:

† As an example, the Bible mentions the mercy that Tabitha (which is translated to Dorcas) used to do: “This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did” Acts 9:39. Hence, when she died, the people had washed her and laid her in an upper room. Then they sent to St. Peter the disciple and brought him after which the Bible says “And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them” Acts 9:39. So the Lord raised her from death on the hands of St. Peter and as a result a lot of people believed.

Giving saves from judgment:

† Giving doesn't provide for the forgiveness of sin, we need Salvation. However, giving declares a heart has accepted salvation and the fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ “Love” so as a result that person loves all the poor and those that are in pain. Moreover whoever loves the good for the others deserves to enjoy the Lord's love, which was announced on the cross for everyone.

† However, the good deeds of a person – no matter how much and how perfect they are – cannot pay for a person's sins. We, as a result, believe with faith that our Lord Jesus “who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.” Romans 4:25. This faith is coupled with the good deeds that we perform through the Lord Christ who is within us.

But we ask: Does giving have the power to save us from judgment? The Holy Bible answers clearly and says:

- † “In mercy and truth Atonement is provided for iniquity” Proverbs 16:6
- † “Break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor” Daniel 4:27
- † “But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you” Luke 11:41

- † “Water quenched a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins” Sirach 3:33
- † “Shut up alms in the heart of the poor, and it shall obtain help for thee against all evil Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor” (review Sirach 29:15 and Daniel 4:27)
- † Therefore, in Matthew 25 let us mediate in what the Lord Jesus Christ has said about His second coming to judge the whole world when He will gather all nations in front of Him and divide humans to two sides: one on His right side and one on His left side and says to the ones on the right: “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” while He will say to the ones on His left: “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels”. Find a reason behind this great reward or great punishment. The Lord did not say to those “come and inherit the kingdom because you lived pure, did not deceive a person, were not unfair towards a needy person, or because you did not bother someone...”; but rather, He said: “For I was hungry and you gave Me food”. Also, He did not say to the other group: “Depart into the everlasting fire you who are adulteress, murders and deceivers”; but rather, He said: “For I was hungry and you did not give Me food”.

There are also a lot of other verses in the Bible that witness to the advantages of giving and its many benefits in diminishing and forgiving of sins.

St. Basilious the great says: “If you have run away from mercy, then mercy will run away from you. And if you disgraced the poor, then the Lord who became poor for your love will disgrace you.”

With giving we get hundred fold in this life as well as at the eternal life:

- † The Lord has premised that however leaves a thing for Him, then that person will get hundred fold in this life and the eternal life. Therefore St. John Chrysostom said: “Whoever has a merciful soul is similar to having a treasure of blessings”

Example:

There was once an old elder who used to do a lot of good and merciful deeds. At some time, a great price increase took place where he used to live but the elder did not stop doing his deed until he ran out of all belongings and was left with nothing but three loafs of bread. When he was about to eat, the Lord wanted to test him. So

a person knocked on his door asking for food and the elder said to himself: “It is better for me to be hungry rather than letting Christ’s brother go empty handed in this great misery.” So the elder gave the poor person two loafs of bread and kept one for himself and stood up to pray then sat down to eat. Suddenly another person knocked on the door asking for food, at that moment the elder’s thoughts bothered him as he will be left hungry, but he quickly took the one loaf of bread left and gave it to the person who was asking for the food while saying: “I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ my Lord and that if I fed His poor son in this miserable time that the Lord will feed me from His blessings.” And the elder person stayed like that for three days without food but still thankful to the Lord.

While the elder was doing his service at night, a voice came to him from heaven and told him: “Because you have fulfilled my command, denied yourself and preferred and fed the poor people over yourself, there will be no more price increase during your life on earth.” When the sun rose up the next day, the elder found in front of his door many camels carrying many rewards so he glorified the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom said: “Do not think that our money would be decreased or wasted when we give alms to the poor from it. But rather, it will increase tremendously. The person who puts his money in the hands of the Lord Christ will protect it from all evil as no one would dare to grasp it from the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. If the Creator gives without getting, then how much He would give if He gets.”

With giving we obtain happiness and healing:

- † The psalmist said: “A good man deals graciously and lens; He will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he will never be shaken; The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever; His horn will be exalted with honour” Psalm 112:5-9. Also in 2 Corinthians 9:9 “As it is written: ‘He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.’”
- † The wise Solomon says that you will gain the blessing of giving even if many years past by it: “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.” Ecclesiastes 11:1
- † Giving saves from sickness and its pain: “Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, And he will be blessed on the earth; You

will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.” Psalm 41:1-3

- † Also, whoever gives the poor, neither that person nor the person’s family would be in need as the singer of the psalm says: “The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives. For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand. I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed.” Psalm 37:21-26. Also in “He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses.” Proverbs 28:27
- † One of the blessings of giving is the materialistic wealth. The wise Solomon said: “Honour the LORD with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine” Proverbs 3:9-10. And more than that as the Lord Christ Himself said that the reward is based on the type of work done “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” Luke 6:38
- † The philosopher Seneca: “No one can lead a happy life if he thinks only of himself”

Giving in the parables of the Lord Christ glory to be Him:

- † In the parable of the rich who received the good things during his lifetime and did not help Lazarus who was “desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.” The rich man was crying in Hades while Lazarus was enjoying the bosom of Father Abraham. The rich man asked Father Abraham to send Lazarus so that “he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue” Luke 16. Has that rich person thought of – while he was still on earth – that he would need Lazarus? The situation has changed. This is what happens in eternal life. What would have happened if the rich person knew that by giving up some food then he can enjoy the bosom of Father Abraham?

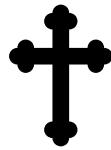
¶ In the parable of Unjust Steward, the Lord Christ praised the Steward's wisdom and commanded us to "make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home" Luke 16:9. These friends are the poor people that we get closer to by giving them vanishing money (unrighteous mammon).

CONCLUSION:

Giving is a sign of exchanging love with the Lord God who cannot be contained by any love from a human. Also, with giving, the person's purity increases and gets cleansed from the love of money while his love to the Lord Christ increases.

It would be great if we can share in all kinds of giving. Share in the giving of the Church's offerings and needs, share in giving the first-giving of all matters that we gain, and share in giving the vows in the case the Lord hears our prayers for specific requests.

The blessings of giving are many. We have mentioned some of them in this booklet. We hope that our dear reader would read them again and enjoy these blessings in their practical lives.



ATTACKS AGAINST THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, “Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.” He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.” I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’” Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are those who put their trust in Him.

-Psalm 2

INTRODUCTION:

In the last week of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth in the flesh, He introduced us to the wonderful dialogue between Him and the Father in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John, and the only request repeated three times during this dialogue was, “That they may all may be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us” (John 17:21).

Also in the Lord’s Christ conversation with St. Peter, He said to him, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church” (Matt. 16:18). So the Lord Christ said “I will build My church” because He wished for it to become one church and not many churches and denominations. As St. Luke the Physician mentions in the Book of Acts, “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32).

St. Paul the Apostle in his epistle to the Ephesians requested that we preserve this oneness for he says, “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is

above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:3). Thus, the Lord Christ and the apostles after Him desired that the church may become one, but what have humans done? They tore the church to many denominations and sects like they divided Christ’s garment, and desecrated the image of the church, the bride of Christ, and every individual began to establish a church with a new name and new values. In this booklet, we will discuss some of these cults, their doctrines, and beliefs.

We pause with an important question: is it possible for the body of Christ to be divided, and does this mean that the personality of Christ also becomes divided? The truth is that the division is not in the Body of Christ, but this modern division is as a result of a division occurring in the human nature that has become blinded with sin. Therefore, what leads to division is the deficient in understanding the Christian doctrines, and its reason is the interference of the human ego and pride. Most of the biggest heretics in the church were fierce fighters of heresies who they fell into heresy while fighting heresies. An example is Arius, the priest of Alexandria and Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople who was known as the “fisher of heresies” but he, like others, fell into heresy because of pride, ignorance, and distance from the work of grace.

For this reason, on its way to unity, the church must follow Christ in all His attributes; just as the Lord Christ and the Father are One, similarly, the church is one. The Lord asks from us this unity on the basis that He is the Head, and it is not possible that He be the Head unless the body is one. Also, the unity that He asks must begin with inclusive prayer that is not exclusive, because unity without prayer and without Divine presence is no more than an idea or a topic.

We desire to see, with the Spirit of God, one church with one faith, one spirit, and one heart and despite all the difficulties, we believe that with love and humility the Holy Spirit is able to grant us the unity of faith and spirit. In the Divine Liturgy, the first request after the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Lord, we say, “That we may become one body and one spirit, and may have a share and an inheritance with all the saints who have pleased Thee since the beginning, Remember O Lord, the peace of Thine One, Only, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, Orthodox Church of God”.

The importance of the topic, “Attacks against the Lord Jesus Christ” goes back to the multiplicity of cults and denominations and their direct and indirect attacks on the personality of Christ, our beliefs, and the values by which we live. What is our reaction towards them?

Christianity is a religion founded on the right faith by our Lord Jesus Christ

We say in the Orthodox Creed about the Lord Jesus:

“We believe in One Lord: Jesus Christ, 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 the third day He rose from the dead, according to the Scriptures. Ascended into the heavens, 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.”

AND IT IS CLEAR FROM THE ORTHODOX CREED THAT THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS:

- † The Incarnate God.
- † The Beloved Son of God.
- † He is the Hypostases of the Son in the Holy Trinity.
- † Faith in the sin of Adam which is inherited by his sons.
- † The faith that Jesus Christ in His human and divine nature sacrificed Himself on the Cross to grant atonement for the original sin.

AND WE FIND LOTS OF EVIDENCE IN THE HOLY BIBLE THAT SUPPORTS THIS FAITH, WE MENTION SOME VERSES:

- † “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 through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” **John 1:1-3**
- † “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**
- † “And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.” **1 John 4:3**
- † “Far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” **Ephesians 1:21**

- † “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” **Colossians 2:9**
- † “And since the beginning of Christianity, Satan has come forth with all his strength to attack the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Lord Jesus prophesized, “He who is not with Me is against Me...” (**Matthew 12:30**)

In this booklet, we will attempt, with the blessing of our Lord Jesus and the counsel of the Holy Spirit, to talk about this important topic: “The Attacks against the Lord Jesus Christ” through covering the following points:

- † Satan is the leader of the attacks against the Lord Jesus Christ... and he uses other helpers.
- † One of the most obvious attacks from Satan is transforming religion into a philosophy.
- † The attack against the Lord Jesus Christ during His presence on earth in the flesh.
- † The continuity of the attacks on the Lord Jesus Christ throughout the centuries.
- † Modern attacks on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- † How do we confront these attacks against the Lord Jesus?
- † Conclusion.

SATAN IS THE LEADER OF THE ATTACKS AGAINST THE LORD JESUS CHRIST... AND HE USES OTHER HELPERS

There are various types of wars from Satan against man. In some wars, he fights man a light war or heavy war, or he fights him through deceiving brethren, evil people, or an evil environment surrounding him; we call them “the helpers of devils” and “his whole army”. For this reason, the church teaches us to pray in the Thanksgiving Prayer, “All envy, all temptation, and all the works of Satan, the counsel of wicked men, and the rising up of enemies hidden and manifest, take them away from us and from Your people.”

All these fables and heresies, from which humanity has suffered, are the work of Satan coming from his thoughts along with all these various beliefs amongst which are many controversies. Blasphemy is also from the work of Satan. Satan does not work alone, for he has helpers from his army of demons, and helpers which are

human as well; these can include people who are your loved ones, relatives, accomplices, or strangers.

Satan spoke through the mouths of some people at the cross saying to the Lord, “If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matt 27:40). The wars of the devil remain until now against Christ, as the devil continues to speak through the tongues of people who have doubts about the divinity of Christ, glory be to Him.

Satan uses your relatives, as it was said “A man’s enemies will be those of his own household” (Matt 10:36). He can approach one of your beloved ones with advice that destroys your life, makes them stand in the way of your spiritual work, against your consecration, against your worship, or he can use them to mock you. Therefore, be on your guard.

The helpers of Satan are bad company. As the Holy Bible says, “Bad company corrupts good habits” (1 Cor. 15:33). Thus, put before you the first psalm and you will not walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

All the instruments of unrighteousness, the causes of offenses, the blasphemous philosophers, all preachers of blasphemy, all promoters of doubts, and all those who cause evil are under the leadership of Satan. As a result, David the prophet and his men cried out, “O Lord, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithopel into foolishness” (2 Samuel 15:31). The counsel which Ahithopel brought forth for Absalom in his revolt against his father David was very harmful for David and his men. So it is our duty to pray at all times that God may protect us from helpers of Satan.

† “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world” (1 John 4:1-3).

Satan was one of the angels that were powerful in might, and after he fell he did not lose his powerful nature, but lost his purity. Therefore, the Apostle Peter described him as a “roaring lion” (1Peter 5:8).

ONE OF THE MOST OBVIOUS ATTACKS FROM SATAN IS TRANSFORMING RELIGION INTO A PHILOSOPHY

† The Lord Jesus desired that religion becomes spirit and life. That is why He said, “The words that I speak to you are Spirit and life.” (John 6:63). We understand the spirit of the word and we transform it into life within us. In this way, religion becomes a way to purify the heart, and a guide for attachment to God so that man may have eternal life. “I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Satan desires to ruin religion over arguments and debates. He wants the mind to take the place of the spirit, and argument in the place of application and practice. Religious life becomes merely intellectual. The first instance of falling into sin was due to reliance on the human mind when it comes to issues relating to worship and the relationship with God. The devil made our forefathers fall for intellectual arguments, for he said to them, “Has God indeed said ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’”, as if the knowledge of God is a philosophy which is studied and analyzed to become merely a curriculum for study and not a life to be lived. “I did not with excellence of speech or of wisdom...”- and “My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1Cor. 2:1-4), “not with wisdom of words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of no effect” (1 Cor. 1:17). So, focusing on the Cross of Christ is a spiritual work which cannot be fully achieved while being occupied with philosophy and argument. Also, our teacher St. Peter says in his second epistle, “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ ... knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:16-22).

The existence of heresies is an intellectual, satanic game to hinder the spiritual work. The spiritual depth that the church lived during the age of Martyrdom throughout the first three centuries, in the beginning of the fourth century, and that had begun with monasticism in the third century, flourishing in the fourth and fifth centuries with all that it contains from love to God and spiritual guidance from the sayings of the fathers... all of this provoked the envy of the Satan, and he wanted to occupy the world with controversy and argument over the span of two long centuries. Therefore, heresies of Arius, Apollinarius, Sibellius, Macedonius, Nestorius, Eutyches, and others came about. All this was in a focused period of time that confused and exhausted the world intellectually. The controversy about the divinity of the Son and His nature circulated in the streets even amongst the common folks.

Satan inspired certain views in heretics and interpretations of verses in the Holy Bible, and the fathers of the church were occupied with them for a long time, answering the heresies and fables. Satan wishes to occupy us our whole life with the intellectual dialogue and the answers.

His plan remains, of sending to us in every generation someone who will try to transform religion to controversy, argument, thought, dialogue, and answers. Through this, Satan wishes to hinder the spiritual work from one aspect, and provoke division and breakups from another aspect in the name of religion and in the name of defending the doctrine. When the church becomes denominations and sects, Satan rejoices. Those who fall in heresies are gains for Satan, and those who are weary from doubts are also gains for him. But there are ones who are awake and on guard, these are children of God who stick more and more to God, so that they may unite with their God and heavenly Father.

We thank God for the fact that the fathers who answered these heresies were spiritual. We read for example ‘The Incarnation of the Word’ by St. Athanasius and find it to be a spiritual, theological, and doctrinal book. Many people were occupied with thinking about these heresies, and we thank God that the heretical movement and the response to it in the 4th and 5th centuries were side by side to the monastic movement and its spiritual guidance; this created a balance with the intellectual revolutions. The response to heretics was necessary for the preservation of the faith but the occupation with it was a hindrance to the church. Yet, God transformed it into good by deepening the faith in the hearts, and by the disappearance of doubts.

Even in the pure spiritualities, Satan attempts to transform it into philosophy. For example, he could change prayer into an intellectual curriculum which has intellectual rules. Also, he might do the same with monasticism and make it into schools that fight intellectually between solitude, work, meditation, and service. The matter turns into discussion and fighting, all which the devil rejoices in.

Even in the prayer of “Our Father”, the devil creates a dispute surrounding the translations. Some people when they pray they say “our bread is sufficient” and others say “bread that is for tomorrow” and the translations conflict and our thoughts are mixed up. Instead of meditations on the prayer, there is argument and debate to determine which translation is correct!

The same situation occurs in the Divine Liturgy also: Satan wishes to destroy the mediations and spiritualities so he provokes a war of translations. Inside the church, it is very easy for him to inspire new ideas. He makes some enthusiastic with something new, so he presents a new interpretation or a belief that is different from

the general understanding, making the one who holds this new interpretation say that all the ones before him were wrong. Instead of using the religious thinking of love and purity of heart, the devil turns it into a dispute and war between the devout because of individual thought, understanding, and the claim by each group that they are defending the doctrine, and that they are the only ones honest in their faith. Or at least, the devil hinders the spiritual people from their work through their occupation with the negative and their response to it; since if they don't do this, the atmosphere fills with doubts and confusion.

But the devil is not able to defeat the children of God, "You are from 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). All these fights and doubts make the children of God hold on more to their Christ and their Bible and their holy faith as a reaction and as a drive towards good, far from all the evil of Satan and his lies. "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."; Christianity remains and grows, and all these lies are effaced.

THE ATTACK AGAINST THE LORD JESUS CHRIST DURING HIS PRESENCE ON EARTH IN THE FLESH.

The devil and his helpers have fought God and those who tried to come close to Him ever since the beginning of creation. Ever since the moment of the incarnation of God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ and His dwelling in our world, the devil started a new, strong war against the Lord Jesus Christ and all of His disciples and all those who desire to enjoy His Kingdom.

THE ATTEMPT TO KILL CHRIST... THE REASON BEING THE FEELINGS OF PRIDE FROM SATAN

This was clear from the action of Herod the King, who assumed that Christ is an earthly king when he heard from the wise men and asked "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" In the end, he sent and killed the children of Bethlehem from two years old and under, desiring to kill Christ among them. And until now, man does not wish that any one should rule over him or that anyone competes with him, and he thinks about heavenly matters in an earthly intellectual way. What is the result? Killing, the loss of peace, and lack of benefit from Christ. This remains one of the ways of Satan in his attacks against Christ.

THE ATTEMPT OF CREATING DOUBT ABOUT THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST... THE REASON BEING THE DENIAL OF THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST BY SATAN.

The devil spoke on the mouths of some people on the Cross saying to the Lord, “If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” (Matt 27:40). Until now, he creates doubts about the divinity of Christ and His divine abilities: if Christ is the Son of God and He came to the world, why are all these modern disasters happening in the world? And why is He not preventing them? And how was He a God and He took flesh? And he creates doubts in everything using the limited human intellect that is unable to comprehend the divine love and the holy mysteries. The result is heresy and false denominations.

ACCUSING CHRIST THAT HE IS BEELZEBUB THE RULER OF DEMONS... THE REASON BEING THE MIXING OF ISSUES AND THE MOVING AWAY OF PEOPLE FROM FAITH IN CHRIST.

† “The one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind, and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, “Could this be the Son of David?” Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, “This fellow does not cast our demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons.” (Matt 12:22-23).

Mixing issues together and the lack of separation between light and darkness - Christ and Satan - good and evil, makes man lose everything and eliminates the meaning of everything. What would happen if we allow wickedness and sin to interfere in the service at Church? There will be no difference between the church and the world. “If the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?” This makes the devil rejoice, and this same idea of mixing worldly matters with spiritual heavenly matters is the reason for the weakness of many churches and the neglect of faith. This also corrupts the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE DEVIL MADE RELIGION INTO A GROUP OF WORDS WITHOUT PRACTICALITY OR SPIRIT... THIS MAKES MAN UNBELIEVING IN CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR.

† An example of this is what the devil did to the class of Scribes and Pharisees. The Lord Jesus said about them, “The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that, observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. (Matt 23:2-3)

The devil has attempted from the beginning to transform religion into ideas without doing the commandments of God or practical applications. The result is clear in that it did not occur to the Scribes and Pharisees and all those who adopt

this attitude (lack of doing the commandments and practicing the spiritual worship) to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ but they became enemies of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE CONTINUITY OF THE ATTACKS ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES.

Many are the heresies and false religions that launch great attacks against the Lord Christ, and we mention some examples here:

THE ATTACK OF ISLAM AGAINST THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

The doctrine of the church with the differences of its beliefs, Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant, regarding the personality of Jesus Christ and His message, is centered on 5 basic points mentioned in the Christian Orthodox Creed from the Ecumenical Council. These 5 basics are:

- ⊕ The faith in Jesus Christ that He is the Incarnate God
- ⊕ The faith in Jesus Christ that He is the Beloved Son of God
- ⊕ The faith in Jesus Christ that He is the Hypostases of the Son in the Holy Trinity
- ⊕ The faith in Adam's sin which his children inherited
- ⊕ The faith that Jesus Christ, in His divine and human nature has scarified Himself on the cross, atonement for the original sin.

ISLAM DOES NOT ACCEPT ANY OF THESE DOCTRINES: IT REFUTES THEM AND DOES NOT APPROVE OF THEM.

With regards to the doctrine of the Incarnate God, Islam refutes this doctrine with the saying of the Quran:

- ⊕ “In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ the son of Mary.” (Sourah 5, The Table: verse 17)
- ⊕ “They do blaspheme who say: “(Allah) is Christ the son of Mary.”” (Sourah 5, The Table: verse 72)

With regards to Divine Sonship, the Quran refutes this doctrine with the saying of the Quran:

- † “They say: “(Allah) hath begotten a son”: Glory be to Him -Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: everything renders worship to Him.” (Sourah 2, The Cow: verse 116)
- † “To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: When He decreeth a matter, He saith to it: “Be, and it is.” (Sourah 2, The Cow: verse 117)
- † Islam rejects the teaching of St. Paul who said “God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law...” (Galatians 4:4)

With regards to the Holy Trinity, the Quran refutes this doctrine with the saying:

- † “Say not “Trinity”: desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah. Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son.” (Sourah 4, Women: verse 171)
- † “They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One Allah. “(Sourah 5, The Table: verse 73)

With regards to doctrine of Atonement, Islam refutes this doctrine with the saying of the Quran:

- † “Then will no intercession of (any) intercessors profit them” (Sourah 74, The Cloaked One: verse 48)

JEWISH ATTACKS AGAINST THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

This attack can be divided into two:

FIRST: THERE ARE CHRISTIANS WITH A JEWISH NAME AND HEART?

The goal of these individuals is to bind themselves with the old Jewish law, and unite Christianity with Judaism so that the Bible becomes the old law that is complementary. They consider Christ a prophet, or second Moses. They deny or conceal His divine nature and His role as a King and Priest. These Christians, who are Judaic by their nature, are Jews, and they are Christians by name only. They practiced and fulfilled the ritualistic and moral Law of Moses and considered it necessary for them for their salvation, but they do not understand Christianity as a religion that is general, ecumenical, and free from the old law.

SECOND: FROM THE JEWS.

The Jews believe that they are the chosen nation of God and that He gave them special talents and gifts. They reject the fact that Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh. They do not believe the ancestral sin that Adam committed and its inheritance throughout generations. The Jews have become a very small number in the whole world.

ATTACKS OF GNOSTICISM AGAINST THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

In the formation of Gnosticism, many of the Pagans arose and tried to become detached from the past completely and cut themselves off from it, as opposed to Judaic Christians, and from here we can name this type of heresy the “Paganizing Heresy” or the “Gnostic heresy”. The Greek pronunciation is Gnosis meaning “knowledge”. Gnosticism is the philosophical religious attempt that saw it fitting to give itself this name, to express that it does not have the blind faith, but relies on the mind and knowledge. Gnostics put the mind above faith, and philosophy above religion, and they made the independent thought and observer of revelation capable of rejecting what the mind does not except.

Gnosticism did not appear in the church carrying this name until the second century, but its roots and values and teachings were found during the Apostolic Era. There are clear signs in Epistles of the Apostles referring to it, specifically the Epistles to Colossians, 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter, 1 & 2 John, Revelations (in the messages directed to the Bishops of the seven churches).

Gnosticism can be summarized in that it is a philosophical attempt to explain evil and the salvation from it, along with rejecting the Old Testament. It glorifies knowledge more than necessary, and lessens the importance of faith; in this way, it has turned faith into an intellectual knowledge of God. They have tried to interpret the existence of evil through duplicity, or a double existence of creatures: the higher spirit and materialism, or good an evil. As for the salvation of the spirit of man, which is trapped in the physical body, it will be, according to their teachings, either through continual severe ascetic practices or by isolation from all that is material (or physical) as much as possible, or through indulging in all that is sensual (claiming victory over what is sensual by indulging in it). As for their doctrine about Christ, it says that He is an imaginary character, denying His human nature. On this point specifically -denying His humanity- St. John the Apostle referred to it in his first and second epistle, “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh is not of God.” (1 John 4:2-3).

Despite the differences between these types of heresies, in the end, they arrive at a clear denial of the truth in the Bible regarding the incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of the world. These heresies depict Christ as merely a man, or an imaginary personality that is supernatural. They do not confess by any means the true, everlasting union between the divinity and humanity in the personality of Christ. This is the sign that St. John the Apostle placed for those against Christ (1 John 2:23; 4:1-3). They attempt to destroy the foundation of Christianity without opposition; because if Christ is not the Incarnate God, and the Mediator between God and people, then Christianity disappears, drowning in Idolatry, or Judaism.

MODERN ATTACKS ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

† The Alleged Gospel of Judas

This is a simple and summarized idea surrounding this alleged gospel:

† The story of the manuscript.

The story begins during the time of discovery of the manuscript of this alleged gospel in the Coptic language in the early seventies (1972), among the manuscripts of Nag Hammadi. This manuscript was on Papyrus paper, in the form of a Codex notebook, and this means that it dates back to the 3rd century AD. Writing was on papyrus in the form of a Roll in the preceding centuries, while the notebook form (group of papers combined together) started in the 3rd century. It is known that Papyrus was a plant grown on the shore of the Nile and its stem was treated in a special way so that it would turn into a paper for writing... that is why it is called Papyrus, and from it came the English word "paper". It appears that the ancient Egyptians were the first ones to create paper and write on it. After discovering it, some peasants took the manuscript and sold it to traders of antiquities. They took the manuscript and moved with it from place to place seeking the highest price. During this trip, preservation of the papyrus occurred in the storage of one of the banks for many years, so it started to disintegrate. (Notice that Papyrus is just a plant that is subject to effects of exposure). In the end, the manuscript arrived in the hands of scientists, who began to collect it with much effort, to find out in the end that it was "The Gospel of Judas" (allegedly).

† The story of the alleged Gospel of Judas:

In the 2nd century AD, a group of Gnostics (heretics who attacked Christianity and tried to corrupt it) claimed a certain type of “knowledge” wrote the so called “gospels” like “the gospel of Magdalene”, “the gospel of Philip”, “the gospel of Thomas”, and “the gospel of Judas”. The writings occurred in Greek around the year 150 AD, and then came the Coptic translation around 300 AD. This is the manuscript which was found in the seventies.

From the beginning, the church rejected these fake gospels that were invented through Gnostic heretics, and the church did not include them in the canonical Holy Bible, which the church delivered to us generation after generation, from the list of Moratory in the year 150 AD to the canon of St. Athanasius in Nicaea.

Gnostics believe in multiple gods in different degrees, specifically a sect of them named Cainites (referring to Cain, the killer of his brother) who consider the God of the Jews an evil God that punished many righteous people like Cain, and Sodom and Gomorrah, and the children of Korah. As a result, St. Iraneus of Lyons (2nd Century), and St. Athanasius the Apostolic (4th Century) wrote about the fake gospel of Judas, and they rejected it, insisting that it is alleged and full of lies!

The story then was discarded by the church fathers ever since the first centuries, and the manuscript remained hidden in the ground until it was found in the early seventies.

† The most critical aspect of the manuscript

The claim that the Lord Christ took Judas (the traitor) aside and said that He would inform him of the Kingdom of Heaven without letting the other disciples know is the most critical aspect of the manuscript. The secret was that Judas would hand the Lord Christ to the Jews to crucify Him, and in this way Christ removes from Himself, “the man that is attached to Him, and His spirit is released from him (similar to the thought of Nestorius). According to what this manuscript alleges, the Lord Christ said to Judas, that He will make him above all the apostles, and that generations will declare Judas as a traitor, but “it’s ok” for he will fulfill a necessary agreement for our salvation by delivering Christ to the Jews.

FALSENESS OF THE MANUSCRIPT.

We are able to prove the falseness of this claim (the claim of the agreement of the Lord Jesus with Judas about His deliverance to the Jews) by using logic, and both the Old and New Testaments.

† First: Logically

How can we be convinced that the Lord Christ would choose one only from His disciples, to explain to him the secrets of the kingdom, and the others remain in ignorance and blindness?! What is the wisdom in that? How can the Lord Christ leave humanity and the church in the delusion that Judas is a traitor, when Judas' deliverance of the Lord Christ occurred through an agreement with Christ? Would God deceive His children for many centuries?! What is the wisdom in this as well?

Why did Judas hang himself after his deliverance of the Lord Christ when he fulfilled his agreement with the Lord, with all faithfulness, according to what this manuscript alleges?! He should have been happy with the fulfillment of his agreement with Christ, and he should have waited for his reward and promise from Christ that he would be “above all”!!!

† Second: From the New Testament.

It is clear from the dialogue of the Lord Christ about Judas that he would deliver Him as an act of betrayal, and He warned him about this occasion several times until the moment of betrayal. He said that he will perish because of this betrayal in eternal condemnation... here are some proofs:

“You are clean but not all of you. For He knows who would betray Him; therefore, He said, “You are not all clean.” (**John 13:10-11**)

“And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” (**John 13:26-27**)

“The devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, to betray Him.” (**John 13:2**)

“And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees,

came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, ‘Whom are you seeking?’ they answered Him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ And Judas who betrayed Him, also stood with them.” (**John 18:2-5**)

“Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?’” (**John 6:70**)

“Then one of the twelve called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?’ And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.” (**Matt 26:14-16**)

“Now as they were eating, He said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.’ And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, ‘Lord is it I?’ He answered and said, ‘He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man if he had not been born.’ Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, ‘Rabbi, is it I?’ He said to him, ‘You have said it’” (**Matt 26:21-25**)

“And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying ‘Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.’ Immediate he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend why have you come?’” (**Matt 26:47-50.** **Also review Mark 17:14-21, 43-46).**

“Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought aback the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” And they said, “What is that to us? You see to it!” Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood.” And they consulted together and bought with them the potter’s file, to bury strangers in. Therefore that filed has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver,

the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the LORD directed me.”
(Matt 27:3-10).

“But Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’
(Luke 22:48).

“Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”
(John 17:12)

“Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.”
(John 19:11)

“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about an hundred and twenty), and said, “Men and brethren, this scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; For he was numbered with us and had obtained a part in this ministry.” (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it;” and, ‘Let another take his office’”
(Acts 1:15-20).

Therefore, it is clear from the New Testament that Judas meant to betray Christ and deliver Him for a cheap price, and that the Lord Jesus warned him repeatedly from this, and rebuked him during the moment of arrest. It is also clear that the Lord Jesus called him “Satan”, and “son of perdition”, and that “it is better for him if he had not been born.” Given all this evidence from the Bible how can we accept this alleged agreement between the Lord Christ and Judas to betray Him, and that the Lord choose him to know the secrets of the kingdom, and for him to become above all the apostles?!

THIRD: FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT.

There are many prophecies about the deliverance of the Lord Jesus by Judas, in the spirit of betrayal, in exchange for silver, and that he will perish in eternal condemnation. Here are some:

- † “And if he comes to see me, he speaks lies; His heart gathers iniquity to itself; When he goes out, he tells it. All who hate me whisper together against me; Against me they devise my hurt. “An evil disease,” they say, “clings to him. And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more.” Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” **Psalm 41:6-9**
- † “But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together …He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; He has broken his covenant … The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn with swords.” **Psalm 55:13, 14, 20, 21**
- † “Set a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand when he is judged, let him be found guilty, and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few, and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.... Let there be none to extend mercy to him.... That He may cut off the memory of them from the earth… As he loved cursing, so let it come to him; As he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment, so let it enter his body like water, and like oil into his bones. Let it be to him like the garment which covers him, and for a belt with which he girds himself continually.” **Psalm 109:6-19**
- † “Then I said to them, ‘If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.’ So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter’- that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter.” **Zechariah 11:12-13**

Note:

St. Matthew mentioned this prophecy in his gospel, and he associated it with what was said by Jeremiah the prophet. This is because the big book which combines the books of the prophets is named, “The Book of Jeremiah”, but inside of it, he includes many of the books of the prophets and one of them is Zechariah. Similarly, we say about the psalms that they are the psalms of David when many of the psalms are by authors other than David. The “Palms of David” is therefore the name on the cover of the book, but inside, it contains the psalms of David and also others, even though David wrote most of the psalms. In the same way, we say, “The Book of Jeremiah” (on the cover), and inside of it we find the prophecies of Jeremiah, Zechariah, and others.

Our teacher Matthew said that “Judas hung himself”, while our teacher Luke in the Book of Acts mentioned that Judas, “falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out.” This is because, when Judas choked himself, with his body hanging on a tree, the rope was broken, he fell, and all his entrails gushed out.

This was the end of Judas the betrayer who chose for himself this sad path, even though if he repented, Christ would have accepted him. He perished because of despair in the love of Christ and His forgiveness, even though he accompanied Him in the ministry and miracles, and was introduced to His divine love. He committed this sin with his complete will, and did not respond to all the warnings, so he became responsible for his own eternal condemnation which the Lord Christ assured for us.

May God protect us from this destructive sin; how many new examples of Judas have sold Christ for money, position, or evil desire? May everyone repent before the time passes, and the Grace of God surrounds us all.

SUMMARY OF THE DE VINCI CODE NOVEL

The Da Vinci Code novel was published for the American writer Dan Brown in 2003. It is a fictional mystery novel, that is also totally imaginary and based on false information which are considered to be lies. Through mixing the truths with lies, and facts with imaginary matters in this business production, the novel tries to prove that:

The Lord Christ was married to Mary Magdalene through which “Sarah” was born as their daughter, and that Mary Magdalene’s descendants are royals and are still alive till this day. The novel also tries to prove that in 1099 a religious organization was formed (known as Priory of Sion) to protect the facts and documents that Christians want to hide. One of Priory of Sion’s most well-known member, was the Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). Vinci is a small village in Italy to which Leonardo da Vinci’s roots are from. In 1975, newly discovered documents proved that Leonardo da Vinci belonged to the Sion group. According to the novel, the artist drew the Last Supper drawing without the Holy Grail, and he also drew Mary Magdalene on the right hand of Christ. The Sion group have claimed that they know the whereabouts of the Holy Grail.

Then, the novel claims that another Catholic group called “Opus Dei” was established to fight the Sion group since the Sion group was trying to reveal the wrong-doings of Christianity. The Sion group claims that ever since Emperor Constantine was baptized he changed Christianity tremendously. During his era,

the number of followers of Christianity had doubled and a struggle started between Christians and Pagans to the extent that the empire was shaken by a potential division. As a result, Emperor Constantine decided to unite all the religions under one by combining the signs and dogmas of the Pagan's religion with the roots of Christianity. Consequently, the result of combining Christianity with Paganism created false beliefs in Christianity, one being that the Lord Jesus Christ is the God incarnate as a human even though He is a normal man in the "original" Christianity who married Mary Magdalene before his death. The Sion group had followed their beliefs and was not affected by what Emperor Constantine had done; they say that this is what made Christianity take the wrong road that it is on today. The writer of the novel, Dan Brown, continues to create imaginary stories and claims that the Bible is false with all its contents, in addition to referencing some verses from the gospels that the Church does not recognize (as they are false and not true).

WHO IS THE AUTHOR DON BROWN?

Dan Brown is an American writer who had not had a famous reputation before his last novel "The da Vinci Code", although he has been especially known to attack and criticize the Vatican in his novel "Angels and Demons". Almost in all his novels, he claims that there exist secret groups that know the "true facts" which are contradictory to the official "lies". The author has a close and special relation to a Sion group even though he claims he is Christian.

The author sees Christ as a prophet whose roots come from King David the prophet and that he is a descendent of royals (Kings of Israel). Mary Magdalene was also a Jew and hence the daughter of the alleged marriage to Christ, is also a Jew and a royal descendent as well. Based on many of the Jewish critics, the author is a Jew who has created a magnificent novel.

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST DID NOT MARRY MARY MAGDALENE AS THE DA VINCI CODE MOVIE CLAIMS

To support his claim, Brown appeals to two of the Gnostic (Apocryphal) Gospels: The Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary. These two gospels, among many more, have been rejected by the early Church Fathers for their unorthodox content regarding the message of the "Good News". They are considered non-canonical and heretical.

What is intriguing is that even these Apocryphal gospels do not claim that Christ was married to Mary Magdalene. This was clearly a personal interpretation of the author to add some zest to this novel.

Once again, Brown offers his own interoperation of the gospel of Philip. On page 246, the excerpt reads: “the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene.”

He claims that the Aramaic word for “companion” literally meant “spouse”. According to Aramaic scholars, this is not true. And, even more importantly, the Gnostic gospel of Phillip was not written in Aramaic, it was written in Coptic!

Moreover, the authors of the New Testament regularly depict the Church as “the bride of Christ” (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:21-33; Rev 21:9-10). This metaphor would never have developed if a flesh-and-blood “Mrs. Jesus” was living down the street. Only if Christ was celibate would the Church have come to be depicted metaphorically as His bride.

We do not have any reference from the Church’s elderly fathers indicating that the Lord Jesus Christ was married. Even during the early centuries, when the Divinity of Christ was being attacked, no one claimed that the Lord Christ was ever married or that he ever had any children. We do not even have any record of any defense from the early fathers of the Church on this topic which indicates that this marriage claim was never a subject matter of discussion, or an issue in the first place.

Additionally, and to keep matters simple, we can close this discussion with just one verse. In the first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, St. Paul says: “Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?” (1 Corinthians 9:5). So if the Lord Christ was married, wouldn’t the argument have been stronger had St. Paul used the Lord Christ as the reference rather than using all those witnesses from the disciples? Additionally, no referencing of the Lord Christ being married had ever been mentioned in the New Testament, nor was there any prophecy about that in the Old Testament.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE BIBLE BEING MODIFIED AS “THE DA VINCI CODE” NOVEL CLAIMS THAT THE BIBLE IS FALSE.

The Bible is not the product of man, but is rather God inspired. Biblical inspiration may be defined as God’s superintending of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities and writing styles under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the result being a perfect and errorless recoding of the exact message God desired to give to man.

† “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

There are more than 5,000 different ancient Greek manuscripts containing all the New Testament that have survived to our time. These are written on different materials:

- † Chester Beatty Papyri contains most of the NT writings is dated AD 250.
- † Older Papyri, Codex Vaticanus and Codes Siniaticus.
- † The Bodmer Papyri contains most of John and dates AD 200.
- † Rylands Papyri found in Egypt, containing a fragment of John and dates AD 130.

In 2 Peter 1:16 we read, “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

Additionally, the entire New Testament can be reconstructed from quotations in the writings of the Early (Ante-Nicene) Church Fathers (95-400 AD).

Writer	Gospels	Acts	Pauline	Catholic	Revelation	Totals
Justin Martyr	268	10	43	6	3	330
Irenaeus	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement (Alex)	1,107	44	1,127	207	11	2,496
Origen	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,922
Tertullian	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
Grand Totals	19,368	1,352	14,035	870	664	36,289

*-Taken from Josh McDowell, the New Evidence that demands a Verdict, p. 43.

A FINAL THOUGHT: HOW DID WE OBTAIN THE HOLY BIBLE AS WE KNOW IT TODAY?

It was precisely when certain writings appeared claiming to be Apostolic, but were unrecognized by the Church as authentic, that efforts were made to make “an approval list” that is the “canon” of the New Testament.

Between 170 AD and 220 Ad the four Gospels and St. Paul’s epistles were formally recognized as ‘canonical’, and within a century after that, the New Testament as we know it today was formally recognized as the “canonical text”. It should be noted that what made the books canonical was their inspiration by the Holy Spirit and their use in the life of the early Church as “inspired text”.

This acknowledgement of an official “canon” might never had taken place if other rewritings had not appeared which claimed to be written by Apostles but were unknown to the Church in its worship and teaching. These false books are the books referred to by some as the “Lost books of The Bible” or ‘Apocrypha’.

The majority of these Apocryphal books were intended to distort the message of Christ. These deceptive writings were tainted by the heresy of “Gnosticism”.

In summary, the Holy Bible was written BY the Church and IN the Church and FOR the Church within the confinement of Holy Tradition. Consequently, it is the Church which recognizes what is canonical through its use in worship and teaching. The Holy Bible and Church are inseparable.

CONCLUSION

The attacks of Satan against Jesus Christ are repetitive and known from the beginning until now. These attacks take different forms but they have the same foundation and meanings.

Transforming religion into philosophy, argument, and debate is one of the clearest wars that Satan wages against the Lord Christ and His Kingdom. He wishes that intellect would take the place of the spirit, and argument the place of practice. This is a concept that led to the fall of many.

The right faith in the Lord Christ comes as a result of the work of grace inside the simple person that leads him to the true faith in Christ. “No one can say that Christ is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” “You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes”

What is the result of their lack of faith in Christ and their attacks against Him?

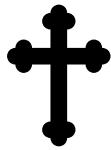
- † Lack of faith in the true God
- † Lack of enjoyment of heavenly life while on earth, “Taste and see how good the Lord is”
- † Falling into many sins as result of rejection of God.

It is the will of the Lord Jesus Christ that all may become one. Would we accept one another as brothers and sisters so that we may open our arms to embrace those who are in disagreement with us? Help us Lord and empower us to work together for the unity of the church and the glory of Your Holy Name.

References:

Books of H.H. Pope Shenouda III
Books of H.G. Bishop Moussa
Books of H.G., the late Bishop Youannes





LET US PRAISE THE LORD THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

INTRODUCTION:

Singing to the Lord and praising His name is evidence that someone is thanking God, is loving Him, and would like to express his or her love to Him. We all know that God loves us all and no one of us can comprehend the depth of God's love for us. Indeed, He loved us to the extent that He died for us on the Cross that we may live; but not everyone can benefit from God's love. Only the people who can exchange love with God and enter into an actual relationship with God can benefit from his love. These people can then benefit from the blood of the Lord on the Cross, and His love for them; they can enjoy a truly joyful life and enjoy eternal life as well. St. John the Beloved expressed this by saying that "we love Him because He loved us first". But, how can we say that we love God?

SACRIFICE OF PRAISE:

We love God if we express this love in terms of certain actions so our love becomes a practical love to the Lord. To express this, there are various ways that show our love to God. One way is to listen to His commandments in the Bible and respect them because He said: "If you love me, you obey my commandments". So we consider His commandments to be very important for us and proceed in our lives according to these commandments. Another way to express our love to God is to help the needy and the poor people, to visit the sick people, and to be merciful to our brothers and sisters who are in need of anything. As He said in Mathew 25:40: "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." Indeed, it is great evident that we love God when we show love to His brothers and sisters, the needy and the poor.

Another way to express God's love is to sing for Him and to praise His name. This shows our hearts being filled with God's love so we express this by our lips when we sing for God. The Holy Spirit, through the Holy Bible, shows us that praising is a type of sacrifice when it is from our hearts and expressed through our lips; it becomes true testament of our love to God. In Hebrews, chapter 13:15-16, it is said:

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” Let us always offer God the sacrifices of praise which are the fruit that our mouths produce that confess His name. In these two verses, St. Paul is talking about two types of sacrifices and each of them is evidence for our love to God. The first type is a sacrifice is sharing what we have with others. It becomes a beautiful sacrifice to God, helping the needy. The other type of sacrifice, he called a ‘Sacrifice of Praise’ to God. The latter one is going to be the focus subject of this booklet.

THE LASTING SACRIFICE IS THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

St. Paul said: “Therefore by Him, let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise”. In the verse, the words ‘by Him’ refers to Christ who lives in you by your faith and by your love of Him. The word ‘continually’ means that praising God should be a continuous thing, not only once a month or when we come to church. We are always supposed to thank God and praise His name, as David said: “Seven times every day I praise Your holy name”. When St. Paul says the ‘sacrifice of praise’, the word ‘sacrifice’ means that it is supposed to be our very best.

Do you remember Cain and Abel? “Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering” (Genesis 4:4).

Abel provided the best that he can offer to God, while Cain hastily gave just anything as an offering or sacrifice to God, not his best. This indicates to us that we are supposed to praise the name of God and do our best in this practice. The Lord God has no need for anything because He is the giver of everything and every good thing. In fact, we are the ones who will benefit when we offer our best to God. This is because it is such a small token that cannot match the Lord’s blessings on us, and at the same time this sacrifice pleases God’s heart. As a simple example, a father is happy with the gifts that his children give to him on his birthday to express their love, even though the source for purchasing those gifts comes from him. Therefore, we need to offer the sacrifice of praise to God from the heart, continually, and sincerely.

St. Paul explains to us what this sacrifice of praise is to God. He says that it is ‘the fruit of our lips’, so from our hearts, because we love God we are singing for Him, and it shows on our lips. Praising God is a symbol of thanking God. The heart that praises God, gives thanks to His name at all times, thanking Him for even the smallest thing: thanking Him for bringing us to the church, thanking Him for giving us our meals, thanking Him for giving us the ability to breathe, when so many people cannot breathe easily. We must thank Him for everything. At many

times we have taken things for granted, however we must remember those things and thank God continually, praising His name continually, and sing for Him continually as an expression of our love to Him.

Praising God is the language of the angels and all the heavenly powers. The reader of the Book of Revelations will find that angels and archangels are praising the Lord, praising His name. We actually borrow some of the expressions that they use in praising God in our daily praise. For example, when we say ‘Glory to be God in the Highest, and peace on earth and goodwill towards men’, we borrowed this from the praise of the angels when they visited the shepherds at the time of the birth of Christ, and they praised the name of God by this song. We try to learn from the angels to sing for God and to express our love to Him. If we truly would like to have a place in heaven, we have to train ourselves from now to thank God, to praise His name, and to sing for Him. Imagine that you are going to a different country. Wouldn’t you need to know the language of that country? Indeed you would. In the same manner we want to learn the language of the new place we are going, we need to learn the language of the new place God has prepared for us in Heaven. When we love God and strive to be in the eternal place He has for us, we should also begin training ourselves here on earth on the language of the heavens. The heavenly language is one of praises to the Lord, praising His Holy Name and singing for Him. As we strive to master the heavenly language, when God opens the doors to paradise we will spend the rest of eternity singing and praising His name.

Many of the saints of the church have enjoyed the life of praise, and the life of singing. Even our holy Mother, St. Mary the Virgin, who is our role model in everything in the church, enjoyed the life of praise. Everyone knows her song of praise when she visited St. Elizabeth and she praised the name of God, while St. Elizabeth was praising St. Mary, and saying: “But why is this granted to me, that the mother of My Lord should come to me?” (Luke Chapter 1). But St. Mary, instead of accepting the praise herself said: “My soul glorifies the Lord, and my soul rejoices in God my Savior...” (Luke 1:46-47).

Many of the saints of the church praised God. We remember David the prophet and king, who wrote many of the beautiful psalms. Many of those psalms expressed his gratitude to God, and his love for the Lord. Those psalms became, for us, prayers, and those psalms are very deep in their spirituality. They show clearly how David loved God, and we, in the same way when we sing with these psalms, we truly express our love to God as well.

We also remember Mariam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea by the strong hand of the Lord, Mariam lead all of the women in praising God and singing and thanking Him because His mercy endures forever. Indeed, we enjoy a beautiful and a joyful life when we sing for the Lord, and when we thank His holy name at all times.

I would like to write for you a quote from St. John Chrysostom, as he commented on St. Paul's writing in Hebrew 13:15 "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name". In response, St. John Chrysostom said: "Of what kind of sacrifice does he speak? ['He' refers to St. Paul of course]. The fruit of the lips giving thanks to His name. The Jews brought sheep, and calves, and gave them to the priest. Let us bring none of these, but thanksgiving and in everything let us imitate the Christ. Let us bear all things thankfully, be it in poverty, be it disease, be it anything else whatever giving thanks," he says, "to His name."'" So St. John Chrysostom is advising us to be thankful, as the church also teaches us to thank God at all times, in every condition, and in whatever condition. He is saying, 'be it in poverty', whether we are in need of money, 'be it in diseases', whether we are suffering from some diseases, or anything else, we should thank God at all times. When we thank God at all times we must realize that God does not need this but it is us who benefit when we thank God, to help and strengthen us. It is with no doubt that He is going to help us in our difficulties as He knows of our need and gives us more than what we ask or think. This is how much God loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son so whoever believes in Him shall not perish. The reader of the Book of Acts will find several times many of the apostles were in prisons, but they spent their time in prison praising God and singing while the other prisoners were hearing them and were astonished at their courage.

This is why our church is a church of singing, a church of praising God. The psalmody book, which is used several times in the church such as before the vespers, before the morning raising of incense, during the midnight praise, and several times during the church days or the liturgies in the church, is also used to praise and sing the name of the Lord. Not only does the psalmody book contain praises to the Lord, but there are also many other books within the church that contain many hymns. Our church is very rich in hymns and in songs of praise that are very rich in their expression of love to the Lord, His cross, and to His sacrifice for us. Many of these hymns are very deep and as we sing them we come closer and closer to God. You may also have observed that when we sing the popular hymn "Through the intercession of St. Mary the Virgin, Lord forgive us our sins", at the end of this song, we say "the mercy of peace and the sacrifice of praise". 'Mercy of peace' is a grant for us from God that He gives us peace. He gives us

peace and we give Him back what? What do we give Him? We give Him the sacrifice of praise. We praise His name. That's all we can do, as the children of God. We can sing for Him; in return for His peace to us, we give Him back the sacrifice of praise. We sing for Him and praise His holy name. One thing we should remember to do while we are attending the Divine Liturgy every time is to participate by singing in the Divine Liturgy. The world 'liturgy' means prayer of the whole congregation. So there are portions in the Divine Liturgy that are dedicated for the congregation to sing, those portions are supposed to be sung loudly from our lips, and not whispered in silence. We should sing loudly and learn the hymns of the liturgy and sing them with the deacons. This way we can participate more in the Divine Liturgy and spiritually connect with the Divine Liturgy through the offering and the sacrifice of praise. Remember when we come to the Divine Liturgy, the Lord is giving us the best that He has: the Body and Blood on the altar of the Lord Christ. This is the very best that God can give us, to be united with Him this way. Now, in return for this gift that He has given us, one thing we can do when we come to the Divine Liturgy is to stand in full respect. We don't talk to one another, we don't laugh, we don't joke, we don't move around, and we don't go back and forth in the church. We stand still and participate in the hymns and offer the sacrifice of praise.

SOME OF THE TERMS USED IN THE PRAISE:

Some definitions of the words that are used in the service of praises are:

- † **Psalmody** is the book which has the collection of praises. There are two types of Psalmodies: the regular Psalmody (year round) and the Kiahk Psalmody (dedicated for the month of Kiahk).
- † **Canticle** this word in Coptic is "hos", meaning praise.
- † **Psalie** is a Greek word which means singing.
- † **Theotika** is a Greek word, which means glorification for St. Mary the Virgin.
- † **Lubch** is a Coptic word, which means explanation.
- † **Zoxology** is a Greek word, which means glorification and blessing.
- † **Difnar** is a Greek word, which means short history.
- † **Adam** this word is used for hymns used on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday.

† **Vatos** this word is used for hymns used on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. The two major tones of hymns in the Coptic Church are the Adam and the Vatos and are taken from the first word of the theotika of Monday (Adam) and Thursday (Vatos) which means the bush.

THE MIDNIGHT PRAISE

Meditating in the midnight praise, we find that it starts with: “Rise up, sons of light, and let us sing to the Lord of powers. Rise up from the sleep and let us get up from being ignorant. Let us sing to the Lord of powers so that He may grace us by the salvation of our souls. Rise up to sing to the Lord of Powers.” We all know the salvation of our souls is only achieved through the grace of God as expressed in the seven sacraments of the church.

When we were baptized and christened, we are taking the most important step in the road to salvation. The Lord God does not need our praise, but He will be tremendously pleased with it, subsequently this will help us grow in our spiritual lives, help us towards salvation and lead us to the repentance. Even repentance we cannot do alone; we need God to help convince us that we need to repent and He will also show us *how* to repent. When we singing to God, He will grace us through the salvation of our souls. This is why the church is calling on us saying, “Rise up sons of light,” because Jesus is the light of the world, “and let us sing to the Lord of powers,” let us rise and sing for Him” because Jesus is the Light of the world and we are His children.

How great is this? We praise the Lord continuously, learn more hymns, participate in the choir, participate in the Divine Liturgy, learn midnight praise songs, learn many hymns from the psalmody book, and this way we can help ourselves to draw nearer to God, as we use these hymns as an expression of our love to God.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE MIDNIGHT PRAISE

- † The midnight praise starts with ‘the first service’ in which the Gospel reading talks about the ten virgins who came out to meet the bridegroom.
- † ‘The second service’ in which the Gospel reading is about the sinful woman in the city who taught us that repentance is not just works.
- † ‘The third service’ in which the Gospel reading is about the promise of God to give us (the small flock) a place in His Kingdom.
- † The first canticle

- † The second canticle
- † The third canticle
- † The praises of the three young men in the midst of the fire.
- † The commemoration of saints.
- † The Doxology
- † The fourth canticle
- † The psalme of the day or the feast
- † The theotika of the day
- † The lubch
- † The ending of the theotika
- † El Difnar
- † The Orthodox Creed
- † God have mercy
- † The absolution of the midnight praise prayed by the priest

PRAISES IN THE HOLY LITURGY

We, at our Coptic Orthodox Church, believe in the Divine presence during the prayer of the Liturgy. That is why the fraction prayers say: “Today present on this table Emmanuel our Lord the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Since the Lord Christ is present with us with His true Body and Blood, the church gets filled with the heavenly praises. According to the church’s saints, many angels join the congregation in these praises and everyone praises the Lord with joy and gladness, as is clear in many of the liturgy’s hymns. In the prayer of the reconciliation, the priest prays and says: “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will toward men.”

One of the congregation’s responses is “The Cherubim worship You, and the Seraphim glorify You, proclaiming and saying; Holy; Holy; Holy is the Lord of Hosts. Heaven and Earth are full of Your holy glory.” During the Holy Communion, the deacons sing with the congregation singing the beautiful Psalm 150 hymn:

Praise God, in all His saints. Alleluia

Praise Him, in the firmament of His power. Alleluia

Praise Him, for His mighty acts. Alleluia

Praise Him, according to the multitudes of His greatness

Praise Him, with the sound of the trumpet. Alleluia

Praise Him, with psaltery and harp. Alleluia

Praise Him, with timbrel and chorus. Alleluia

Praise Him, with strings and organs. Alleluia

Praise Him, with pleasant sounding cymbals. Alleluia

Praise Him, upon the cymbals of joy. Alleluia

Let everything that has breath praise the name of the Lord our God. Alleluia

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

Now and forever and to the ages of all ages amen

Glory be to You our God

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, hears us and have mercy upon us

Truly it is a church of praising and singing. Truly, it is a heavenly church and not an earthly one. Even at the Agpya prayer, which has plenty of psalms and praises, we pray at the beginning of each hour and say: “The prayer (praise) of the First Hour of the blessed day, I offer to Christ my King and my God, beseeching Him to forgive my sins.” We also say: “The prayer (praise) of the Third Hour of the blessed day, I offer to Christ my King and my God, beseeching Him to forgive my sins.”

HOW DO WE MAKE THE CHOIR OF THE CHURCH AN EFFECTIVE ONE?

The first thing that we should remember when we are singing in the choir, is that we are singing for the Lord. We are offering a sacrifice of praise to God. We are thanking the name of God. Remembering this will give us a sense of respect. Every time we sing a song, we stand in presence of the Lord and in front of Jesus Himself. Also, singing the songs should be from the heart and not only by the lips.

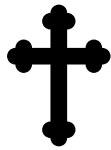
This way, every person who hears these songs will be touched since the songs that come out of the heart will be an expensive aroma in front of the Lord who searches the heart of men and knows if the songs are from the heart or not. Moreover, humility is needed while singing these praises and there should not be any pride in ones' own voice as it is a talent from the Lord. Otherwise, taking pride in ones' own voice reduces the effectiveness of these spiritual songs.

Needless to say that the group of the choir are supposed to pray together before they learn the hymn and before performing so that the whole choir atmosphere will be filled with the presence of God. Also, when we sing we are supposed to be sure that all the hymns conform to our doctrines. Every word is supposed to conform to our faith and our belief in the Coptic Orthodox Church; don't let anything come to us that wouldn't agree with our doctrine. The music that we use in the hymns is also supposed to be a respectable type of music and conforms to the hymns' spiritual atmosphere because we are praising the Lord. That is because when we are singing to God, we are actually imitating the angels who are the ones who sing at all times to God. Therefore, we should use respectable music that is calm and brings peace to all those who hear it. There are hymns with sad tunes and others with joyful tunes, depending and conforming to the specific occasion. Let us learn from David, the prophet and king, who praised the name of the Lord every day through his psalms and who played musical instruments while praising the Lord's name.

We always pray and ask God saying: "Even though we are weak and are not capable of participating with the angels in praising Your name, Lord, accept our voices with the voices of the heavenly and unseen powers" as we pray in the Gregorian Liturgy.

Purify, O Lord, our hearts, purify our thoughts, purify our lips, and make us worthy of praising Your holy name and participating with the angels in praising Your holy name saying: "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Psalm 141:2).

"Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful" (Psalm 33:1).



THE VIRTUES OF OUR MOTHER SAINT MARY THE VIRGIN

INTRODUCTION:

When we speak of the virtues of St. Mary the Virgin, we would like to emphasize that we can't enumerate all these virtues, nor examine all their deep meanings. Nonetheless, we will speak about as much as the Holy Spirit would allow.

However, before we speak of these virtues, we would first like to speak about the source of all these virtues. How did St. Mary acquire all these virtues?

Was it attributed to her personal efforts, a gift from God, or a combination of both?

A good reader of the Holy Bible would clearly see that these virtues are from heaven and are given by God. However, she had to be worthy and welcoming to these blessings by doing what she did to receive these gifts. This can be likened to a grant. For someone to receive a grant, he/she has to file an application for that grant. As soon as you apply for a suitable grant with seriousness, you can get this grant of spiritual life from God. God would like to give them to us because He loves us, but we have to do our part, as one of the saints said "Without God man cannot work and without man God does not work". We are in need of both together. This can be achieved by doing our part no matter how small it appears to us, for God completes our works. This way we can have gifts like our Virgin Mother St. Mary did. Her role was to pray, so she spent all her time in the altar and this way she taught the church that prayers are the source of gifts. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

Ever since her childhood, she spent all her time in the altar praying and listening to the word of God in the Holy Bible, thus she learned a lot from God. When she used to listen to the words of the Scriptures she would find it talking to her, for example, about humility. The Bible used to talk to her about obedience of the word of God. She read in the Holy Bible about examples of individuals who were humble and other examples of those who were with God. She has read the tales of several

persons from the Old Testament including David, Abraham and many others. She learned from them through her Bible reading. St. Mary also had the virtues of calmness and peace, as she was of very few words. Therefore, if we want the Spirit of God to work in us, we don't have to do much but rather do not speak excessively and keep our calmness and peace, just like St. Mary did. If I am too busy to the point that there is no time to pray, I have prevented myself from all these virtues. If I spend all my time between watching TV and listening to the radio and other shows, how can I obtain any of these virtues? On the other hand, if I sit in peace and pray, I give time for God to work within me and in turn for Him to give me all these blessings.

Our Virgin Mother St. Mary obtained a lot of these blessings from the Holy Spirit. When Archangel Gabriel came to her, he said "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). She was full of grace and on top of that she was given even more grace above all that she had before. She had grace from her strong prayers and readings of the Scriptures, and when the angel spoke to her, she received the ultimate grace and blessing. As we have said in the beginning, we have to do our part so that God can complete our works with these heavenly blessings.

FIRST VIRTUE: HUMILITY

Every saint will have this virtue; humility, as the Holy Spirit does not work except in the humble individuals. It's written in the Holy Bible "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Of course, the degree of humility differs from one person to another.

What is humility? There might be more than one meaning to it, but the simplest of all, is for one with several talents and blessings in his/her life, doesn't feel that he/she is better than anyone, deals with everyone in utmost respect, and feels that everything one has is from God and not from one's set of skills and might. Let's say someone is the number one in his class in graduation. How should he feel? If he deals with this without pride "But he who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (2 Corinthians 10:17) or without feeling that he is better than others, but glorifying God for He is the beneficent. This is living a life of humility. The same goes for the greatest musician, engineer or physician for example. All these are earthly talents and earthy works that will not last forever.

What about someone who has a lot of heavenly rewards above the human level of realization?

St. Mary became the only one in the history of mankind to have such a gift. It didn't happen before that and will not happen afterwards to obtain such a gift that is God the Word who was incarnate of the Holy Spirit. She gave birth to Him and remained a virgin and her virginity is sealed. As we pray in the Agpeya prayers saying "for the Father chose you, and the Holy Spirit overshadowed you, and the Son condescended and took flesh from you", we should realize that there is nothing greater than this. In spite of all this, she was in absolute humility and she bore this grace. When the angel spoke to her, she replied saying, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord" (Luke 1:38). Thus, we pray in the Agpeya saying "as you are the bright and unchanging flower, and the ever virgin mother". For this same reason, the Lord has chosen her to be incarnate of her for she bore this blessing and stayed humble. Then our Virgin St. Mary went to serve Elizabeth as she was pregnant and advanced in age, and St. Elizabeth welcomed her joyfully and the babe leaped in her womb (Luke 1:41) and said "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). What was St. Mary's reply to that? She said "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:46). She gave all the glory to the Lord and announced that, she too, needs salvation. God gives to whoever can bear grace, talents, and blessings in a humble manner while avoiding arrogance, pretentiousness and being a stumbling block for others.

Satanael was part of the heavenly powers in the same rank as the Cherubim, but he fell because of his arrogance and his desire to be greater than God Himself.

How did our mother Virgin Mary reach the depth of this virtue better than all the other saints?

It is because of her prayers, obedience to the word of God, silence, calmness and the work of the Holy Spirit in her.

SECOND VIRTUE: OBEDIENCE

Our Mother St. Mary was obedient in everything. When she turned twelve, she was asked to leave the altar according to the custom of the Jews and she obeyed. Then came the time for her to accept to be betrothed to an aged man who is St. Joseph the carpenter, and she obeyed, in spite of her wanting to stay celibate. Her personality was ornamented with obedience, and when there was no place in the house to deliver the only begotten son, she accepted to give birth to Him in a manger.

And after she gave birth to him, she had to escape to the land of Egypt from King Herod who wanted to kill the boy. She obeyed the words of the Lord and went to

Egypt, and only when the Lord directed she returned back. In all of this, she obeyed with complete trust in God's will.

THIRD VIRTUE: PATIENCE AND BEARING

Then comes patience and bearing. In our present days, we are in desperate need for this virtue. We are in need of patience and bearing. A lot of times, we find ourselves under tremendous pressures as a result of sharpness and aggression, and when we lose our patience, we become prone to worry. We are in need of patience and bearing like our Virgin mother in the worst situations of all. The angel promised that she will be the crowned queen and give birth to the King of kings and Lord of lords, and it comes to pass, that the queen will sit on the right of the King. Archangel Gabriel promised her to be the Mother of God, but for this to happen, she had to go through some hardships and troubles to get to this level, and she overcame all these and was in complete patience and bearing. From the moment of the angel's annunciation , to the birth of our St. Mary never complained. She was always happy, and trusting even through her travels to Egypt while she was in her last few days of pregnancy. Even during their time in Egypt, every place they entered idols would collapse behind them as they passed and the natives rush to take the Holy Family to safety. The Holy Family was always on the move. Do you think that was easy on her? No, but she bore all this in patience, and she didn't complain but was very happy from within since she was partaking all these hardships with Christ. We also see her following Jesus at all times. She witnessed her beloved Son and Savior being mocked, tortured and ultimately hung on the cross. She saw all this with her eyes, and pain in her heart. She bore the suffering alongside the Saviour In the midst of all this; she didn't lose the peace within her. Where did all this patience come from? Her obedient nature and her humility? She was patient for everything without losing her joy. All these were heavenly gifts given to her by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, because she had done her part. She prayed frequently and lived according to the Bible. Moreover, she avoided anything which distracted her from living with God in a peaceful atmosphere. Thus, God gave her all these gifts "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

FOURTH VIRTUE: FAITH

Our Mother Virgin St. Mary had very strong faith. What is faith? How do we define faith? Faith is trust, and certainty in matters that can't be seen. This is the meaning of faith. St. Mary had really strong faith. When the angel came to her to spread the news that she will be pregnant and give birth, naming her son

Emmanuel who is the awaited Son of God, she gladly accepted and she had faith in what the angel said. And she said, let it be to me according to your word, although she did not see Jesus yet. This is faith, and she accepted his words with joy. She wanted to stay celibate, but how could this be? But she knew that God is capable of everything. He is capable of making her a mother, while remaining a virgin. And truly, she stayed a Virgin as she wished. She accepted that with deep faith. Even when she saw her son Jesus Christ on the Cross, she had faith that He would rise up from the dead. And this was before everything had happened, but she was sure and had faith.

ALL THE VIRTUES OF THE SAINTS ARE IN HER

We have mentioned a few of the virtues of our Virgin Mother St. Mary. And whatever virtue you find it in any of the saints, you will find in its deepest form in St. Mary. Purity, Celibacy, wisdom, etc ... and thus we find the Sunday Theotokia in the 8th part:

1. Seven times every day: I will praise Your name: with all my heart: O God of everyone.
2. I remembered Your name: and I was comforted: O King of the ages: and God of all gods.
3. Jesus Christ our true God: Who has come: for our salvation: was incarnate.
4. He was incarnated: of the Holy Spirit: and of Mary: the pure bride.
5. And changed our sorrow: and all our troubles: to joy for our hearts: and total rejoicing.
6. Let us worship Him: and sing to: His mother Mary: the beautiful dove.
7. And let us all proclaim: with the voice of joy: saying Hail to you Mary: the Mother of Emmanuel.
8. Hail to you Mary: the salvation of our father Adam: Hail....: the Mother of the refuge: Hail....: the rejoicing of Eve: Hail....: the joy of all generations.
9. Hail to you Mary: the joy of Abel the just: Hail....: the true Virgin: Hail....: the Salvation of Noah: Hail....: the chaste and undefiled.
10. Hail to you Mary: the grace of Abraham: Hail....: the unfading crown: Hail....: the Redemption of Saint Isaac: Hail....: the Mother of The Holy. Hail to you Mary:

the rejoicing of Jacob: Hail...:
Myriads of Myriads:

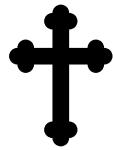
- 11.Hail...: the pride of Judah:
Hail...: the Mother of the
Master.Hail to you Mary: the
preaching of Moses: Hail...: the
Mother of the Master: Hail...: the
honor of Samuel: Hail...: the
pride of Israel.
- 12.Hail to you Mary: the
steadfastness of Job the just:
Hail...: the precious stone:
Hail...: the Mother of the
beloved: Hail...: the daughter of
King David.
- 13.Hail to you Mary: the friend of
Solomon: Hail...: the exaltation
of the righteous: Hail...: the
redemption of Isaiah: Hail...: the
healing of Jeremiah.
- 14.Hail to you Mary: the knowledge
of Ezekiel: Hail...: the grace of
Daniel: Hail...: the power of
Elijah: Hail...: the grace of Elisha.
- 15.Hail to you Mary: the mother of
God: Hail...: the Mother of Jesus
Christ: Hail...: the beautiful dove:
Hail...: the mother of the Son of
God.
- 16.Hail to you Mary: who was
witnessed by: all the prophets:
and they said: Behold God the
Word: was incarnate of you: in an
indescribable: unity.
- 17.You are truly exalted: more than
the rod: of Aaron: O full of grace.
What is the rod: but Mary: for it
is the symbol: of her virginity.
- 18.She conceived and gave birth:
without a man: to the Son of the
Highest: the Word Himself.
- 19.Through her prayers: and
intercessions: O Lord Open onto
us: the gates of the Church.
- 20.I entreat You: O mother of God:
keep the gates of the church: open
to the faithful. Let us ask her: to
intercede for us: before her
beloved: that He may forgive us.
- 21.You are called: O virgin Mary:
the Holy flower: of incense.
Which came out: and blossomed:
from the roots of the patriarchs:
and the prophets.
- 22.Like the rod: of Aaron the priest:
which blossomed; and brought
forth fruit.
- 23.For you gave birth to the word:
without the seed of man: and your
virginity: was not corrupted.
- 24.Wherefore we glorify you: as the
Mother of God: ask your Son: to
forgive us.

CONCLUSION:

Let's liken ourselves to St. Mary and learn from her how she deserved all these virtues from the work of the Holy Spirit in her. We are in need of prayers continuously. We are in need of listening to the voice of God through the Holy Bible frequently and apply it. We need less words and more peace as the voice of God can only be heard in peace. We need to reject the thoughts of pride in order to receive the numerous gifts of God.

Thanks due to the Lord Jesus Christ.





THE PRAYER IS THE SOLUTION

INTRODUCTION:

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave utmost attention to prayer. He taught about it and practiced it even though He did not need to pray because He is God incarnate. He used to pray a lot and very deeply, to the extent that His disciples told Him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Since the beginning of time, before and after the coming of Christ in the flesh, the people of God and the saints cared greatly about the life of prayer. Abraham, the father of all fathers, was building the tent and the altar of God. David, the prophet wanted to describe himself and he said, “But I give myself to prayer” (Psalm 109:4). Thus, our Coptic Orthodox church cares very much about the life of prayer and teaches us that prayer is always the solution to all life’s problems. “Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god” (Psalm 16:4). In most cases, the fathers of confession tell their children that the problem will usually end in this manner: The issue requires prayer; it requires the names to be put on the altar in the Holy Liturgy for the name of God to be glorified and for God to put out His hand and solve the problem. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Mathew 7:7-8). From His overflowing love, our Lord advised us and said, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). If a person is convinced that prayer is the solution to all problems in life and speaks to God saying, “Nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You” (2 Chronicles 20:12), then this person will always recite this verse in his/her heart and will greatly benefit from it. For this reason, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in this small book we shall focus on the following prayer topics:

- † Prayer is the solution to the wars of the devil.
- † Prayer is the solution to gaining the grace of God.
- † Prayer is the solution in the case of illness.
- † Prayer is the solution in our tribulations.

- † Prayer is the solution in the study of theology.
- † Prayer is the solution to achieving true unity with God.
- † Prayer is the solution in our homes.
- † Prayer is the solution to gain faith.

Then, we will concentrate on some points about how to pray deeply, as we learn it from the greatest teacher, our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is due all glory and honour.

PRAYER IS THE SOLUTION TO THE WARS OF THE DEVIL.

When the self yearns for God and begs asking for His protection and help in its wars against the devil saying, “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13). Our heavenly Father who loves us more than we deserve, will no doubt protect us from the wars of the devil. For our Lord Jesus Christ has come to our world to save us from the bonds of the devil and to give us a triumphant life over him; how would he not save us if we ask Him to make us winners over the enemy?!

At one time, the multitude brought to the disciples a child possessed by a demon and he used to torment the child greatly and the disciples could not rebuke and cast out the demon, thus, they brought him to our Lord Jesus and He cured him and said, “However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21). What is a youth going to do when the devil fights him with many temptations and desires? Prayer is the remedy to all desires; do you ask how? From the bodily perspective, you take medications for a certain illness but you do not know exactly how it works. In the same sense, prayer is medicine that saves you from the temptations of the devil. “The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Exodus 14:14).

How can the human being win over the devil that tries to make him/her fall into sin? Surely, the answer lies in repentance and changing evil thoughts and in return replacing it with thoughts of purity. This can be achieved through prayers. Concerning this, one of the fathers has said, “Whoever thinks he can offer repentance without prayer, he is deceived by the devil”. Also, in the Book of Jeremiah, he says, “You have chastised me, and I was chastised” (Jeremiah 31:18).

PRAYER IS THE SOLUTION TO GAINING THE GRACE OF GOD.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

We ask of God and He gives us abundantly more than we ask or deserve, but we have to ask with all our heart and our requests should be constructive and for good reason. St. Mary asked our Lord Jesus in the wedding of Cana of Galilee to make wine. She prayed and said, “They have no wine” (John 2:3). She proposed to God this concern in her prayer to Him and our Lord Jesus listened and helped even though He said, “My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). He responded and made great and plentiful wine; this is heavenly grace, joy and blessing. This was the beginning of the miracles of our Lord Jesus and so His disciples believed in Him. This is when, the heavens opened and the heavenly gifts began to pour. “Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51). “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). We are now in the time of grace and heavenly blessings since our Lord Jesus Himself paid the price of our sins and paid our debt. As we say in the Holy Liturgy, “The middle wall You have broken down.”

In the prayers of the Agpeya, the church teaches us that our spiritual life is from the grace of God, which He gives when we ask in prayer. We say, “Give us this day that we please You”, and we say, “Give us the joy of Your salvation.”

After our Lord Jesus met with Saul of Tarsus while heading to Damascus bearing letters in order to be able to put the Christians in prisons, Saul screamed and said, “Lord, what do You want me to do? (Acts 9:6). Then, God appeared to Ananias in a vision to give to Saul a heavenly gift. God also comforted Ananias since Saul was famous for persecuting the Christians and said concerning him, “For behold, he is praying.”

PRAYER IS THE SOLUTION IN THE CASE OF ILLNESS.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has done many miracles to heal the sick and many hearts have rejoiced through these healings. Only some of these miracles are mentioned in the Holy Bible since St. John the Beloved said in his Gospel, “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). However, some people say the miracles of the healing of the sick have taken place only when our Lord Jesus was on earth in body. This is untrue since, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Hence, in the Epistle of James, it is 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 omitted sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14-15). This sick individual prays to the Lord and asks for healing from the Lord with complete submission. Before thinking of curing the patient, the Christian physician first prays to the Lord asking for guidance and asking for the healing of this patient both with medicine and without.

The church prays a beautiful prayer for the sick, which says, “Thou hast visited them with mercies and compassion, heal them”. The sacrament of the anointing of the sick has seven prayers and seven cotton wool wicks. Every cotton wool wick that is lit symbolizes the human being, in which the oil runs through with the work of the Holy Spirit. The self-lightens up and the inner being heals. Physical healing also occurs if God wills and if it is for the benefit of that person. We also accept physical illness though the help of the Holy Spirit who comforts us as it works in us like it does in the cotton wool wick without destroying or burning it.

PRAYER IS THE SOLUTION IN OUR TRIBULATIONS.

Prayer is the solution to all kinds of tribulation. The person can cause the tribulations that they go for themselves because of their sin, disregarding and not caring about one's spiritual life. The grace of God then leaves that person for a small period of time during tribulation with the will of God so that this person may repent. A person may also pass through tribulation caused by war from the devil and his followers. In either case causing the tribulation, prayer is the solution. In prayers, the person pleads with God asking to be saved from this tribulation and for the problem to end and God to respond. The disciples were crying in the boat fearing that they were perishing when a great tempest arose on the sea and the boat was covered with waves. The disciples came to Jesus while he was sleeping in the boat (Matthew 8:24). They woke Him up and then He arose and rebuked the winds and the disciples' hardship was over.

They went and woke Him up and we too in our tribulations go and pray. Instead of focusing on the hardship, we focus on prayer so God can take it away from us. So was St. Peter in prison when King Herod was going to kill him the day after he was arrested (Hebrews 12:6). But the church was constantly offering prayer to God for the sake of St. Peter and so God sent His angel and rescued St. Peter.

Therefore, prayer is the solution to tribulation, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Psalm 50:15). In our tribulations we also ask for the intercessions of the saints. When we are facing hardships, we pray to God and we talk and ask for the intercessions of the Saints so that God can take them away from us.

There are many examples in the Holy Bible and the history of the church and her children showing that prayer softens the heart of God that He saves us in time of trouble. Remember the miracle of moving the Mokattam Mountain by St. Simon the shoemaker in the time of Fatimid Caliph Al-Muizz Li-Deenillah and how the church was passing through hardships and God manifested Himself by moving the Mokattam Mountain.

PRAYER IS THE SOLUTION IN THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY.

Prayer is the solution to the scholars of theology. What about those who have fallen due to heresies like Arius and Macedonius and many others? The church warned them and directed them to their mistakes, but when they did not forego their theological wrongdoings, the church excommunicated them. Were they careless about their theological studies? Truly, they stumbled in their spiritual life first because they were weak in prayers and submission to God and so their studies were not supported by the Holy Spirit and did not achieve inner enlightenment. Hence, they stumbled and invented strange earthly thoughts because they failed in the school of prayer. Truly, our God of glory said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight” (Luke 10:21).

PRAYER IS THE SOLUTION TO ACHIEVING TRUE UNITY WITH GOD.

From the sayings of His Holiness Pope Kyrillos the sixth, the man of prayer, he says, “Prayer is unity with God. In prayer, the heart rises up and pours out to God. It is food to virtue and growth to the spiritual life.

It is a conversation and a dialogue with God. In it, we live with God, because it teaches us to love and prayer fills the spirit with fiery spiritual desires. Prayer is strength to oneself and to the soul. When our prayer weakens, so does the self and the spirit. Prayer is life to one’s spirit; when it dries so does the fountain of grace. If we do not stay up, we sleep. If we sleep, the enemy comes and sows in us whatever he desires. But prayer guards us and purifies our spirit and erases the strange thoughts. A heart without a guard or a gate or a weapon is a target for strange thoughts. Prayer is able to do all things because it moves the Hands that move the whole universe. Prayer opens the gates of heaven and grants all believers a portion in God’s gifts. It destroys the strength of the devil and breaks the chains of sin and loosens the bonds of evil. There is nothing which prayer cannot overcome, for it is the key to heaven.”

PRAYER IS THE SOLUTION IN OUR HOMES.

Our church prays for her children saying, “Houses of prayer, houses of purity, and houses of blessing”. It is obvious that before the houses can become a home of purity and blessing, they must FIRST be houses of prayer. What are houses of prayer? They are extensions to the church. Church is a house of prayer and so are the houses of believers; they are houses of prayer, “To the church in your house” (Philemon 1:2). You find in the house the Holy Bible, the Agpeya, the Psalmody, the Synaxarium, the icons and the crosses. The priest comes to the house to pray the prayer of blessing new homes. The priest comes to do the holy prayer of the sacrament of the unction of the sick and anoints the sick with the oil that was prayed on.

A person starts with prayer immediately after awakening in the morning... and ends the day with prayer before going to sleep saying, “His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me” (Song of Solomon 2:6). The sound of hymns and spiritual songs are constantly heard in the houses. The family prays before and after meals. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). It is a heavenly life on earth. What happens when this house passes through a time of tribulation? There is no need to fear because as long as the Lord is present this house will never drown. Christianity is not four hours per week when we go to church. It is a constant presence in the bosom of Christ, the “Houses of prayer”

PRAYER IS THE SOLUTION TO GAIN FAITH.

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:1-2).

Cornelius was a Christian, but he used to pray to God at all times. I personally think he used to pray to an unknown God because it is impossible for a person to pray to the true God except through our Lord Jesus Christ and through faith. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). God is He, “Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). God planned for Cornelius to believe in Christ to who all glory is due, the true God, “Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter” (Acts 10:5). Indeed, St. Peter the disciple of our Lord Jesus went to Cornelius and his family and baptized them in the name of the Lord and so entered into Cornelius’ household the Christian faith.

Prayer can do all things; God plans and prepares all things to lead one to true faith in Christ so we may be saved.

HOW TO PRAY DEEPLY THAT PRAYER MAY TOUCH GOD'S HEART AS WE LEARN FROM THE GREATEST TEACHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST TO WHOM IS DUE ALL GLORY.

† Our Lord Jesus taught us... Our Father.

"When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Luke 11:2-4).

This is the most important prayer because God of glory said it Himself. We should pray it quietly, slowly and deeply. We praise God in three parts, "Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done." There are also four requested needs we ask for as human beings. "Give us day by day our daily bread" or the Greek word, "artos epiousios" which is translated by St. Jerome to be, "the bread that is beyond the materialistic form". The Coptic translation, "Bread for tomorrow" ... then forgive us our trespasses... then do not lead us into temptation... then deliver us from the evil one... St. Caperyanous says, "My beloved we pray with what God our teacher has taught us, for it is a beautiful and gentle prayer, asking God using His very own words and we raise up to His ears the prayer Jesus has taught us as God knows the words of His Son when we raise our prayers to Him".

OUR LORD JESUS TAUGHT US TO PRAY FERVENTLY TO HIM.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to pray to God with all our heart. Since His sweat was like drops of blood in the garden on the eve of the crucifixion.

Remember Hanna, the mother of Samuel the prophet, and remember the church praying for St. Peter the apostle when he was in prison. Also, remember St. Monica the mother of St. Augustine praying for the repentance of her son.

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST TAUGHT US TO THANK GOD IN OUR PRAYERS.

† When our Lord Jesus gave thanks in front of Lazarus' tomb, "Father, I thank You that You heard Me." (John 11:41).

Our holy church always starts the prayers with the beautiful prayer of thanksgiving... David the prophet has filled all his psalms with thanksgiving and praise..."Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His

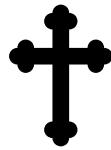
holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103:1-5).

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST TAUGHT US THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSTANT PRAYER.

† "Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). David the prophet says, "Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:164). All the saints have made constant prayer the foundation of their lives with God... St. Pishoy used to tie his hair to the ceiling of his cell so he would always enjoy praying to God.

PRAYER

O my God, make me a son/daughter to You. My God, help me pray to You not with my lips, but with my heart. Make me a heart of flesh instead of my heart of stone. O my God, make me an inheritance with You. I thank You my God in everything and for everything.



TOWARDS THE FUTURE

"Nor do we know what to do, but eyes are upon You" (2 Chronicles 20:12)

INTRODUCTION:

“...You do not know what will happen tomorrow...” (James 4:14)

The human being is limited in his thinking and understanding and does not know what happens in the world that he lives in. That is why St. James said in his epistle: “whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). Despite that, every human wants to grow in all of his life aspects whether materialistically, psychologically or spiritually, but specifically in the spiritual aspect as it is the foundation and the most important thing that a human would want to improve. His heart would strive to be with God and live in heaven while he is still on earth. This way, he lives victorious over all the devils’ wars and enjoys an inner peace that is glorious and above all the fear of the future and whatever it hides. How would the person enjoy the inner comfort and peace amidst a world that is unknown and among a future that is unfamiliar? This is what we will try to answer, with the grace of God, in this small booklet through the following points:

- † The necessity of concentrating the person’s feelings on the Lord Jesus Christ
- † The new garment...All of it is new
- † The new heart...The grace of God
- † The policy of closing the gate... Fighting the flight
- † The Conclusion

THE NECESSITY OF CONCENTRATING THE PERSON’S FEELINGS ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

“O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.” (2 Chronicles 20:12). If we looked at the first half of the verse “For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do.” In this world there is nothing guaranteed so we get worried and we cannot calm down. But if we looked at the second half of the verse “But our eyes are upon You” we are calmed down since our Lord knows, not only the future but everything since everything is exposed in front of Him and He can protect us.

This is the Lord’s protection. Hence, we ought not to have a weak relation with God but rather, as the psalmist says: “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him.” (Psalm 34:8). Indeed our eyes hardly know God, but we must have a strong and deep relationship with Him. When we pray we say “Our Father who art in Heaven”. Do we think of that phrase and say from our heart “Our Father”? Do we really believe it when we utter the word “Emmanuel” which means God is with us? Or do we even feel the Godly help! Indeed, all the fear of the future will run away if we lived feeling and trusting that the Lord is with us, walking with us, and in our heart. We are members in His kingdom, and that is why David the prophet said in his psalm: “For the word of the LORD is right, And all His work is done in truth.” (Psalm 33:4). This is the secret behind that peace that You are with me and You are protecting me. You know what the future has for me, and You support me with Your Godly protection as You have said to Jacob when he was afraid from his brother, Esau, and afraid from the future in the Old Testament: “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.” (Genesis 28:15).

When St. Peter left the boat, which was tossed by the waves and walked on water, he was able to do so as long as his eyes and feelings were set on the Lord Jesus Himself. However, he started to sink and scream once he looked at the waves and the danger around him. We, as believers, are in essence the same.

We live in peace and comfort so long as we do not concentrate on the tiring matters in our life. But we should concentrate on the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and think of the happy and joyful matters in our lives (Every person has both joyful and tiring incidents in his/her life). This way we can have an inner strength that will lift us above the temptations and sufferings so that our lives pass in peace until we cross to our heavenly land that has no tiring, suffering, diseases, sadness or any other misery, but rather is full of joy and happiness.

THE NEW GARMET... ALL OF IT IS NEW

Sometimes a person tries to overcome a problem in his/her life by concentrating on it. This leads to sadness and fatigue, and the problem does not end but rather increases in time and the person gets tired of it. In some other times, a person may want to overcome a sin in his life and leaves all the other sins remaining in his life together with the weakness.

Maybe he will be able to overcome that specific sin, but he might go back to it again and fall into other sins with that sin. What is the way to get out of such a problem or to be able to get out of that fight? Our Lord Jesus Christ answers us Himself on this issue and says in (Luke 5:36-39): “Then He spoke a parable to them: ‘No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskin; or else the new wine will burst the wineskin and be spilled, and the wineskin will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskin, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, ‘The old is better.’’”

With that, we can see that our Lord Christ refuses to put the new on the old and He stresses out that nothing new can work with the old. This means that He wants a new heart and a new life. This parable that was spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ has two ideas:

THE FIRST IDEA is that improving on one matter does not benefit us forever nor does it ensure a pleasing outcome. **THE SECOND IDEA** is that when we taste the old meaning Jesus, “the **Ancient of Days**” as He is referred to in Daniel 7:9, then we do not want anything else. He is the best of the best and we find with Him the peace and comfort and every good along with the meaning of life now and at eternity.

Hence, we need to get attached to the Lord Jesus Christ and find a new heart, completed with Him. Do we remember Lot and his family when the angel came to get them out Sodom? Everyone left Sodom quickly running away from it with the exception of Lot’s wife who looked behind her and became a rod of salt because her heart was not completely with God.

Another example is the people of Israel when they got out of Egypt by a great miracle and with a strong hand away from the slavery of the Pharaohs. However, they looked at the past and craved to eat from the food of the Egyptians and as a result, they were greatly punished.

THE NEW HEART... THE GRACE OF GOD

The child in his father's hands depends completely on his father to do all the difficult tasks for him that the child cannot perform. The father performs all the tasks that his son needs with joy.

Similarly, we cannot by ourselves change our hearts; however, the Lord God who has created us can change our heart if we ask Him to do so. He says in Ezekiel 36:25-27 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; (**The water here represents baptism**) I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to talk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgements and do them.” Let us ask God to give us this new heart as David the prophet says: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

One of the descriptive things in the Bible and in the Holy Church is that when a person dedicates his/her life to God, then his/her name changes also. Abraham, the father of all fathers, was called Abram before he became closer to God. Paul the apostle also was called Saul before his life changed completely.

Moreover, Matthew the evangelist was called Levi and was sitting at the tax office before he became a disciple of our Lord Christ. St. Peter was called Simon before he became a disciple of Jesus. Also the church changes the person’s name when he is ordained as a priest. All of these are announcements that the person’s heart has changed.

THE POLICY OF CLOSING THE GATE... FIGHTING THE FIGHT

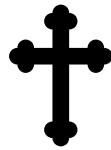
Do I have a role in my new life? What about Satan’s fight against me? If Satan has a place in the heart, then life will be tiring. We always say, if you give Satan an inch, then he will take a mile or more from you. As a result, you need to completely close your gate. An example of that is if you looked an evil look at an inappropriate scene on TV (meaning that you gave Satan something), then Satan will not calm down and will cause to you a lot of suffering until you fall into other sins and sorrows.

Similarly, if you allow a specific sinful idea to enter into your thoughts, then the devil will enter through it and cause you to fall into sinful thoughts and tough sins. In such circumstances, closing the gates of our senses shutting out Satan we are able to protect the soul and the heavenly treasure inside the heart. David the prophet says in Psalm 147:12-13 “Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your

children within you.” Meaning that you yourself close all your senses’ gates in front of Satan and with that “The Lord strengthens the bars of your gates” which means that He protects you more and strengthens your gates, but you must close the gate and the Lord Christ strengthens that gate so that Satan cannot open it.

THE CONCLUSION

How would a person survive and be in peace and comfort and not to think about what the future hides as Pope Kyrillos VI said: “Be very very calm and do not think of the matter too much, but leave the matter in the hands of He Who has the control”. This comes from tasting the life of living with the Lord Jesus Christ and asking him to give us a new and clean heart that is with Him and does not have a place in it for Satan. With the help of God, a person can have no place for Satan in his heart by closing the gates of his senses completely so that nothing dark can find its way into the human soul. And with the strength from God, this gate can be strongly closed and locked so that the devil cannot push on it to open it.



ABIDE BY THE LORD SO THAT YOU DON'T PERISH

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED TO ABIDE BY THE LORD.

One of the important matters in a human life is his ability to abide by the Lord. The reader of the Holy Bible (and in his practical life today) finds many examples of people who have lost everything and were miserable in their lives on earth because they failed to abide by the Lord. The contrary is true as we find many example of people who enjoyed everything in peace, quite, and happiness of the heart just because they have abided by the Lord as He said: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I am in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” John 15:5.

Therefore we will speak about “Abide by the Lord so that you don’t perish” through the following points:

- † “Abide by the Lord so that you don’t perish” - an important fact not a threat.
- † The goal of the Lord is to enter into an intimate relationship with the human.
- † An example from the practical life on the importance of abiding by the source of life.
- † What happens to the person who rebels away from God and becomes lost in the world?
- † Why is it that the secret behind the person’s living his life is in abiding by the Lord?
- † God wants to connect with the human race through many ways.
- † How do I receive Jesus in my life amidst the life’s strong storm?
- † The characteristics of the person who abides by the Lord in his life.
- † Is every religious person is a person who abides by the Lord?
- † The Conclusion.

"ABIDE BY THE LORD SO THAT YOU DON'T PERISH" - AN IMPORTANT FACT NOT A THREAT.

The phrase “Abide by the Lord so that you don’t perish” is not a threat. God does not want to threaten any person. God has created the person with a free will to choose for himself whatever he wants. However, the practical life has taught us that the person who abides by the Lord is a successful person in everything. Psalm 1:1-3 says: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season whose leaf also shall not wither and whatever he does shall prosper.” Therefore it is a lovable advice to the person who wants success to himself as well as eternal life.

When the Bible says: “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth” Ecclesiastes 12:1, it is a lovable invitation from the Lord to the youth so that they abide by Him from their early years so that they can enjoy the Lord, live with Him and grow up with Him.

It is not hard at all for the person to abide by the Lord even among the strongest currents that are against him in this life. That is because the Lord Himself wants to abide by us even if we do not want to, yet He wants and keeps on trying with us.

THE GOAL OF THE LORD IS TO ENTER INTO AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH MAN

Any person would really suffer if they thinks that the Lord God wants to burden us with commands that a we cannot perform and thinks that the Lord wants to punish us.. On the contrary, the same person would be rest minded when he thinks of God as his own father who does not want to punish him. “for God cannot be tempted by evil” James 1:13. We also say in the thanksgiving prayer “Beneficent”. He also does not want the person to lose his will. God did not disregard the human being, but rather He blessed him as we pray in the Holy Liturgy “You blessed my nature in You” and God says “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you” Jeremiah 13:3. God also called us His brothers and loved ones “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” John 15:15. The Lord of glory also says “But He answered and said to them “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.” Luke 8:21.

Therefore, the Lord does not want to enter into a manager-worker relationship with. He also does not want to control us or be strict on us “For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” Psalm 103:14. He also does not want our relation with Him to be a combination of information or doctrines but rather, a living and lovable friendship relation. He knows our frame and weaknesses and wants to give us all the grace and blessings and He is rich in grace and blessings.

But we only get these blessings when we abide by the Lord and be steadfast in Him as well as stay away from all the evil tiring that the devil brings who hates the human being and wants to destroy him.

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE PRACTICAL LIFE ON THE IMPORTANT OF ABIDING BY THE SOURCE OF LIFE.

Let's examine what happens when the person puts on a specific radio station. The first thing is that the station has to be in working state. Then the person would adjust the radio to tune in to the correct frequency of that station. After that, the person can adjust the volume to enjoy the radio station that he wants to hear. What happens if the person was unable to tune in to the correct radio frequency? Obviously, he wouldn't hear anything. If he wanted to increase the volume in this case, he would not hear anything but noise that does not have any value.

This is the same in the relationship between man and God “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures” James 1:17-18.

God has all the blessings and grace of which God wants to give to the person who loves Him. However, can the person accept these blessings?

Some people want to receive God's blessings even though they do not mind not to have a good relationship with God or to see Him in their lives. What do we call this? It is selfishness and not a loving relation. An example of that is a wife who tells her husband “send me the money that would be enough for my living and it is not important that you live with me or we enjoy living together” or “you can live away from me but just send me all the good things and things and it is not important that you live with me”. Of course, such a relationship is a very bad one.

Therefore, it is not that we just abide by the Lord to obtain grace and blessings, but to enjoy Him and live with Him. He says “I am with you always, even to the end of the age, Amen” Matthew 28:20. We in return say “I am my beloved's, and my

beloved is mine” Songs 6:3. As such we then have a strong living partnership “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” John 1:16 and we ask life for ourselves “Ask for God and your souls will live.” If our souls did not connect with the source of life, God, then it would die just like the radio device that is not tuned in to the correct frequency wher you can only hear noise and gain nothing from it.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE PERSON WHO REBELS AWAY FROM GOD AND BECOMES LOST IN THE WORLD ?

From the beginning problems for the human being continued to come when he is away from the source of life, God “For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.” Psalm 36:9. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” John 1:4. Adam was the master of all creation along with his wife. They used to enjoy living with God. However, by their deviation away from God, they lost the source of life in them and they were thrown away from the presence of God and death entered into them “and death which entered the world with envy of the devil.” The first son of Adam and Eve was Cain who killed his younger brother Abel. Then, failures in front of the devil continued and the human being’s sadness and misery, when he is away from God, also continued.

Idolism was spread in the Old Testament. Nebuchadnezzar created the huge idol and wanted the three young men to worship it or be thrown into the fire. Then he takes a punishment with a voice from heaven “...King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken; the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses” Daniel 4:31-32.

Saul the king had the Spirit of God dwelled upon him. However, God’s Spirit left him and an evil spirit came on the king once he separated himself from God and did not hear God’s voice. The evil spirit used to torture him and he ended up being killed in a war.

Herod the king, wanted to marry Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. When John the Baptist opposed his decision, telling him it was “not lawfull,” Herod sent men to behead John The Baptist. What was the outcome of all of Herod’s evil things? He was tortured a lot in his life and was killed and lost everything.

A story from practical life: in a Christian family by name only, the father of the family got into a sinful relationship with a woman. The wife lost her job and the

family was in need of money. The whole family went astray from prayer and from the church. The daughter of the family left her house at the age of 14 going out asking for a helper. Unfortunately, evil friends received her and she became a drug addict after which she was killed few years after living in sin and torture. All that just for being away from the source of life. What is the ultimate destination of the father in this situation?

WHY IS IT THAT THE SECRET BEHIND THE PERSON'S LIVING HIS LIFE IS IN ABIDING BY THE LORD?

St. Augustine says “You have created us in Your image, so we have no comfort except with You”

- † When God created man from mud, He breathed in the mud the Godly breath. This is not a normal breath, but a breath that has power that it created all the human complicated body parts in the human body and soul. That is why we are from Him. “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.” John 1:16. So the grace of life and existence came in us from Him.
- † The body parts that the Lord God has created in the human being cannot be satisfied except with the existence and in the presence of God Who has created them. Can the son be comforted with strangers? The son cannot be comforted except in his father’s and mother’s chest because he looks like them and they adore him and they also know what is good for him.
- † That is why we say “abide by the Lord so as you will not perish”

GOD WANTS TO CONNECT WITH THE HUMAN RACE THROUGH MANY WAYS

In the parable of the sower “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on the rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” Luke 8:5-8

From Reading the bible “But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God Who tests our hearts.” 1 Thessalonians 2:4 then it is clear that God gives an equal chance for everyone in spite of His knowledge that the ground is not good to give out fruit. However, He gives a chance to everyone.

All the creation that can be seen with all of its beauty, admiration and strength was created by God, in front of everyone as a witness to the only God of heaven. God has also placed the fields' lilies and the stars of the heavens with all their accurate precise movement in front of everyone. But who responds and believes in the Great God Who is an inventor of beauty? "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork" Psalm 19:1. He shines His sun on the good and the evil people. He rains on the good and evil people. But who would meditate? But who would thank? But who would ask to show Himself?

Ever since Adam sinned, God did not stop preparing for his and his offspring salvation. God called Adam after he had sinned and asked "Where are you?" and then God took off him the figs leaves that are useless in cleansing the inside of him and God clothed Adam with "tunics of skin" to show to Adam that he is being sent out of the garden of Eden but is not forsaken as he is preparing for him the salvation with God's own sacrifice.

God then sent many prophets as we pray in the Gregorian Liturgy "You have sent prophets for me I am the sick" and as St. Paul says "God, Who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets." Hebrews 1:1

The human being was created with a natural law that knows what is good and what is evil to the extent that Joseph in the Old Testament knew by nature that it is adulteress if he did any doing with Potiphar's wife.

Then God sent to the human being the written laws which were written on the two stone tablets with the finger of God.

Then God prepared all the sacrifices and standards in the Old Testament to explain to the human being in a clear way "the punishment of sin is death" and "without a blood sacrifice, no forgiveness takes place" Not that the calves created forgiveness, but it was a symbol of the true sacrifice Jesus Christ Who presented the sacrifice of all to the world in the fullness of time.

THE MISSION OF THE LORD CHRIST:

In the fullness of time, God incarnated in a human body as we say in the Creed "Begotten not created, of one essence with the Father," to save the human beings that fell. He came for all those who came before him and all those who will come after him that they may be saved, fulfilling the promise of God. He also did so to tie the devil and jail him with the cross for our sake.

This is not only to teach us but to abide with us and raises us with him to heaven
“For this is how God showed His love in us that He has sent His only Begotten Son
to the world so that we live with Him”

THE MISSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” John 15:26 and we say in the Creed “Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Life-Giver, Who proceeds from the Father”

THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS IN US AND THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH:

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit became not limited for specific people, but rather He was poured and gave birth to the Church on the day of the Pentecost and dwelled as tongues of fire. From that moment, God has given to the Church the ability to give birth to spiritual people.

CHRISTIANITY IS A DECLARATION FROM GOD AND A RESPONSE FROM THE HUMAN BEING WITH THE GRACE OF GOD:

Christianity is different from the rest of the religions in a very important matter which is the faith that: I do not get to God by my thoughts or own power, but God gets to me by His power and I receive Him with my own free will. He even helps me in the receiving Him part. “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and-prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.” Luke 10:21. “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills reveal Him.” Luke 10:22.

He declared Himself to Saul (Acts 9:3) ... and declared Himself to Cornelius (Acts 10:3)... “The people who walked in darkness seen a great light” Isaiah 9:2.

HOW DO I RECEIVE JESUS IN MY LIFE AMIDST THE LIFE’S STRONG STORMS?

☩ The steadfast in God’s words

The Lord’s word in the Bible is His message to us. Every single person reads the Bible gets a different personal message that is directed to him from God. The word of God carries the strength in it

that is capable of affecting the inside of the human being as well as feelings and mind.

John 8:31 “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believe Him: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”

John 15:7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”

James 1 :25 “But he who looks into the perfect law of Liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

1 Peter 1:25 “But the word of the LORD endures forever.”

¶ The steadfast in love

It is obvious that the only way to reach God is the road of love in dealing with everyone. 1 John 4:16 “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” If the person did everything but did not notice the command of love and the way of love with everyone then he did not reach anything and nothing will benefit him from religious life or even the religious practices. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love. I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.

¶ The steadfast in grace

“Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.” Hebrews 13:9

† The steadfast in Jesus with the Communion

This is the strongest steadfast that the believer takes in the sacrament of the communion as in John 6:56 “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PERSON WHO ABIDES BY THE LORD IN HIS LIFE.

For sure everything that he does would be successful. An example of that is Joseph from the Old Testament.

His eyes will be opened on the heavenly matters. An example of that is St. John the beloved.

His life will be filled with praising and singing to the Lord. An example of that is David the king and Prophet.

His life will glorify the Lord and his soul will be happy with the soul saviour. An example of that is Virgin Mary.

If he ever encounters trouble, but his eyes are set on Jesus then the trouble will never swallow him. An example of that is St. Peter when he walked on water as long as he was looking at Jesus.

IS EVERY RELIGIOUS PERSON IS A PERSON WHO ABIDES BY THE LORD?

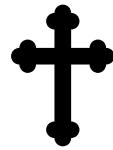
Today, many wrongful religions exist in this world. Many people believe in many gods. There are some who believes in deceiving prophets. Additionally, many forged books claim to be holy. This is why St. John says: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God; Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.” 1 John 4:1-2

That is why not every person who is religious in his religion is a person who is truly close to the True God and worships the True God. That is why that person can perish in his wrongful religion. “Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.” John 17:1. It is then clear that not everyone worships the

True God. Only those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are those who worship the True God and those would never perish and get lost in this world.

THE CONCLUSION

1. The goal of God in His love to men is to get into a personal relationship, that has friendship and care.
2. God works with all the ways to reach the human being and talk to him. God also sends signs to the human being with all the different ways.
3. The human being must realize the following base: The person would lose himself and perish if he did not abide by the Lord.
4. There are many example of people who have perished because they did not abide the Lord.
5. There are many ways to abide by the Lord. Steadfast in the word of God (because it has His power), steadfast in His love (because God is love), steadfast in His grace (because God has all the grace), and steadfast in Jesus by the Holy Communion (as it is the Sacrament of Sacraments).
6. Not every religious person truly worships the True God since there are many wrongful religions that do not worship the True God Himself.
7. Only the believers in Jesus Christ are those who abide by the True God and they can never perish.



THE CHRISTIAN LOVE

INTRODUCTION: THE TYPES OF LOVE

The word love has several translations in the different languages. While in English it is Love. It has three different meaning in the Greek language:

- † Love which is translated to Eros; which means an Erotic love. This is a sinful love which is full of selfishness and aims to satisfy the individual with disregard to other people's interest. This type of love does not give, but only takes.
- † Love which is translated to Philia and it means the human love. An example of that is the love of a mother or a father to their children. It also means the love of relatives.
- † Love which is translated to Agape means the love that the Holy Spirit emanates, which is similar to the love of the church congregation to each other with loyal, honest, and love.

THE SINFUL LOVE HAS MANY EXAMPLES IN THE HOLY BIBLE, SOME OF WHICH ARE:

- † The love of Rebecca to her son Jacob. She wanted him to obtain the blessing, but she used the wrong method to do so through deceiving his father. With this method, she exposed Jacob to God's punishment and as a result he was always deceived.
- † Rebecca also committed a mistake in her love as she showed partiality to Jacob over Esau. Similarly, Jacob's love to his children was not the same as he loved Joseph more than he loved the rest of his children.
- † Isabel loved her husband King Ahab with the wrong love that had ribbed Naboth the Jezreelite right and in it, Ahab got killed and God punished him (1 Kings 21).

- † The love that encourages people on continuing in their sins is a sinful love. An example of that includes those who followed the heretics throughout the years, encouraged them and built a congregation for them that accepts their theological sins. “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord.” Proverbs 17:15.
- † The mother who hides her children’s mistakes from the father in hopes of circumventing his admonition is mistaken in doing so. Similarly, the husband who locks up his wife in the house is not displaying love to his wife. Another mistaken person is the mother who forbids her son from fasting by all means even by asking his father of confession to forbid him thinking that this is better for her son’s health.
- † There are many other unjustified types of love that we cannot account for.

Therefore, let us be aware of the improper type of love that is not in consensus with the love of God and life with him.

In this small booklet, we will cover the Christian love through the following points:

- † The Christian love comes from the love of the person to the Lord from all of his heart
- † The characteristics of the Christian love
- † How to reach the level of Christian love
- † Love and Strictness
- † Stories on the Christian Love
- † Conclusion

Let us cover the above points through the guide of the Holy Spirit:

THE CHRISTIAN LOVE COMES FROM THE LOVE OF THE PERSON TO THE LORD FROM ALL OF HIS HEART:

Pope Shenouda III says in his book titled “Ten Concepts” which was published in 1994:

“If we want to understand the concept of love on a true basis, then we need to put in front of us the following fact: Love should be directed first and foremost towards the Lord God glory to His name.”

This is what the Lord says to us in the book of Deuteronomy “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). If this love is from all the heart, how would the other types of love be? What would we give to them while the whole heart is dedicated to God? The only solution is that our love for everyone and everything should stem from our love towards God. We gave the whole heart to God and from within our love towards God, we love everyone else. That is why God said “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:39).

When He said “The second is like it” that is because it stems from our love towards God. Our love towards our neighbour cannot be distinguished from our love towards God.

Therefore, every love that is outside from the love to God is a wrongful love.

What is it then if that love was more than our love towards God? In this matter the Lord God says “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37).

The love that is greater than the love towards God is one where you prefer a human being or anything else over God Himself. We can say that this is a sinful and wrongful love that contradicts the love towards God. In this case, the heart would not be owned by God and this wrongful love would alienate the heart from the love of God.

The love of the parents to their children, the love of friends to each other, the love of engaged couples, the love of married couples, and many other types of love in our daily life.

For all of the above love types to be Holy, they should stem from our love towards God. The source of any love type should be out of the love to God and should neither contradict nor exceed our love towards God.

It is an interesting circle for the human heart to be filled with the love towards God and from that source of love, that same human would then be capable of loving others. However, that person cannot love God from all of his heart except through the love of God towards him and through the work of the Holy Spirit inside him. After that, the love would appear as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. From the individual’s

actions, it is important for a person to practice love towards others. That is why we put on the following four verses:

- † “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness” (Galatians 5:22).
- † The condition of abiding in the love to God is to practice the love to God “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16).
- † “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5).
- † “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39).
- † The Lord Christ in His incarnation and life on earth lived His life with the full love and said “Learn from Me....” Similarly, when the disciples completed their faith, they lived their lives with the Christian love.
- † The great martyr St. Stephen while being stoned said “Lord, do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60). That is why the Bible says “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He (**i.e. Jesus**) walked” (1 John 2:6).

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHRISTIAN LOVE:

Without the Christian love there is nothing of good use:

St. Paul speaks to us about the importance of the Christian love and that without it there is no meaning to anything: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

The Christian love comes from God

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God that works in the human being and abides him in God. The love, therefore comes from the same love that God has for us and that is why St. Paul says: “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in inequity, but rejoices in the truth;

bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

The Christian love is a practical love

St. John the disciple says “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:18). The love of a family to their child is a practical love that has the care of the child’s food, health, cleanliness, and his education on top of taking care of his spirituality and teaching him religious doctrine while helping him maintain purity.

The Song of Songs book speaks about love and says “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm” (Song of Songs 8:6). The phrase “a seal upon your heart” means your emotion and love that comes from the heart. As for the “a seal upon your arm” phrase, it means stretch your arm for work.

How is it that a person loves God from all his heart and the Lord says: “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). Prevent his hand to give alms? The giving of alms to God’s brothers and sisters or to the Church is the most practical way to show love in practical way. As for the house, it should participate with things that are earthly help God’s brothers and sisters, help the church that wants to do the things needed from her to build the kingdom of God.

The Christian love is a love without hypocrisy

Just as St. Paul says “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good” (Romans 12:9). Let us hope that our hearts would not be different from our tongues and that our tongues would not be different from our feelings.

How was Judas the Iscariot’s love towards Jesus Christ during his kiss to him and at the time he went off to the chief priests and said to them what would you give me to deliver Him to you?

The Christian love is a sacrificing love

Love is tested with pain, heartache, and with sacrifice. Whoever that does not want to sacrifice cannot love. If a person loved, then he would sacrifice everything. When Jacob, the father of all, loved Rachel he sacrificed many things for her. He worked for her for 20 years while being scorched by the sun in the morning and getting cold at night. All of these years for him were as few days because of his

love to Rachel. “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).

HOW TO REACH THE LEVEL OF THE CHRISTIAN LOVE

Pray to reach this fruit “love”

Exercise into obeying the command of love as follows:

“And just as you want men to do to you; you also do to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). It is a beautiful principle for a person to think about how he wants others to treat him and then treats others based on that principle

“But if you love those who loved you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners Lend to sinners to receive as much back” (Luke 6:32-34). Therefore, the person should start exchanging love with those who do not exchange with him the same love. This is what distinguishes a Christian person, when compared to others, in that his love fills all from his love towards God (those who the Bible has called them here in Luke 6:32-34 as “sinners”)

Then with the grace of the Holy Spirit and as a natural fruit the person reaches the Lord Christ’s command in the New Testament “But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him, who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back.” (Luke 6:27-30)

LOVE AND STRICTNESS

Love does not contradict with justice and neither does it contradict with strictness/firmness. Therefore, we know that God is full of love, and is full of justice. The Lord Christ who was incarnated was like that. He used to travel and do good, heal the sick and weak from all illnesses. On top of that, when He entered the Temple and found the money changers and those who were selling doves, He overturned their tables and drove them out and said to them “My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.” (Matthew 21:13). He was also firm and frank with the Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests of the Jews and said to them “Woe to you” several times since they desecrated the true worship of

God and as a result all of their deeds became outside of the love of God. Hence, the Lord Christ was firm with them.

Does the father at home give strictness while the mother gives love? This is wrong as the mother and the father should both have simultaneously the love and firmness. There is no contradiction between the firmness to discipline along with the love. Even the discipline comes out of love to the son/daughter and for their benefit.

This is how Moses was as he was extremely patient and loved by the entire congregation. However, he was extremely firm at the same time and showed his disappointment with them when he saw the golden calf which, this firmness was needed for their repentance.

Similarly, Elijah the prophet was extremely lovable but he was tremendously strong and firm and asked the Lord to stop the rain for three years and six months even though a famine was going to take place, but this was needed for repentance.

Likewise, David the prophet was extremely lovable and the Lord said about him “I have searched in David’s heart and found it as Mine”. David was firm in leading the army and the people.

John the Baptist was also full with love because he was filled with the Holy Spirit while he was a baby in his mother’s womb. He was very firm with Herod the king and told him “**It is not lawful for you**” to have your brother’s wife as your wife.

Was our mother the Virgin Mary with all of her love and humility a firm person? Yes, indeed she was despite all of her deep love.

St. Mary went to serve Elizabeth when she was pregnant with St. John the Baptist and stayed at her house for three months. However, despite all that love, she was still a firm person in that she never loved the praise of people because of her service to St. Elizabeth but “returned to her home”. This is firmness with the soul and strength. Similarly, in the wedding of Cana of Galilee when she told her son and God Jesus Christ “They don’t have wine”, but she was firm with the servants and told them “whatever he says to you, do it”. She was also firm with herself in turning down any attempts to understand all the matters that cannot be understood by the human brain such as the incarnation of God and all the other incidents that she has kept in her heart “and His mother kept all of these matters in her heart.”

STORIES ON THE CHRISTIAN LOVE

A very good Christian wife who had a heart full of love was married to a husband who unfortunately used to walk in the sinful way and commit criminal acts. As a

result of his actions, he was sentenced to death by shooting which would take place once the prison bell was rung. This husband was very aggressive with his wife and she had been abused by him. On the day of his sentence, she climbed the pole that he was attached to and clasped the bell with her hands so that it would not ring and her husband would not die. That meant that her hands would have been cut and blood would ooze out and they would be broken. Indeed, the bell did not ring and she saved her husband from death. Her love saved him from the death and he presented great repentance. The Lord has as well healed her broken bones afterwards.

A Lebanese young man, who used to study in a university in Germany, was coming back home to his country during the war to visit his family. He was a person full of faith and love. Unfortunately, they caught him and thought that he was a spy and led him to the death penalty field. He was walking with the jail keeper, who was responsible to hand him to death, and telling him with lots of love that he feels sorry for the jail keeper in his job as he hands people off to death. The Lebanese man told the jail keeper that he will pray for him. All of a sudden, the jail keeper's heart changed and he felt sympathy towards the Lebanese man and told him that his love had touched him deeply and he let him loose from another road to escape and avoid the death penalty.

A small town in Egypt called Esna had great love for the soldiers who came late at night and surrounded the town ready to kill every person in the Christian town. However, the people of the town went out late at night and offered the soldiers food and water. One of those soldiers who had seen the people's act of love change his religion and became the very well known Saint Bakhoumius the father of the Monastic Partnership.

One of the monks was slapped by a young girl who had a devil possessing her. The monk turned his other cheek to the girl so the devil screamed loudly and was cast out of the girl.

There is a story about a Monastery's abbot who went to the cell of a new monk who was caught in his cell with a woman. The abbot went to the cell under pressure while he was full of sadness. When the abbot had arrived to the cell, the new monk had hidden the woman under a small table. The abbot entered the cell and sat on the top of the table so as not to harm the new monk's feelings. When the abbot left the cell, he heard a voice saying Blessed O Makarius for you have a glimpse of the Holy in that you have hidden the faults of others.

CONCLUSION:

Any love to the others that does not come out of the love of the person to God is a wrongful love.

The Christian love to others is a love that comes out of the heart that is filled with the love of God. Then the person loves everyone just as God loves everyone.

The Christian love to others is not feelings from the heart only, but it accompanies an act that points to Christian love. This is similar to the love of God that is sacrificial. He is the “**Beneficent**”.

The love of the person to others emanates from the love of the person to God and that is why it cannot be more than the love towards God.

There is no Christianity without love “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35).

The Christian love is without hypocrisy.

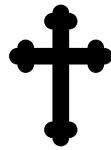
The Christian love is a sacrificing love.

You must practice in applying the command of love. Start with treating others the way you want others to treat you. Continue in loving those who do not love you. The Lord will fill you with the Holy Spirit’s love so you may attain the fruit that will allow you to love your enemies.

Love does not contradict firmness. On the contrary, we know that God is Love, is Just and Firm and He wants us like Him.

The Christian love saves from death.

The person who concentrates on himself does not know how to love in the right way.



THE CHURCH'S EFFECT ON THE PERSONALITY FORMATION

INTRODUCTION: THE PERSON'S BOND TO THE CHURCH

The individual's bond to the church differs tremendously from one person to another. Some people's connection to the church is very weak and diminishing. Those people live a miserable and tiring life, yet they do not think about the church, which is their lifeboat. Other people go to church on occasions and feasts only as a habit. They fail to comprehend the significance of the spiritual occasion or to live in and to enjoy all its holy blessings. Yet there are other people who get attached to the church and go to it several times each month, but only when they have time. To these people, the church is considered a place that they go to whenever they have time or whenever they truly need to go for a special matter there. Then there are also whose lives get attached so much to the church to the extent that their personalities are developed by it. They find in the church their happiness, faith, the way to eternal life, and the feeling that the church is within their hearts "And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

We will, with the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, speak about the Christian person's personality formulating in the church and how attached he is to the church. Moreover, we will look into the graceful words of St. Ephrem the Syrian who stated "If a person wanted for God to be his father, then that person must have the Church as his mother."

In order to cover this subject, we will talk about the following points:

- † My single and hidden identity.
- † The person's confrontations.
- † The work of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the person's personality.
- † The work of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the service in the church.
- † My identity in the church.

† My duty towards the church.

† How do I know my identity?

MY SINGLE AND HIDDEN IDENTITY.

One of the important issues in a person's life is for him to have a single/lone identity at church, at home and at work. That person works to establish one single identity for himself, in all aspects of his life, whether at his home, social life, school, or work. If the person's behavior is different and dependent on the place he is in, then that person has become a hypocrite and this is a sin.

The Lord Jesus Christ glory be to His Name said: "...Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees..."(Matthew 13:29) as they were hypocrites and used to change their behavior/morals based on their surroundings. Changing the person's identity is not going to benefit him in anything, but rather is going to harm the society and the church. The person ought to have one identity inside the church and in every other place. We are ambassadors on behalf of Christ as he said "...Learn from Me..." (Matthew 11:29). We learn from Him to have gentleness and kindness with all people and to be helpful and loving because we are Christians so that other people would see that in all places "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

THE PERSON'S CONFRONTATIONS.

A student learns many things at school. He learns many important aspects by which he builds his own mind so that he can collaborate later in society when he starts working. Hence, work means so much to us as it is the practical collaboration in the society around us.

Work is also another venue by which people will see the Christ Who is in us and that is an important side of our working life. Moreover, work is important to cover our personal needs. As a result, school means a lot to me, and work means a lot to me as well.

All of the different organizations that we deal with in life, in the society we live in, are important for us. Yet, none of all of these organizations is capable of satisfying us by bringing the heart-based happiness to anyone. None of these organizations such as school, work or even the society are able to give eternal life. The church gives us Happiness and eternal life through the work of the Holy Spirit. One of the important aspects is that my personality is formed inside the holy Church with the work of the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Church.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE FORMATION OF THE PERSON'S PERSONALITY.

St. Paul the apostle explains to us in his first epistle to Corinthians chapter 12 verses 3-7 and also verses 12, 13 the work of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the Christian personality and in the formation of the Christian society (the Church).

“Therefore, I 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 this scripture, it is clear that we cannot reach the ultimate truth of the faith except with Jesus. We cannot become a son or daughter of God except through the work of the Holy Spirit inside us.

“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” (1 John 12:13).

From the moment of the second birth in the baptism the Holy Spirit gives a new vision and new life as He has given a new vision and a new life to the man born blind.

That is why the Holy Spirit is called (Braklitoun) and it is a Greek word that means “the Helper of the spirit in everything”. The Holy Spirit helps us in everything; in our Christian life which includes:

† 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 in 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).

Therefore, we cannot pray or praise in a practical way except when the Holy Spirit works in us. The Holy Spirit can also decorate us with His fruit:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Holy Spirit is the source of the daily blessings and as a result, we don’t thirst for the worldly and materialistic issues as the Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to His name, said in the gospel according to St. John:

“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 in the person to give him a spiritual vision and helps him to pray and understand the holy books as well as to create from him a true person who believes in Christ. However, in order to enjoy the work of the Holy Spirit, two things are required from us:

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 evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forging 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 is fitting for saints” (Ephesians 5:3).

SUBMISSION TO GOD, BEING THANKFUL AND THE 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, 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 WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE FORMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN SOCIETY (THE CHURCH).

In the first epistle to the Corinthians we read as follows:

† “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).

God chooses the servants of His house and they serve in the church under the guidance of God Himself. God gives them the necessary gifts to perform this service in order to form a complete Christian society that produces fruit and does not lack anything. As an example of that:

IN THE AREA OF GIVING SOCIAL SERVICES:

“Seven highly reputable men and filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom were chosen to serve the multitude of people; whereas the disciples chose to vacate themselves for prayer and servicing the word.

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was 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, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them” (Acts 6:1-6).

IN BUILDING THE CHURCH SERVICE:

In the Old Testament, the Lord told Moses how to appoint specific people and gave them the required information and needed talents that were necessary to build the tabernacle.

“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 Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, 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 lamp stand with all its utensils, that 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).

As a result, in every church there are servants who serve the children and the youth in Sunday school. The Holy Spirit works in them and so it is not that they are the speakers but rather the Holy Spirit. There are others who pay attention to the social occasions and work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in heavenly love and self-denial. Hence, no one feels proud in their service at church because the Holy Spirit is He who gives the needed talents to serve in the church.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit gives us the Christian life that we nurture by repentance and spiritual acts. All of the church’s body, which is comprised of all the people together, is a gathering of different talents that the Holy Spirit provides to every individual.

MY IDENTITY IN THE CHURCH.

The Church is the source of my life and the road to eternal life as well as the road to how to obtain this happiness for me. That is why my identity in the church is the source of that. Therefore, the church is such an important aspect in my life.

The mere fact that I am member of the church’s body means that I have to strengthen my faith in Christ in order to reach the correct faith that is based on Jesus Christ to deserve to be a member in Christ’s body, and as a result, a true member of the church’s body. However, if I do not have faith in Christ, then I cannot call myself a member in my church since both follow each other.

The Holy Book teaches us that when the Lord Christ spoke to His disciples about the church and faith:

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, **‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’** Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:17-18).

Christ said to Peter that He will build the church on this rock which is the faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This is my ultimate goal then which is to believe in Jesus Christ so that my participation in the church is based on that foundation that is in us. Every time I enter the church I must understand that the most important thing in my life is my faith in Jesus Christ that He is the Son of God.

Additionally, since the church is the source of life, it gives me the correct faith. Consequently, regularly attending Sunday school, sermons, and the youth meetings will help me understand the Holy Bible and grow in my faith. As St. Paul the apostle says **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). My faith comes from hearing the word of God through listening to the word of God and its explanation.

All that I hear in church will build my faith and will get me closer to God. The church becomes such an important aspect in my life in order to nurture my faith in Christ. Moreover, inside the church, I enjoy the seven sacraments. In the baptism, I enjoy the new birth and the riddance of the old sin. I also dress up with the Holy Spirit gifts in the Confirmation sacrament (Myroon sacrament). In the sacrament of the Eucharist, I get united with Christ through taking His Body and Blood as He promised that **“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him”** (John 6:56). Also, when I get sick, the priest comes and anoints me with oil (Sacrament of Unction of the Sick). Therefore, whether I am a son or daughter of the church, I delight in the seven sacraments of the church. Through the work of the Holy Spirit I grow in my faith and my prayers increase. Through the Holy Spirit I get closer and closer to the Lord Christ. Not only through the sacraments and the sermons, but also through the connection I have with all the church members that I delight in the blessing. For example, if the church organizes a fun trip, then I should sign up and I should help in the preparation of the event. This is by itself a great joy. We start by prayer first and then by singing spiritual songs. This way we become one family in the love of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the aghaby meetings, in any of its forms, bring happiness and joy to all of us because it makes us feel that we are one family in Christ and that He is with us. Just as He promised us “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). He is among us. Moreover, during our celebrations in the saints’ feasts, the saints become role models for us so that we follow in their steps in obeying the commandments. The saints were also human and obeyed the commandments, they are a true example for us all.

It is such a great thing that I am a member of the church and that I have faith in Jesus Christ, partaking in the sacraments and becoming part of the church society in all occasions. No matter how old I am, I am still the church’s son or daughter and I enjoy all that. The church supports me and helps me from the day of my baptism to this moment in everything and my personality gets formed in the church.

This way, the church is an important factor and guidance so that I can gain a place in Kingdom of God. Just as Mari-Ephrem the Syrian said “If any person wanted for God to be his father, then the church has to be his mother.” I cannot reach eternal life without practicing the sacraments in the church and listening to the word of God. All of these are important factors for me to become a member of the church.

Therefore, because I am a member of the church, then I am a member of Jesus Christ’s body as it is written: “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:4-8).

We are members with different jobs and talents in the church but with One Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives each one the talents and abilities to use in serving the church.

Therefore, we have different talents/gifts but One Spirit. Thus, we ought to use these gifts towards glorifying God’s name. Jesus is the head of the church and the church is the body of Christ; whereas, we are members in this body. Hence, we are the body of Christ and Christ leads.

MY DUTY TOWARDS THE CHURCH.

† Firstly: Obedience.

No matter how old I am, and no matter how educated I am, I have to obey the word of God in the church. I have to obey the priest of the church and the Pope. I have to obey each authority of the church. Therefore, my reply should be: yes, I will do my part in this aspect. Just as when the Virgin Mary obeyed the word of the angel and said to him: “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” This way I become a son/daughter of the church and not a member that defies the church.

† Secondly: I ought to have complete confidence in the church.

The church is the house of God and the house of prayer. The church is the body of Christ. I should not lose confidence at all in the church and in my father of confession. The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is based on confidence. I should not lose my confidence in the church especially that the church protected the faith that was handed down from the disciples without any change or alteration. The church is based on the blood of the martyrs who protected the faith and we follow this unchanged faith.

† Thirdly: I become a member.

It's not enough to have my name registered with the rest of the members, it is essential to also be a true member in the faith of Christ and my heart is in the church. Not only physically, but also with my heart. Therefore, I have true membership in the church and the church is what formed my personality through the Holy Spirit that works in it.

† Fourthly: Fellowship KOINOINIA.

Which means the Christian fellowship and that we should imitate each other and share the church life. If one member is in pain, then the rest of the members feels the pain and do their utmost to help this member. And if a member is happy, then the rest of the members will be happy with him. We believe that we are all one family. If we go back and look at the **Book of Acts** and searched for the church as one family and how was the way they dealt among each other we find:

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in

common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple..." (Acts 2:42-46).

We find in these **four aspects**. The **first aspect** is regularly attending the teaching in the church. The **second aspect** is fellowship - because I am a member of the church, I share in the church. So, when the church talks to us about paying the tithes and the like, whether it is for the poor and needy or for the church, I should not say: once I finish all of my study, I will start giving the tithes, but I should start from now. No matter how small my tithes; I have to train myself from now so that God blesses the rest.

The **third aspect** is the breaking of bread, which is participating in the communion, and this is one of the most important aspects that I will not find in any other place but the church. The **fourth aspect** is the prayers. The four aspects are enjoyable to practice in the church as I am a member of its members.

"... and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." Acts 2:46

This is Christianity: cheerfulness and simplicity of heart.

"Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

The church grows because I am a member of it and I too grow with it. We share with each other in everything we have and God helps us. Therefore, let us do our responsibility and God will complete our work and perfect it. As He is perfect in all He does.

HOW DO I KNOW MY IDENTITY?

FIRSTLY: To know my true identity, I have to pray for that. I cannot do anything alone. I ask God in my prayer: God, show me my identity. Open my eyes to know my weakness and gifts as well to develop myself to the best. Also, to know my identity and to distance myself from earthly matters, I will need to review myself as the prodigal son did when he came back to himself, repented and went back to his first level and back home.. I as well ought to come back to myself and long to make my personality better through prayers. This is my responsibility towards

myself. On top of that I have to understand that the person's personality is continually changing.

I may inherit some of the behaviors from my parents but I have to give a chance for the church to form me and allowing myself to take part in the sacraments of the church..

Therefore, the conclusion of all of the above is five points:

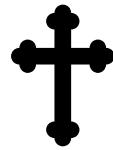
- † To form my personality and identity in the church through prayers and the work of Holy Spirit and this is what St. Paul said: “... **But be transformed by the renewing of your mind...**” (Romans 12:2). As a result, the feelings change and the personality as well through the work of the Holy Spirit inside us. The most valuable thing is that my personality is formed in the church and grows in it.
- † We should not let the media, friends and the external world change us or affect us. We have to get deeper in the church and in the house of God so that we are formed gradually to look like Jesus Christ in our humility and purity and so we become the light of the world. We should not allow for any chance to the darkness of the sin to enter.
- † We must participate in singing the hymns, the praises and the songs of the church. This would deepen our faith and ignite in us the pure feelings inside us. All of these things will help us to thank the Lord in all situations and praise His Holy Name.
- † My membership in the church ought to be useful and not just a name on the list of members. The church is in my heart and my heart is in the church because the church is an important aspect in my life.
- † All of that is based on love. Not only my love to those who are surrounding me in the church but I ask God to give love to all people, so this way I become a true member of the church if I had this love. **Jesus said: “If love was in you, then the world will know that you are My disciples.”** We have to love everyone and treat everyone kindly, not just my parents and the church, but everyone so that I become a true member.

Let God help us to be true members and not only names on a list, but true members in the body of Christ.

PRAYER

Lord, I thank You from all of my heart that You have opened for me a church so that it can be the source of my happiness, my door to heaven, my fullness, a holy place that I can be at amidst the angels, and my restful pace where my soul get rested with You and I put all of my worries on You. It is a place where I start my life with You in it at baptism and my faith in You grow in You. Thank You for giving me the church where it is a place that I unite with You in it through the Eucharist, and a place I feel that I am a member in the holy body and a member of Your holy family throughout all the days of my life up until when I leave here from the church on earth to the Winning Church where the Church is my mother. Lord please makes all of the church's doors open for all the believers.





“SIT DOWN FIRST AND COUNT THE COST” -LUKE 14:28

INTRODUCTION: COMMON MISTAKE

One of the commons mistakes among some Christians is planning for everything, reviewing every action and worrying about the outcome. It is enough that we depend on God Who loves us and protects us and to wait on Him to send us all the blessings. As for us, there is no need to think, plan, or count the cost.

A SYMBOLIC AND MEANINGFUL STORY

Once, a flood took place in a town that threatened the lives of many people. The government in that town organized a special rescue unit to save the people and take them from their houses before the flood level reached a level that no one could bear. In one of the buildings, all of the people were rushing to save themselves except one religious man who refused that his life be saved. The water level kept rising and he had to move to another level in the building, yet he refused to be saved on the basis that God can save him and that God is more powerful than all these special rescue units and he insisted not be saved. At the end he drowned and his soul went to Hades. There, they asked him why did you come here? He answered and said, “I did so because I depended on God, and He did not save me.” They answered him back and said, “God prepared the rescue units, so why did you refuse them? Where was your mind, the one that God gave you? Why did you tempt God even though it is written, “You shall not tempt the LORD your God.” Luke 4:12. God gives us the means, but we have to utilize it. We can’t be like this man and walk away from His arms which saves, waiting for God to save us in a specific manner. We must work with what He provides and put efforts towards our own Salvation.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

“Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my

barns and build greater and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”” But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’

“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12:16-21

It is clear from the parable that the rich, who God has called him a fool, he forgot that God has a role in all matter. He thought to himself that he could plan without God. He thought that his life is in his hands and that God has nothing to do with it. He thought that happiness comes from materialistic matters. He forgot that the human life is in the hands of God. This is a huge mistake and is the opposite of what the other person did (in the previous story) who wanted only God to do the work, but did not want to do any work himself.

In this small section, we will prove from the Holy Bible that it is **essential** for the person to think and study the matters and count the cost in his life prior to the start of any of the things in his life. This also requires prayer, guidance, and leaning on God as well as hearing His voice.

To cover this topic, we will need to discuss the following points:

- † Life, with all of its trials and problems experienced by all people.
- † The Lord Christ, to Whom is the glory, asks us to think and plan then do the work.
- † Is thinking and planning a wrong action that shows no depending on God?
- † The conclusion of a matter is a difficult thing.
- † God gives you the “seeds” and you are to work to grow it.
- † All of the successful organizations must have a planning department.
- † How can planning be successful?
- † The conclusion.

LIFE, WITH ALL OF ITS TRIALS AND PROBLEMS, EXPERIENCED BY ALL PEOPLE.

In God’s endless love, “... He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matt 5:45. He gives blessings generously

to everyone. A person can face many problems, illnesses, and many trials. In addition, we cannot ignore the pressure in our daily working life, who can withstand all that? The person who can withstand all this is the one who has built his house on the rock, which is the faith in Christ. “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on)the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was funded on the rock. “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” Matt 7:24-27

Therefore, troubles, trails, and responsibilities face every person and **EVERYONE SHOULD PREPARE**. Those who have built their houses on the sand (i.e. without preparation) got ruined because they did not prepare. Therefore, it is essential to have faith along with the preparation to face the troubles in life (i.e. with work) because faith itself without work is dead. “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ... O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” James 2:14-20

THE LORD CHRIST, TO WHOM IS THE GLORY, ASKS US TO THINK AND PLAN THEN DO THE WORK.

The brain and the ability to think are a blessing from God. Would God give this blessing so that the person would not use it to the fullest? Of course that would not be logically acceptable and not even biblically acceptable.

† “For which of you, intending to build **a tower, does not sit down first** and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it lest, after he has the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’? Or what king, going to make war against another king, **does not sit down first and consider** whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.” Luke 14:28-32

It is clear from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ the following:

It is imperative to think first before the start of anything. Not to mention thinking in a calm manner as it is clear from the phrase, “sit down first”.

It is important for the person to have an imagination for matter he wishes to reach in its final look. This imagination must be clear. For example, imagination in

building a tower refers to the size of that tower and how long it would take to build, etc.

It is vital to consult with someone when it comes to important matters especially with a person who had wisdom, honesty and no conflict of interest. This should all take place before the start of any project. Our beloved Pope Shenouda III said, “Two minds are better than one.”

In the same subject about the importance of thinking, planning then executing, St. Paul the Apostle said: “See then that you **WALK CIRCUMSPECTLY, NOT AS FOOLS BUT AS WISE**, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Ephesians 5:15-16

From verses by St. Paul, the following become clear:

We must walk cautiously. This requires thinking and planning. Would this contradict with prayer and its importance? Of course not.

We must behave as the wise.

We must not behave as fools,, but as people who understand. The word “understand” means thinking of any matter and studying it. It was said St. Mary was a deep thinker, “But His mother **kept all these things in her heart.**” Luke 2:51

St. Mary, who is our utmost role model, did not used to speak much, but she used to think and meditate deeply. Moreover, she used to pray and fully depend on God “And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.” Luke 1:50

IS THINKING AND PLANNING A WRONG ACTION THAT SHOWS NO DEPENDING ON GOD?

The Bible verses must be looked at together and not looked at separately upon which a final conclusion is reached without the entire picture being drawn in the verse. Many religious groups have fallen for this wrong principle and they have ended up into an incomplete understanding of the Bible verses.

There are many verses that illustrate that our eternal life is everything:

- † “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Luke 12:34
- † “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do

not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that” James 13:15

From the above it is clear that thinking and planning are based on the following:

Giving the person’s place in heaven the first priority.

In addition, planning should not be based on a materialistic gain only. “No one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and mammon.” Matthew 6:24

Any thinking or planning should be placed in the hands of God either to bless it and allow it to happen through us or He would not want it to happen for our own benefit which we might not understand today, but later we will.

There are many other verses about the importance of leaning on God and surrendering to Him. The following are some examples:

† “Therefore grid up the loins of your mind, be sober, **and rest your hope fully upon the grace** that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1:13

It is clear from the above verse that the mind of a believer should always be alert and therefore it is said, “grid up the loins of your mind.” Then He explained in great details that this does not conflict with leaning on God and His grace. Therefore, He said “and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

We find in the Psalms of David many psalms that indicate the importance of leaning on God’s work. This does not conflict with the fact that we have a role to play.

† “Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust” Psalm 16:1

† “To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul” Psalm 25:1

† “O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me.” Psalm 25:2

The principle drawn from these examples is that in thinking and planning we must also lean on God. As such, the person would walk in his life in steps, guided by the word of God in him or else his steps would be weak. A person must do his part with God’s work. As an example, in Lazarus’ miracle: God told the people to lift

the stone, which was the human part. However, the Divine part was much bigger, which was the raising of Lazarus from the dead after his body was rotten. That is why one of the Saints say, “No human being can work without God and God will not work without the human being.”

THE CONCLUSION OF A MATTER IS A DIFFICULT THING.

(The end of a thing is better than its beginning. Ecclesiastes 7:8)

From the simplest matters to the most complicated matters, “The end of a thing is better than its beginning” Ecclesiastes 7:8. The word “better” means “more important” from its start. Therefore, there should be a clear vision of the end of matter from its simplest outcome to the most complicated.

Examples:

- † A person needs to be at the airport at a specific time (e.i.11am). Then he must calculates the time backwards.. He must calculate the time it takes for transportation with some additional time in the case of unforeseen road delay then he can come to the time at which he must leave home. Therefore, the end of a matter defines where our calculation will start and how to prepare and budget for its cost.
- † A young man wants to become an engineer. Then, he should calculate for that matter backwards e.i., from the end to the beginning. Will there be available engineering positions? What are the engineering schools and universities? What are the courses that must be taken at these universities?

Therefore, the end point is the start of the thinking and planning.

- † The most important matter is the eternal goal. Every person wants to have a great eternal end after his effort on earth to the extent that St. Paul said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” 2 Timothy 4:7

GOD GIVES YOU THE “SEEDS” AND YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO WORK WITH THEM.

God does not give a tree that has fruits already, but rather gives us “seeds” that we water and He grows it. He leads us to pull the weed and He grows the tree so that it brings fruit for our good. The farmer works in the land, but it is God that makes it grow. However, the experienced farmer knows the exact cycle so that he knows when to plant the seeds, when to water them, and when to clean the land before

tweaking the seeds. God gives him the increasing fruit at the end (30, 60, and 100 fold), but he must think, plan, and work.

ALL OF THE SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATIONS MUST HAVE A PLANNING DEPARTMENT.

All of the successful organization must have a planning department and in it they study the future expectations and how to work from now so that the organizations become prepared for all the future and account for it. As much as their precession in their planning is a huge part , success is also based on the other departments that implement.

Not to mention these plans must be reviewed and adjusted according to the required outcome. Otherwise, all of the steps will be based on a plan that is not suitable, which leads to a failure outcome. However, there is a difference between the planning of the people of the world, which is based on pure studies versus the planning by the sons of God in their lives, which is based on God leading the way with His guidance in the person's circle of thinking, feeling and effort.

HOW CAN PLANNING BE SUCCESSFUL?

† Are steps towards the goal important or are they just tasks?

When the vision is clear, the steps/roles go towards the correct direction and are not just random tasks. For example, David the prophet had a clear vision that he will become king after Saul. David knew so after Samuel the prophet anointed him king. As such David did behave accordingly as “he had served his own generation by the will of God” Acts 13:36. His steps were taken towards this goal.

† Is the person a manager or a leader?

The manager is a person who manages the work through several assignments and maybe does not have a clear vision of the end goal. On the other hand, the leader has a clear goal in front of him and knows the obstacles that must be faced to achieve the goal.

† Would the person do things right or right things?

A person should do right things and not just things right. This is also obvious when the vision is clear and things are not only right, but also serve a goal. For example, a student knows that a chemistry exam is going to be tomorrow. He should concentrate to obtain great marks in

chemistry and in doing right things. If, on the other hand, he spent his time in other matters then this would not be suitable (doing things right).

† Does the person have a role in this life?

There are some people in this life that will live and die without it crossing their minds that they can have an influence on what is happening around them. Of course God will use the human being, according the human's will, to build the society and the Church. However, the human should at least ask God to use him for improvement and for the good; otherwise, the person would be revolving around himself in a selfish manner.

† Does the person use the talents that God has given him?

St. Paul says to his disciple St. Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy” 1 Timothy 4:14. God, through His love, has given every person many talents and abilities. The person should firstly discover these talents. Secondly, he should improve these talents. Thirdly, he should use these talents to his good and the good of the society.

† Does the person do his utmost?

The Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to His name, said, “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” John 17:4. **This is our** role model in all what we do. One of the nice biblical stories that show how the person should do his utmost is the story of the four lepers.

“ Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, “Why are we sitting here until we die? If we say, ‘We will enter the city,’ the famine *is* in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore, come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall only die.” And they rose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians; and when they had come to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, to their surprise no one *was* there. For the Lord had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses—the noise of a great army; so they said to one another, “Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack

us!” Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact—their tents, their horses, and their donkeys—and they fled for their lives. And when these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they went into one tent and ate and drank, and carried from it silver and gold and clothing, and went and hid them; then they came back and entered another tent, and carried some from there also, and went and hid it. “And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die. And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the LORD had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.” 2 Kings 7:3-8.

† Does the person think and plan without worrying?

This is an important condition to the success of matter as a rule in our lives. Would a person lose his peace during thinking and planning? This would be such a huge mistake that indicates the lack of faith, prayer, not leaning on God, and not asking for their father of confession’s guidance.

Example: St. Mary did not get worried at all when she was in front of Archangel Gabriel, but rather answered him from the bottom of her thinking and principles and said: “Behold the maidservant of the Lord!..” Luke 1:38. She was not worried as well when she ran away with the Child Jesus and Joseph the carpenter to Egypt. She also came back without being worried.

† Does the person think and plan with an open mind?

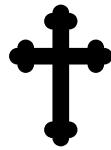
A person should be prepared to change his thinking and his plans and should not stick to one thing. He should listen to the voice of God, His plans, and implement them. If God guided him to another thing, then the person should have an open mind and implement Gods' plan.

The story of David the prophet in saving the Keilah village:

"Then they told David, saying, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are robbing the threshing floors." Therefore David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah?" But David's men said to him, "Look, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" Then David inquired of the LORD once again. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand." And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow, and took away their livestock. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah. Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, that he went down with an ephod in his hand. And Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah. So Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars." Then Saul called all the people together for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down." Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will deliver you." So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go. Then it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah; so he halted the expedition. And David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand." 1 Samuel 23:1-14.

CONCLUSION.

1. God has given us mental and spiritual talents that any wise person should use.
2. God has taught us to sit down to calculate the cost but without being worried and not leaning on our own personal opinion or our personal abilities.
3. Any thinking or planning must give the priority to the eternal life and the saving of the human soul before anything else.
4. Our steps should be built on a clear vision in our mind. We think about it and consult our father of confession or people who do not have a conflict of interest in their goals with ours.
5. We must be open minded and have a second plan or a different way in case God has a different road for us to walk and succeed on.



CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

"PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN; STRUCK DOWN, BUT NOT DESTROYED" (2 Corinthians 4:9)

INTRODUCTION: THE INJURED FEELINGS

I met a deeply saddened woman and her feelings were very much hurt. When I asked her what the reason was behind her sadness, she answered and said it is because of the current events that the Egyptian Copts endure, which does not end, starting from the wounded and the dead, to those who get attacked, and to those who are without a job, plus the attacks and the burning of the churches. How would she be comforted? One of the things that added to her sadness is her continuous follow-up on the news and media that just exaggerate and repeat the issues. I asked her to give me some time to speak about the “persecution” subject with her because it has different angles that, if we equip ourselves with faith and with the knowledge of these angles, it would calm our feelings. These feelings would then be changed to holy feelings, not bitter or fearful ones, but rather ones that, “Work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28). “For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:7-8).

We spoke about the different angles of the persecution subject and her soul calmed down and she told me that she prayed for not only the persecuted in Egypt, but for all the persecuted in the whole world and those who persecute them. Let me mention some of the angles that we spoke about:

- † Persecution existed since the beginning of creation. It is directed by Satan and his followers towards the people of God
- † Pain benefits the person and develops him
- † God does not allow us to be trialed beyond our limit

- † The person who endures the persecutions with thankfulness carries the cross and will be glorified with Christ
- † The murdered are martyrs. The blood of the martyrs screams out and God avenges for them
- † What is our role in the persecution that is directed towards us?
- † The conclusion
- † From the Church's prayers

PERSECUTION EXISTED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF CREATION. IT IS DIRECTED BY SATAN AND HIS FOLLOWERS TOWARDS THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

The Book of Revelation tells us at the moment the devil fell from heaven, persecution started immediately against the people of God. It is written: “Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.” (Revelation 12:12-13).

The devil descended from heaven to earth with great wrath and persecuted the sons of God. In Psalm 143:3-4, King David says: “For the enemy has persecuted my soul; He has crushed my life to the ground; He has made me dwell in darkness, like those who have long been dead. Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me: My heart within me is distressed,” at the end of this Psalm he says: “In Your mercy cut off my enemies, and destroy all those who afflict my soul; for I am Your servant.”

The people of Israel were in Egypt from the time of Joseph till the time of Moses, which was more than 350 years, during which the people of Israel were under slavery and being killed. Yet, we find that God says, “I have seen the oppression of My people in Egypt” (Exodus 3:7). This is what happens today. God sees the oppression of His people in Egypt and as He descended and saved His people at the time of Moses, He will save His people now.

The people of God are persecuted by the devil and his helpers, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). Therefore, the persecution was against the Lord Christ Himself and all the apostles and these persecutions extend to ALL the sons of God. “Who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets,

and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men.” (1 Thessalonian 2:15), and “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” (Acts 7:52) Note that the person who persecutes the sons of God persecutes God Himself, as God says: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4)... “I am Jesus of Nazareth, Whom you are persecuting.” (Acts 22:8)

What is the sign that the sons of God have? They are persecuted from the devil and his helpers. This persecution is towards God Himself. Ever since the first church as it is mentioned in Acts 8:1, “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

PAIN BENEFITS THE PERSON AND DEVELOPS HIM

Taking responsibility and enduring pain makes a person stronger and makes him gain the virtue of patience to face obstacles with an open mind so that he may overcome these obstacles to avoid collapsing. “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (James 1:2-4).

A person may think that entertainment and enjoyment is beneficial to him. However, the opposite is true. Enduring pain and troubles is what benefits the human being. It was said about St. John the Baptist who lived in the wilderness, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously apparelled and live in luxury are in kings’ courts. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’ For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” (Luke 7:24-28).

Anyone can see that a child or youth that was raised in a spoiled manner is not able to face life, but rather collapses under any pressure, nor can he take responsibilities. On the other hand, the child or youth who is raised in a somewhat demanding environment will be able to take responsibilities from his younger years and face life as he grows up. Therefore, do not despise pain or suffering because it benefits the person and does not hurt him if it is with God’s allowance rather than a result of sin.

GOD DOES NOT ALLOW US TO BE TRIALED BEYOND OUR LIMIT

If a trail is from God, then God will put a limit to it, and it will be a reason for improvement not a reason for disaster. “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33). Also, “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).

He did not allow the furnace of fire that was seven times hotter than usual to hurt Daniel’s three friends. God also did not allow the lions to touch Daniel in the lion’s den. God did not allow all the persecutions from the Jews, Romans, or others to hurt anything, and the Church expanded while all the persecutors were quenched. “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” (Acts 9:31)

Joseph the righteous was persecuted from his brothers because of the colourful shirt that his dad, Jacob, had given him. Joseph endured a lot and was put in jail because of his honesty and his insistence not to touch the wife of Potiphar. God did not allow pain to destroy Joseph, but he was a blessing in all the places that he went to including jail. Finally, God moved Joseph from jail to the palace and he became the second man in Egypt, after the Pharaoh, and was the reason for Egypt’s escape of the great famine.

THE PERSON WHO ENDURES PERSECUTIONS WITH THANKFULNESS CARRIES THE CROSS AND WILL BE GLORIFIED WITH CHRIST

Throughout the ages, Christians endured persecutions with thankfulness. They carried the cross with Christ and tasted the pleasanse of the resurrection with him.

Persecutions are symbols for the Christians that are full of love and giving. When St. Peter spoke to Jesus Christ saying: “See, we have left all and **followed You.**” (Mark 10:28). Jesus then answered him saying: “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life.” (Mark 10:29-30).

Therefore, the persecution that a Christian person endures is the same road to Christ. It is the road of the cross, the resurrection road, the glory road, the victory road, and the road to eternal life. St. Paul’s road is the same road that Christ took: persecuted from the devil and all his helpers. In St. Paul’s letters to his disciple

Timothy he says: “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (2 Timothy 3:10-12)

It is a great irony. The church is persecuted yet in peace and is enduring it. The church is persecuted, yet very strong. The church is crucified, yet notwithstanding. St. Paul explains this irony and says: “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” (2 Corinthians 4:7-9)

It is such a great irony what the Christian person endures during persecutions. Then, St. Paul explains how this irony takes place and says that it takes place through Godly work during which Jesus Christ carries the pain instead of the persecuted person and gives him a happy, heavenly life rather than pain while on earth. St. Paul says: “Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” (2 Corinthians 4:10-11)

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:35)

St. Paul wanted to explain to the Thessalonians that he can boast due to their endurance to the persecutions that they were under, “so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer.” (2 Thessalonian 1:4-5)

THE MURDERED ARE MARTYRS. THE BLOOD OF MARTYRS SCREAMS OUT AND GOD AVENGES FOR THEM

The murdered in any of the attacks that take place on churches, whether in Egypt or any other place, are martyrs as they have been killed because they are Christians.

The martyrs’ blood is so precious to God. If we forgot about that, God does not forget. In Psalm 94, he says: “O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!”. One of God’s names is the Vengeance God, which means that He is just, in spite of His love, tenderness, meekness, and humility. Then, the Psalm says: “Rise up, O

Judge of the earth; Render punishment to the proud. LORD, how long will the wicked triumph? They utter speech, and speak insolent things; all the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. They break in pieces Your people, O LORD, and afflict Your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say: “The LORD does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand.” (Psalm 94:2-7)

Sometimes we look and see that God is standing still against those who kill and destroy. We think to ourselves that He will not do anything to them. If we speak out and say God exists, they answer and say where is He? At the end of this Psalm, it says; “They gather together against the life of the righteous, and condemn innocent blood. But the LORD has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge. He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; The LORD our God shall cut them off.” (Psalm 94:21-23). He also says in another place in the Bible, “Vengeance if Mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Hebrew 10:30). We have the right to scream to Him and say, “Come God of Vengeance. Why do You stand still? Where is Your power and domination? You have forbidden us from paying back the evil with the same no matter how much they attack us and You are responsible for your children. We are awaiting Your promise to be filled.”

THE BLOOD CRIES

- † In the beginning of History, Abel’s blood was the first to be shed. In Genesis chapter 4, God cries of this blood, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground.” (Genesis 4:10). Here we find that the blood has a crying voice. What do we feel? This makes us feel safe given the fact that the blood of the martyrs cries out to God. What would God do? He will avenge the blood of the martyrs.
- † Another example about the cries of the blood is the story about Naboth the Jezreelite when Ahab greedily desired the land of this poor person. Jezebel was able to create a deception and accused Naboth of infidelity and blasphemy against God so that she permitted his killing unfairly. This incident did not pass easily in front of God as He sent Elijah and said to Ahab: “Thus says the LORD: “Have you murdered and also taken possession?”” And you shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: “In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.”’ (1 Kings 21:19). We notice that no one tried to defend Naboth in front of Ahab and Jezebel. Yet, the Lord does not need someone to move Him to avenge the blood of those who died.

¶ Another example about God's vengeance is in Acts chapter 12 when Herod stretched his hand on the church and killed James the brother of John. Herod found that this pleases the Jews, which is very similar to many situations in today's life where things are done to please some groups or to calm down other ones. God is not satisfied with injustice. After that, Herod seized Peter as well. Although God allowed for James's martyrdom, God did not allow for Peter's death at that point due to the specific wisdom that God has. Towards the end of the same chapter, Herod puts on his royal apparel and sits on his throne. At that point, the people shouted about Herod saying: "The voice of a god and not of a man. Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died." (Acts 12:21-23). Therefore, God, to whom glory is, hears and sees as well as knows. He has justice and He will not delay. When the Lord Christ spoke to the Jews about their unjust ways, He said, "That on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth" (Matthew 23:35), meaning that the blood of a righteous person who was dealt with unjustly will not pass by God easily, but rather is accounted for very precisely. Then, He continues and says, "From the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." (Matthew 23:35)

Therefore, no one should feel insignificant and we should not be upset with God and ask Him, "Why are You silent?!" Yet at the same time we love these attackers and pray for them. We do not wish for any harm to them, nor do we feel happy if we see them being harshly punished from God! It is such a strange matter.

In the Book of Malachi, when the persecutions increased against His people, they screamed to God. The Bible says that a remembrance book was written before God. This means that God does not forget anything. He also wants to reassure us that everything is written before Him so that no one thinks to himself that God forgets. St. Peter says that God is not slow to fulfill His promise, but He takes time to respond to us. Why? Maybe because we did not repent as we should, or maybe because we did not pray as we should. He also takes His time when it comes to evil people as maybe one of them will repent as we ask for repentance and forgiveness for them. God does not wish for the sinner to die.

And about the cries of the blood, the book of Revelation says: "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they

cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then a white robe was given to each of them, and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.” (Revelation 6:9-11)

GOD'S VENGEANCE AND PUNISHMENT TO THOSE WHO PERSECUTE HIS CHILDREN

God hears the crying blood of the martyrs. He also hears those who are in pain because of the persecutions of their brothers upon them. He is unhurried, as maybe the sinner will repent. However, after that, He punishes the evil people who are moved by the devil. He punishes them severely on earth and beyond. Let us mention some examples:

- † After the tenth plague, Pharaoh allowed God's persecuted people in Egypt to leave. They traveled and crossed the Red Sea and it was divided with a Godly power so that the people of Israel were saved. At that point, Pharaoh wanted to catch up with the people of Israel to kill them or bring them back to slavery in Egypt. The Lord said enough, and the Red Sea went back to its place, closing on Pharaoh and all his army and all of them died in a dreadful manner.
- † During the time of Hezekiah the king (Isaiah 36-37), Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. He also insulted the Lord and threatened to burn all the cities as well as kill everyone. When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. He took the letters of threat and placed them before God and prayed a lot. So the Lord said about the king of Assyria that He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city. The Lord also sent an angel and killed 185 thousand soldiers from the Assyrian army and Sennacherib returned back and was killed himself.
- † In Acts 12: Herod the king killed James and seized Peter having the intention to kill Peter. God sent an angel who struck Herod and he was eaten by worms and died awfully.
- † During the time of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:1-24), the king of Judah, a great multitude from the people of Moab and the people of Ammon came to

the boarders preparing for a great attack. So Jehoshaphat sat by himself to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah, “Nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.” (2 Chronicles 20:12). Then he said tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you. Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established. Then he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness. So the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end to the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another. So when Judah came to a place overlooking the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and there were their dead bodies, fallen on the earth. No one had escaped (2 Chronicles 20:22-24). Therefore, the enemies killed themselves because the Lord saw the praise of His children and their dependence on Him.

- † Also, in our current life and history, we say without any delight, criticism, or hate to any person, that what happened after the major injustice that took place against Christians and churches in the recent years, God has prepared for those leaders of persecution to be brought down, jailed and lose everything. And of course, Hades and eternal suffering awaits them “And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (Revelation 20:10)

WHAT IS OUR ROLE IN THE PERSECUTION THAT IS DIRECTED TOWARDS US?

- † Pray with tears and depth and ask God to intervene and protect His children and all those who pray for Him asking for kindness (mercy).
- † Repent, which is when the person realizes all his sins that allowed for all these persecutions to take place. Just as the time of Nehemiah when he prayed so that God lifted up the persecution for the people of Israel and said: “Please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father’s house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.” (Nehemiah 1:6-7)

- † To help the poor and needy from our persecuted brothers so that they are not in distress from all directions. The least thing we can do is to send them an ongoing monetary assistance.
- † Encourage our brothers and sisters who are passing through persecutions and remind them that God does not forget their tears and every single drop of blood they lose is very precious to Him.
- † St. Paul has appealed his case to Caesar. Also, during Queen Esther's time, the persecuted Jews from Haman raised their appeal to the king through the help of Esther and the matter ended with Haman's death. Therefore, there should not be a problem defending what is fair as a small token of human effort (just as lifting the stone from Lazarus's tomb) then the Lord will intervene and perform the major part, after which, peace and quietness come over the church (as raising Lazarus after four days). Hence, the human effort is important and must be done with all methods.

CONCLUSION

- † We should not look at any matter from one angle. The subject of the persecution of the children of God has many angles and must be looked at so that the person does not lose his faith.
- † The devil and his helpers are behind the persecution of the children of God.
- † The persecution of God's children exists in all ages and goes back to early history.
- † God does not allow the evil people's hand to rest on the righteous ones but rather God protects His children and does not allow them to be trialed more than what they can endure.
- † The persecutions against the children of God and the church result in the church's growth, development, and strength in the faith, "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." (Exodus 1:12)
- † Enduring the suffering and not the pleasures of life is what benefits the person and makes him strong, patient, and developed.
- † The persecution that the person passes through is the road of the cross and with it comes the glory and resurrection.
- † The church has an amazing irony. Persecuted, but in peace! Persecuted but still very strong! Persecuted, but does not lose hope, nor is it left our or

ignored. This is done through a Godly and heavenly interference. The Lord Jesus Christ takes from the persecuted person his pain and gives him inner heavenly happiness. That is why we find the martyrs happy during harm that are targeted towards them. Why? Because an exchange takes place: Christ takes the suffering instead of them and gives them inner happiness and strength that are miraculous. That is why we find the martyrs' stories of unbearable sufferings that a normal human cannot endure. Have you ever thought about the pain from crushing with a pressure machine that is sharp from all sides?

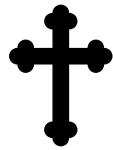
- † The murdered people are martyrs because they died due to their Christianity.
- † The martyrs' blood is very precious before God and it cries before God.
- † Although God is Loving, He is also Just and Avenges the killers of the martyrs, both on earth and eternally.
- † When God wants to punish the evil people who persecute the church, He has many ways. He does it either through natural power (such as the Red Sea closing over Pharaoh) or by sending a fatal angel (as in Sennacherib's army) or through worms (as in Herod the king) or by letting the evil people kill each other (as in Jehoshaphat the king).

FROM THE CHURCH'S PRAYERS

- † "All envy, all temptation, all the work of Satan, the counsel of wicked men, and the rising up of enemies, hidden and manifest, take them away from us, and from all Your people, and from this Holy Place that is Yours."
- † "The worship of idols, utterly uproot from the world. Satan and all his evil powers, trample and humiliate under our feet speedily. All offenses and their instigators, abolish. May all dissension of corrupt heresies cease. The enemies of Your holy Church, O Lord, as at all times, now also humiliate. Strip their vanity, show them their weakness speedily. Bring to naught their envy, their intrigues, their madness, their wickedness, and their slander which they commit against us; O Lord, bring them all to no avail, disperse their counsel, O God, Who dispersed the counsel of Ahithopel."
- † "That which exists from one end of the world to the other. All peoples and all flocks, bless. The heavenly peace, send down into all our hearts. Even the peace of this life, graciously grant to us. The leader (king), the armies, the chiefs, the counsellors, the multitudes, our neighbours, our coming in and

our going out, adorn them with all peace. O King of Peace grants us Your peace.”

- † “The leader (king) of our land, Your servant Keep him in peace, truth, and strength. Subject under him all the barbarians, the nations that desire war against all our fertile lands. Speak to his heart concerning the peace of Your one, only, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Grant to him that he may think peaceably towards us and towards Your holy name. That we too may lead a quiet and peaceful life, and may be found in all godliness and all chastity in You.”
- † “We ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of mankind, Remember, O Lord, the peace of Your One, only, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.”



CREMATION SINFUL AND CRUEL

INTRODUCTION:

I find it difficult to write about the concept of cremation (the burning of dead bodies) because there is a lot of cruelty being afflicted to the body that took part in prayers alongside the spirit, used to worship God and was taken care of by the human beings “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it” Ephesians 5:29.

I feel aggravated from any images that show hardship and cruelty even if it was against a dead body with no soul and no feelings. The blood of Jesus Christ ran through this body that is being tortured and burnt. I find it real difficulty to write about this subject. Many people ask about cremation and therefore a written reference is needed to answer these questions, as well, the church is obligated to present to her children the needed guidance.

Two incidents from my practical service:

THE FIRST INCIDENT:

As a priest serving in the church, I got to know a highly educated lady, who during the last two months of her life had great support from all her family members. She was battling cancer. I have visited her several times and was able to give her communion several times before her departure. On the day of her death, I was surprised by the will that she has left to her family that they have informed me about. She has indicated in her will that she had wanted her body to be burned and that the ashes left from her body after the cremation be put into the church’s censer in the liturgies. I was astonished! I was so affected by that request and asked the family not to obey the will that she had left. They did not listen so, I had to explain to them that no matter what will she left, it is impossible to force the church to put anything in the censer except coal and incense as this is according to a specific doctrine and rigid routine that follows spiritual meanings. It is stemming from the biblical and church doctrine. No matter what her will was, this particular request would be impossible to carry out. I even initially rejected to pray on her body, but then I later remembered that the church does not pray on the person who

committed suicide only on the basis that this person died in his sin and lost his hope in Christ's blood. As for this woman, did she repent before her death? How would God deal with her? Did she write this will in ignorance or with lack of knowledge? Did she write this will a while ago, then repented, but forgot all about it? So I ended up praying on her body and left the body in her family's hand, which had completely rejected to bury the body. The family burned the body and did as they pleased with the ashes away from the church.

THE SECOND INCIDENT:

A Coptic Orthodox Christian person had many protestant friends and spent a lot of his life between the Protestant Church and the Coptic Church that he was baptized and raised in throughout all of his early years. He used to live in a city far from Toronto and we knew very little about him. Close to the end of his life, he returned to the Coptic Church in repentance and started to regularly attend the church and take communion. When he departed, we were surprised to find out that his family wanted the church to pray on his body and that he wrote a will to have his body burned. We tried with all our will to convince them that this is not an acceptable thing and that this action is not a Christian-like behaviour. We also explained that the church is used to burying the departed and not burning them. We also were certain that there was no monetary reason behind all that. The family was then divided. Half of the family members were convinced and asked for the burial of the body while the other half insisted on fulfilling the will of cremation. The church prayed on the body for his sake. This incident has raised many debates over several levels and therefore I write asking for the guidance and blessing of the Holy Spirit for me as I didn't find a lot of references in this matter; although my first reference is the Holy Bible and the Church's teachings.

To cover this subject, we will handle the following points:

1. The body from the Christian view point.
2. What happens when burning the dead bodies?
3. Burning the bodies throughout history.
4. The burning of the bodies in Judaism and Islam.
5. Christianity bans the burning of the bodies according to the teachings of the Holy Bible.
6. Examples from the Holy Bible about the burial of the believers.

7. Examples from the Holy Bible indicating that burning the body is a symbol of disgrace and torture.
8. The different churches views on the burning of the body.
- 9. Conclusion.**

THE BODY FROM THE CHRISTIAN VIEW POINT.

- a. The unjust view of the body

The “unjust” view of the body/flesh is that it is the enemy. In fact, the true enemy is Satan and not the flesh. We should distinguish between the flesh and the flesh’s lust. The body is cherished, but the body’s lust and sins should be fought.

The body is cherished because “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” John 1:14. The Lord blessed our nature “You blessed my nature in Yourself” (St. Gregory Liturgy). Our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you” 1 Corinthians 6:19

ON THE OTHER HAND:

The lusts and sins of the body must be battled “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” 1 Corinthians 9:27

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BODY AND THE SPIRIT:

The body has an impact over the spirit and the spirit has an impact over the body “For out of the abundance of the heart (the spirit) the mouth speaks (the body).” Matthew 12:34. St. Matthew was trying to emphasize that the spirit has a great impact on the body. A person must stay away from the bodily and lustful desires because they battle the spirit “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (i.e. the spirit)” 1 Peter 2:11

The person is one unit. The body might sin because of its attraction to the sin and as a result, the spirit sins as well. Similarly, the spirit might get attracted to the sin and this affects the body and causes the body to sin.

THE SPIRITUAL PERSON AND THE WORLDLY PERSON

In the spiritual person, his body obeys the work of the Holy Spirit, instead of the world’s spirit and the evil found within the world. “For to be carnally minded (i.e.

lusts) is death, but to be spiritually minded (i.e. spiritual life) is life and peace” Romans 8:6. Therefore, the carnally minded and the outside matters lead to Satan unlike the spiritually minded and the inner matters that lead to life and peace with the Lord.

That is why the person is responsible for putting down the body’s lust “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” Galatians 5:24

HOW CAN THE SPIRITUAL PERSON DEAL WITH THE BODY TO CHERISH IT?

Any place that houses a holy item should be honoured. The manger where the Lord Christ was born is a very holy place. The holy places that the Lord Christ has visited are shrines that people visit to get their blessings. In the Old Testament, the Jews used to fear getting near the mountain for the Lord descends on it. They also did not enter the Most Holy for the same reason. Therefore, if we are to believe that our bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit as the Holy Bible says: “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” 1 Corinthians 6:19, then the body is exactly the same as the most holy and must be appreciated with all methods without hurting or abusing it.

These bodies will take luminous power and we will resurrect with them on judgment day. Would these bodies stand in front of God in this luminous way judged or without judgment? This is an important matter.

Let’s not forget that many of the saints’ bodies performed many miracles. This means that the Lord does these amazing miracles through the saints’ bodies to honour the saints and their blessed body. For example, Saint Mina performs many miracles.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN BURNING THE DEAD BODIES?

The word “cremation” comes from the Latin word “Crematos”, which means burning. Note that the word “cemetery” means “sleeping place” where the dead are buried.

During the cremation process, the body is placed in a wooden coffin inside a “furnace” or what is called “crematorium”. The crematorium temperature is then raised to a very high level (between 870 to 980 degrees Fahrenheit) until the body becomes ashes. The remaining bones are then placed in a crushing machine to crush them till they look like sand with a light gray color. This burning process

takes between two to three hours depending on the size of the corpse, and the remaining ashes weigh about four to six lbs.

What happens to the ashes after this burning process?

The ashes can be kept at home or spread in the air. The ashes can also be thrown in the cemetery garden or placed in a jar in the cemetery or we can even get rid of them through a different method.

BURNING THE BODIES THROUGHOUT HISTORY.

Burning the bodies of the dead was the followed routine for the Indians and Buddhists and all the idol worshippers from the Greek and Roman period of late antiquity. With the founding of Christianity, cremation is forbidden. Governments used to forbid cremation by the law, but unfortunately since 1902, the governments began to change its view by allowing individuals to do as they please with his or her body, which can include cremation. Of course in Judaism (i.e. even before Christianity), the Jewish rites used to refuse the burning of the body, as we will explain later.

In the old world, cremation was the preferred method for one reason or another. They used to be afraid of the dead person and wanted to get rid of him altogether (through burning). Others used to think that the dead body has little importance, as it is dead, so why take care of it or spend money on it. They used to burn it to dispose of it since that was the cheapest method.

THE BURNING OF THE BODIES IN JUDAISM AND ISLAM

Judaism forbids cremation and the reasoning behind that is that in Judaism, the body must be honoured because the Spirit was in it together with the breath of God.

Another reason is that the cremated bodies get mixed together as the cremation process is not precise. Hence, some remains of the previously cremated body get mixed with the newly cremated body and similarly, some remains from the newly cremated body will be mixed with the body to be cremated afterwards.

Islam also forbids cremation.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REASONS IN OUR WORLD THAT MAKE PEOPLE CREMATE THE BODIES?

- † Economic reasons: as cremation costs much less than burying the body.

- † Some people believe that burying the body will end up decomposing the body to be sand at the end, so why not make the body ashes in a faster manner.
- † Some people believe that the body is the reason for every sin and pain the person receives and so it must be burned. This is a mistake and such an awful and terrifying thing.

CHRISTIANITY BANS THE BURNING OF THE BODIES ACCORDING TO THE TEACHINGS OF THE HOLY BIBLE

The body is honoured in Christianity. It is a vessel for the Holy Spirit. The Blood of Christ moved through it. It was anointed with Holy Myron Oil. It must be honoured in all ways. This body is going to resurrect from death similar to Christ's resurrection and will unite with the Spirit in a new luminous body to meet Christ in His eternal second coming in the glorious, heavenly celebration. The church is the body of Christ in its deep meaning. We are all members in Christ's body and share together in taking communion "The Sacrament of Community". Therefore, the church is the group of believers who became united sacredly through the Holy Sacraments. Hence, the body must be honoured even if the spirit left it for a temporary time. "There is no death for your servants anymore, but departure".

The spirit goes to Paradise, the waiting place for the holy people, while the body goes down temporarily to its burial place until the general resurrection.

"But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. What you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain - perhaps wheat or some other grain. God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. The resurrection of the dead is also like this. The body is sown in corruption and raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour and raised in glory. It is sown in weakness and raised in power. It is sown as a natural body and raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. It is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterwards the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man,

so also are those who are heavenly. As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” 1 Corinthians 15:35-55

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” 1 Thessalonians 4:16

Examples from the Holy Bible about the burial of the believers

- 1) “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:19.
- 2) Abraham gave great attention in order to find a tomb for his wife Sara: “I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, “Hear us, my lord: You are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place, that you may bury your dead” Genesis 23:4-6.
- 3) Joseph asked the people of Israel to take his body when they leave the land of Egypt (although they could have easily burned it rather than carrying it and travelling with it): “And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you.” Exodus 13:19.
- 4) “His body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.” Deuteronomy 21:23.

- 5) "Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury." John 19:40
- 6) "For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. Indeed all the people of the land will be burying, and they will gain renown for it on the day that I am glorified," says the Lord GOD. "They will set apart men regularly employed, with the help of a search party, to pass through the land and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search. The search party will pass through the land; and when anyone sees a man's bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog." Ezekiel 39:12-15
- 7) "Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime. But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth; Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting and trumpet sound.'" Amos 2:1-2
- 8) Moses' burial: "So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD." Deuteronomy 34:5
- 9) "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." 1 Corinthians 15:3-4
- 10) "And they made His grave with the wicked but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth." Isaiah 53:9
- 11) "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." Daniel 12:2
- 12) "Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." Isaiah 26:19
- 13) "You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth." Psalm 71:20
- 14) David's burial: "So David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David." 1 Kings 2:10

- 15) "And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many." Matthew 27:52-53
- 16) "These things He said, and after that He said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.'" John 11:11, 43

EXAMPLES FROM THE HOLY BIBLE INDICATING THAT BURNING THE BODY IS A SYMBOL OF DISGRACE AND TORTURE.

- 1) "Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched. So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the LORD had burned among them." Numbers 11:1-3
- 2) "If a man marries a woman and her mother, it is wickedness. They shall be burned with fire, both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you." Leviticus 20:14
- 3) "The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire." Leviticus 21:9
- 4) "And Joshua said: "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day." Joshua 7:25-26
- 5) "And behold, a man of God went for Judah to Bethel by the word of the LORD, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, "O altar, altar! Thus says the LORD: Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you." 1 Kings 13:1-2
- 6) "So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, 'If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.' And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. Then he sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty men. And he answered and

said to him: “Man of God, thus has the king said, ‘Come down quickly!’” So Elijah answered and said to them, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.” And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.” 2 Kings 1:10-12

- 7) “And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, “Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she is with child by harlotry.” So Judah said, “Bring her out and let her be burned!” Genesis 38:24
- 8) “Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it” Exodus 32:20
- 9) “And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.” Numbers 16:35
- 10) “You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to the LORD your God.” Deuteronomy 7:25
- 11) “So the LORD said to Joshua: ‘Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you. Get up, sanctify the people, and say, sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: “There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.” In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to the families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man. Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel.’” So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the

Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. Now Joshua said unto Achan, “My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.” And Achan answered Joshua and said, “Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighting fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.” So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD. Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.” So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.” Joshua 7:10-25

- 12) “Then the Philistines said, “Who has done this?” And they answered, “Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion.” So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.” Judges 15:6
- 13) “Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and traveled all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan; and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.” 1 Samuel 31:11-13
- 14) “And they brought the sacred pillars out of the temple of Baal and burned them.” 2 Kings 10:26
- 15) “And because of them a curse shall be taken up by all the captivity of Judah who are in Babylon, saying, “The LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire.” Jeremiah 29:22

- 16) "Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime" Amos 2:1
- 17) "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Revelation 20:15

NOTE:

What would happen in the situation when a faithful Christian becomes a martyr in the middle of fire and his body is burned? In this case, the Lord is capable of resurrecting and gathering every single piece of his body that was spread from all over the world and resurrect his body in a luminous way. "Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself." Acts 24:10

We notice in the Coptic Orthodox Synexarion the honouring of the saints' bodies. Through honouring the saints' bodies, many miracles are performed. In many occasions, the church celebrates the transfer of saints' bodies from one place to another. St. Mina's miracles were all performed after his martyrdom from his body and the sand surrounding his body.

THE VIEWS OF DIFFERENT CHURCHES REGARDING THE BURNING OF THE BODY

1. The view of the Catholic Church:

The Catholic Church has rejected the cremation principle. It also mentioned that cremating the body indicates lack of faith in the resurrection of this body in a glorified way. Unfortunately, since 1963, the Catholic Church has lifted this rejection of body cremation and allowed it and started to pray on the body either before or after cremation. Because of this, cremation started to become more popular, although it originally was part of the idol worshippers and evil people way of life.

2. The view of Protestant Church:

The Protestant Church was fast into approving cremation to satisfy people's requests before the Catholic Church's approval even on the premise that God is capable of resurrecting everyone including the buried and burned.

The view of Eastern and Oriental Churches:

These Churches forbid the cremation of the bodies (including the Coptic Orthodox Church). When the person chooses to burn his body, then not praying on his body would be the correct thing to do since he did this with his own will and decided not to obey the Church and the Holy Bible when it comes to the burying principle.

Would this person be dealt with as a person who committed suicide in which case the Church does not pray on his body?

Did that person write in his will that his body be cremated with lack of knowledge or did he repent after writing this will and had no chance to change that will? I personally do not know. Would that person be prayed on and then leave the rest for God who is knowledgeable of everything? The Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Oriental Orthodox Churches do not want to pray on someone like that person and neither do they commemorate him in the Liturgy Diptych.

STATISTICS REGARDING THE CREMATION OF DEAD BODIES

† In the United States:

5% in 1962

25% in 2000

† In Japan: Burying the dead person is illegal

98% are cremated

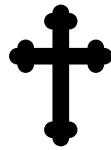
CONCLUSION

We reject cremation for the following reasons:

- † God created the person's body. Hence, it deserves all the honour
- † The Lord Jesus, glory be to His name, blessed the body forever when He incarnated and so the body must be honoured and not burned.
- † The Holy Spirit blessed the body through working in it and so the human being became the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
- † We follow the Lord Christ, glory be to His name, in everything. He was buried after His death on the cross and then resurrected. Likewise, we will be resurrected like His glorified body.
- † There are three ways to deal with the body of a dead person
 - 1) Burial

- 2) Mausoleum (placing the dead body on a shelf)
- 3) Cremation which is sinful and cruel

- † Cremation of dead bodies is originally a habit of the idol worshippers
- † Cremation of dead bodies is against the Holy Bible and Christianity
- † Cremation of dead bodies is a symbol of destruction without any hope for resurrection
- † In many cases in the Holy Bible, we find a lot of care is given into applying precious spices and ointments to the dead person's body (2 Chronicles 16:14 and John 19:39)
- † In the Old Testament, cremation was the followed method for one reason or another:
 - 1) They used to be afraid of the dead person and wanted to dispose him completely (burning)
 - 2) Or that this dead body is of less importance and so burning it is possible.
- † The Holy Bible describes the dead as sleepers. The word cemetery means sleeping place.



BE SERIOUS

INTRODUCTION

- † The difference between a saint and a person turning away from holiness is that the saintly person takes his relationship with God and his eternal life seriously. “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers” (1 Peter 4:7). Therefore, thinking about eternity and paying it great attention makes the person serious about his spiritual life. One of the saints said “I do not remember that the devils caused me to fall in the same sin twice”
- † In our daily life, we find that even the person who is successful in his study or work is as a direct result of being how serious he is when it comes to his work and other priorities in his life. “...Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*” (1 Cor 9:24)
- † To cover the subject of the successful and serious life – whether the person’s spiritual life of a Christian man or the daily life, of any person we will talk about the following points:
- 1) The definition of seriousness from the Holy Bible.**
 - 2) Seriousness is a divine commandment**
 - 3) Seriousness in the life of Jesus Christ**
 - 4) Seriousness does not interfere at all with cheerfulness**
 - 5) Practical applications in the seriousness spiritual life.**
 - 6) Seriousness in work**
 - 7) Seriousness in service**
 - 8) How can a person deals with his life in a serious manner?**
 - 9) Conclusion**

1) THE DEFINITION OF SERIOUSNESS FROM THE HOLY BIBLE.

- † Contrary to the seriousness that St. Peter spoke about “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers” 1 Peter 4:7, he also spoke about not being serious “For we *have spent* enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness,

lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with *them* in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of *you*” 1 Peter 4:3-4. Therefore, seriousness is being “to be serious”, “be watchful” and “pray”. Not being serious is “doing like the will of the gentiles” and walking, like the gentiles, “in lewdness, lusts”, and “dissipation”

- † Additionally, St. Paul talks about dissipation being against seriousness and says “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” Ephesians 5:3-4
- † In other words, the person is serious whenever he thanks God... and this resides in his heart all the time... and when he says “...And *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire besides You” Psalm 73:25. This becomes actions and not just words and the person become serious in them. Moving forward and then backwards does not work in the spiritual life, or as some say “an hour for your God and another for your heart”. Hence, the person who is serious about his/her spiritual life would not accept half solutions.

2) **SERIOUSNESS IS A DIVINE COMMANDMENT**

- † To the angel church in Smyrna “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” Revelations 2:10.
- † To the angel of the church of the Laodiceans “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” Revelations 3:15-16. It is therefore obvious that those who have the chance to have a share in paradise are those who are serious about their spiritual life.
- † Additionally, in the book of Jeremiah, he says “Cursed *is* he who does the work of the LORD deceitfully, And cursed *is* he who keeps back his sword from blood.” Jeremiah 48:10. Also, as we explained in 1 Peter 4:7 and Ephesians 5:3-4. And in “you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” Matthew 25:23

3) SERIOUSNESS IN THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

The Lord Jesus Christ is our ultimate example in everything and he said “learn from Me” Matthew 11:29. The Lord Jesus Christ was serious in all of his steps headed towards His goal which is to complete the salvation. In Luke 13:31-33 “On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, “Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You.” And He said to them, “Go, tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.’ Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem”

Not only that, but the Lord Jesus Christ continued on His road to the cross without a one second of delay despite the terrifying war by the Pharisees and Herod. And continued His “journeying toward Jerusalem.” Luke 13:22.

He also said “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” John 5:17. And in His last prayer He said “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” John 17:4. The Lord Jesus also walked a long distance and waited for the Samaritan woman and sat on the well to save a soul “...who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” Acts 10:38. He also explained His message when He went into the synagogue and was reading the book of Isaiah as written in Luke 4:18-21 ““The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.””

Similarly, St. John the Baptist was a strong example of seriousness during the same period of Jesus Christ. Many people were being baptised by him. At that time, the Lord Jesus Christ came to get baptised by St. John the Baptist who said “He must increase, but I must decrease” John 3:30 by which he clearly stated that he is not Jesus Christ but rather a messenger sent to prepare the road in front of Him.

4) SERIOUSNESS DOES NOT INTERFERE AT ALL WITH CHEERFULNESS

It was said about the Lord Christ that He was never seen laughing, but was always smiling. He walked towards the cross “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;

And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth” Acts 8:32, but He was happy and smiling. The Holy Spirit works in Christian person and provide him with happiness and heavenly peace so in turns he is always cheerful. Yet, this does not contradict with the fact that the person’s heart is serious in his actions.

5) **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS IN THE SERIOUSNESS SPIRITUAL LIFE.**

* This part of the article is obtained from the late Thrice Pope Shenouda ||| sermon titled: The serious person does not slack nor does he falter/hesitate between two opinions

† **In Vows for example:** The serious person would not vow then go back on his vow. A good example in vow seriousness is Jephthah the Gileadite: Judges 11:25-31 “And now, are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against them? While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon, for three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time? Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the Lord, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.” However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him.

Jephthah’s Vow and Victory Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon. And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, “If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”

Or a person who vows his/her life for monasticism – a person should not rush into vowing without praying and testing matters first. Deuteronomy 23:21-23 “When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.”

- † **In promises**: as in when a person promises to obey his father of confession with full obedience, but when he leaves he does not obey. Or when a father promises his son to do something specific, but later the father denies his promise. These are examples of not a serious person.
- † Not being serious is not good for either the person's sake or the group's sake.
- † To be serious about taking responsibility. Taking care of the single soul
- † The serious student in his study: you find that his school notes are tidy and complete. When the time comes to ask about his exam results, the question would be how much did he achieve rather than whether he had failed or passed.
- † Being serious in raising children is a very important matter: Jochebed was extremely serious in raising Moses. The serious mother makes her children memorize the church's hymns and biblical verses because she took a pledge during baptism to raise the child in the fear of God.
- † Being serious in repentance as Moses the black, Augustine and St. Mary of Egypt.
- † Being serious in changing one's behaviour moves the person from repentance to righteousness and holiness to glory after glory.
- † Being serious in spiritual exercises makes the person move forward in his spiritual life and gain many virtues.
- † Being serious in fasting and prayer so that they no longer are routine actions, but rather a source for the heavens to open up and for the person to receive heavenly blessings
- † The serious person is always fruitful
- † Seriousness is the basis for the success in life

- † The person who is not serious in his life hesitates between going up and down and his moves are not steady. He falls and get up.
- † The serious person does not easily overlook God's rights. He obtains God's rights from his own-self first before obtaining it from others. He walks in the commandments of God with all seriousness, details, depth, and his obedience to God is without discussion or compromise.
- † Examples from the Holy bible:
 - Father Abraham obeyed God with all seriousness
 - Joseph the righteous was serious in obeying the command and protecting his chastity
 - Daniel was serious about worshiping God even when they threw him in the lion's den.
 - John the Baptist said to Herod "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Mark 6:18
 - The person who is serious about repentance does not delay it as Felix the governor Acts 24:25 "Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." Or King Agrippa Acts 26:28 "Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." But rather like the prodigal son who arose and came to his father.
 - The person who confess and take communion then fall in the same sin and repeat the same confession is not serious in his repentance. Repentance is a change in the person's life without return. As for those who sin every day and depend on the Psalm words "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities" Psalm 103:10 are not true repented people. The Lord's mercy is for those who are serious in their repentance.
 - The serious person does not care about his own pleasure, but rather sacrifice any pleasure for the Lord. Just as David the prophet said "Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, Or go up to the comfort of my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes Or slumber to my eyelids, Until I find a place for the Lord, A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob" Psalm 132

- The bible also condemns many people who were not serious. For example, Lot's wife, Saul the king in his offering of the sacrifice, Adam and Eve in not being serious in obeying the Lord's command.

6) SERIOUSNESS IN WORK

It is to take on the responsibility that is given to the person and so the person accomplishes his responsibilities to the fullest and with utmost accuracy. That person would listen to the leaders and their experience and organizes his time as well as would not give any excuses. The church prays saying “In work, be a partner with Your servants in every good deed” Therefore, the serious person should make sure that the hands of God are before him in every work and that he always asks for the Lord’s hand in his work.

7) SERIOUSNESS IN SERVICE

- † In the healing miracle of the paralytic as in Mark 2:1-12 “And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, “Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, “Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!” . They went atop the roof, uncovered it, and let the paralytic man down. The result is a physical healing and a spiritual one too.
- † John 12:24 “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”

Similarly, for the servant to produce much fruit, he has to sacrifice a lot for the sake of the service

- † Serving the Lord is a sign that the person is a true Christian "... Do you love me? ... Feed My sheep." John 21:17
- † 1 Corinthians 3:5-9: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." The servant's faith that he works with God. This does not mean to be lazy while the Lord's work, but rather the servant feels that he is in the hands of the Lord Who provide the strength. About David the prophet's services as in Acts 13:36 "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption". The serious service is through the Lord's advice.
- † 1 Chronicles 11:15-19: "Now three of the thirty chief men went down to the rock to David, into the cave of Adullam; and the army of the Philistines encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. And David said with longing, "Oh, that someone would give me a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" So the three broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless David would not drink it, but poured it out to the Lord. And he said, "Far be it from me, O my God, that I should do this! Shall I drink the blood of these men who have put their lives in jeopardy? For at the risk of their lives they brought it." Therefore he would not drink it. These things were done by the three mighty men." It is great seriousness and power in the service of those three men that broke through the camp of the Philistines.

8) HOW CAN A PERSON DEALS WITH HIS LIFE IN A SERIOUS MANNER?

- A) There must be a clear goal in life and that "Jesus". Philippians 3:13-14: "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"

“For to me, to live *is* Christ” and “it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”. It should be clear that my goal, of which I should strive not set myself away from, is to “unite myself with Jesus”

B) I must fully use my brain that it was given to me by God. Luke 14:28-32 “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it*—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’? Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace”

Praying then thinking as our Mother St. Mary when the Angel brought her the news so she said “Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” Luke 1:34

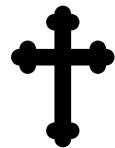
C) The serious person should fully research the whole picture of matters

† The story of the youth in Mark 10:17-22 “Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Do not defraud,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’” And he answered and said to Him, “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.” Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions”. This poor youth went sorrowful because he did not hear the full story as the Lord Jesus Christ clarified in Mark 10:29-30 “So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life” Had that person knew that he will not lose anything with Jesus Christ but rather he will gain, he would have felt full happiness, prosperity and relaxation and would not have left sorrowful

- D) Do not tolerate with the sin
- E) Do not delay repentance

9) CONCLUSION

- 1) Seriousness is the basis of success in life. Nothing but seriousness works with spiritual way
- 2) Seriousness does not contradict with cheerfulness and happiness
- 3) Seriousness is for the sole's and group's benefit
- 4) Seriousness in work is very important and so it is in study
- 5) Seriousness in raising children is very important
- 6) Seriousness in obeying the father of confession and making sure to confess often
- 7) God does not accept excuses “Therefore you are inexcusable” Romans 2:1 but rather wants the person to be serious “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” 1 Corinthians 16:13
- 8) Give me one servant like St. Paul the disciple is better than one thousand servants (from the saying of late Thrice Blessed Pope Shenouda III)



Open Discussion Session on Excerpts of the Sayings of Saint Anthony the shining star of the wilderness, founder of Christian Monasticism & father to the Monks.

HOW TO LIVE IN CHRIST

“O Lord do not take my soul while I am in the middle of my age. Do not take me and my lamp is quenched, but have patience on me to turn on my lamp with the oil of repentance” St. Anthony

“Let it be the general goal for everyone not to fall behind after you have begun or not for your determination to faint in time of distress. ” St. Anthony

“Nothing of this world is worth to being sad for or suffer about” St. Anthony

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 very 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 the spirit, to anything evil that can burden our conscience. It is enough to know that they are inborn/native in the body.

- † **The second** results from indulgence in food and drink. The energy generated by rich food causes the body to revolt against the spirit and have low and improper cravings. To this effect, St. Paul says : “and do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation” (Eph. 6:15).
- † **The third** is aroused by the satanic forces. These forces 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 Christian Orthodox faith and the belief in God’s commandments, then the Holy Spirit teaches him how to free his body and his spirit of such cravings.

HOW TO EMERGE VICTORIOUS FROM THE SATANIC WARS?

Through humility, Christian understanding and fervid prayer.

In his long struggle against the forces of Satan, St. Anthony was always extremely humble. He addressed the devils saying, “you who are powerful! what do you want from me the weak? “I am too week to fight the least one of you”. In his prayer, he used to say “Save me O Lord from those who believe that I am something while I am nothing but dust and ashes!”

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, then who am I to resist Him? But if He didn’t, then none of you would be able to do me harm”.

In his war against the devil, he kept on praying, he used to recite Psalm 27: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; Who 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 was also based on that love) he said: “I do not fear God because I love Him” “Perfect love casts out fear” (1Jn 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 son-ship”.

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 enquiry 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 for the books”.

Emperor Constantine the great sent to St. Anthony a message seeking his blessings and prayers. When St. Anthony didn’t read the message at once, his disciples were astonished. He said to them, “Do not 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 the monks who kept silent. So, St. Anthony asked him about his opinion. Anba Youssef replied, “Believe me father, I do not know”. To this, St. Anthony replied, “Blessed are you Anba Youssef, because you have known the way to the phrase: “I do not know”.

ON THE 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 EXPERIENCE:

While he was residing by a sycamore tree near a river, 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".



THE DEPARTURE OF ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT (ANTONIUS). THE COMMEMORATION OF ST. ANTHONY, COPTIC SYNAXARION, 22 TOUBA

On this day, of the year 355 A.D., St. Anthony the Great, the star of the wilderness, and the father of all monks, departed.

This righteous man was born in the year 251 A.D. in the city of Qimn El-Arouse, to rich parents who loved the church and the poor. They raised him up in fear of the Lord. When he was twenty years old, his parents departed, and he had to take care of his sister.

Once, he entered the church and heard the words of the Lord Christ in the Gospel, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven; and come, follow Me." ([Matthew 19:21](#))

He returned to his house, decided to fulfill this commandment and considered it directed to him personally. He gave his wealth to the poor and needy, and he took his sister and placed her with some virgins.

At that time, monasticism had not yet been established. All those who wanted to live a solitary life went and lived on the outskirts of the city. This was what St. Anthony did as he dwelt alone, worshipping and living an ascetic life.

The devil fought him there by afflicting him with boredom, laziness, and the phantoms of women. He overcame the devil's snares by the power of the Lord Christ. After that, he went to one of the tombs, and he resided therein and closed the door on himself. Some of his friends used to bring him food. When the devil perceived his ascetic life and his intense worship, he was envious of him, and he beat him mercilessly, then left him unconscious. When his friends came to visit him and found him in this condition, they carried him to the church. After he somewhat recovered, he went back to the same place. The devil again resumed his war against St. Antonius, only this time the phantoms were in the form of wild beasts, wolves, lions, snakes and scorpions. They appeared as if they were about to attack him or cut him into pieces. But the saint would laugh at them scornfully and say, "If any of you have any authority over me, only one would have been sufficient to fight me." At his saying this, they disappeared as though in smoke, for God gave him the victory over the devils. He was always singing this psalm, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let those also who hate Him flee before Him." (Psalm 68:1)

St. Anthony used to prepare a quantity of bread that would sustain him for six months. He did not allow anyone to enter his cell, and whoever came to him, stood outside and listened to his advice. He continued in this condition of solitary worship for 20 years. Then by God's command, he went to El-Fayyoun and confirmed the brethren there in the faith, then returned to his monastery.

During the time of persecution, he longed to become a martyr. He left his monastery and went to Alexandria. He visited those who were imprisoned for the sake of Christ and comforted them. When the Governor saw that he was confessing the Lord Christ publicly, not caring what might happen to him, he ordered him not to show up in the city. However, the saint did not heed his threats. He faced him and argued with him in order that he might arouse his anger so that he might be tortured and martyred. But God preserved him all along, according to His will, for the benefit of many, and so the Governor left him alone. Then the saint went back to his monastery according to God's will, and many came to visit him and to hear his teachings.

He saw that these visits kept him away from his worship. As a result, he went far away to the eastern desert. He travelled with some bedouins to the inner wilderness

for three days, until he found a spring of water and some palm trees, and then he chose to settle there. On this spot now stands the monastery of St. Anthony the Great. The bedouins came to him with bread, and the Lord drove away all the wild beasts from this place, for his sake.

On occasions, he would go to the monastery on the outskirts of the desert by the Nile to visit the brethren, then return to his inner monastery.

His fame spread abroad and it reached Emperor Constantine. The Emperor wrote to him, offering him praise and asked him to pray for him. The brethren were pleased with the Emperor's letter, but St. Anthony did not pay any attention to it, and he said to them, "The books of God, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, commands us everyday, but we do not heed what they tell us, and we turn our backs on them." Under the persistence of the brethren who told him, "Emperor Constantine loves the church," he accepted to write him a letter blessing him, and praying for the peace and safety of the empire and the church.

One day, he was bored, and he heard a voice telling him, "Go out and see." He went out and saw an angel who wore a girdle with a cross, one resembling the holy Eskiem, and on his head was a head cover (Kolansowa). He was sitting while braiding palm leaves, then he stood up to pray, and again he sat to weave. A voice came to him saying, "Anthony, do this and you will rest." Henceforth, he started to wear this tunic that he saw, and began to weave palm leaves, and never got bored again.

St. Anthony prophesied about the persecution that was about to happen to the church and the control of the heretics over it, the church victory and its return to its formal glory, and the end of the age.

When St. Macarius visited St. Anthony, St. Anthony clothed him with the monk's garb, and St. Anthony foretold him what would be of him.

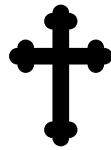
When the day of the departure of St. Paul, the first hermit in the desert, drew near, St. Anthony went to him. St. Anthony buried St. Paul the hermit after he had clothed him in a tunic which was a present from St. Athanasius the Apostolic, 20th Pope of Alexandria.

When St. Anthony felt that the day of his departure had approached, he commanded his disciple to hide his body and to give his staff to St. Macarius, and to give one sheepskin cloak to St. Athanasius and the other sheepskin cloak to Anba Serapion, his disciple. He stretched himself on the ground and gave up his

spirit. The angels and the saints took his spirit and carried it to the place of perpetual rest.

This saint lived for 15 years, struggling in the way of holiness and purity.

His prayers be with us and Glory be to our God forever. Amen.



CALMNESS AND QUIETNESS IS THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE

INTRODUCTION: - “THAT YOU ALSO ASPIRE TO LEAD A QUIET LIFE” 1 THESSALONIANS 4:11

The Lord’s commandment in the Holy Bible is not just about avoiding specific sins and gaining specific virtues. Instead it encompasses our entire way of life on earth and how we should live it. **“But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed, you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.”**

(1 Thes. 4:9-12)

Therefore, a person learns “quietness” from the Lord’s characteristics of life. Quietness of the heart and senses, quietness of thoughts and actions. The question is if this is possible in an anxious atmosphere that is fast-pace and full of moral deviations, atheism as well as competition between individuals and organizations? This is the subject of this article which we will cover with the grace of God.

- 1) The spiritual person is quiet
- 2) Factors that help in achieving quietness
- 3) Factors that disturb a person’s quietness

1) THE SPIRITUAL PERSON IS A QUIET PERSON

¶ About the quietness of David among Saul’s persecutions and while attempting to kill David “**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? When the wicked came against me To eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell. Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war may rise against me, In this I will be confident.**

One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, And to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; Therefore, I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord.” Psalms 27:1-6

The person’s view of the Lord’s protection and how the Lord is stronger than all of Satan’s forces and helpers, makes the person be at peace and quiet “**Though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident.**” This is how David expresses it in Psalm 23

“**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. Yea, though I walk 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.**” Psalm 23:1-6. This is particular asserted by the verse, “**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil**” Psalm 23:4

- † Abraham, the father of fathers, was a very calm person. The Lord promised Abraham to make him a great nation; yet after blessing him with Isaac, the Lord asked Abraham to give Isaac up as an offering on the altar. Abraham was not disturbed and did not lose his calm nature. He took his only son and in complete calmness obeyed the Lord’s command. The Lord interfered, applauded Abraham’s love and faith, and gave Abraham another offering in place of Isaac.
- † Similarly, our Lord and Great Teacher Jesus Christ was very calm. He did not cry out, nor did anyone hear His voice in the streets even at the time of His crucifixion “He was led as a lamb to the slaughter” Isaiah 53:7
- † When the Lord Jesus visited Martha and Mary – It was Mary that sat at the feet of the Lord Christ while Martha was told by Jesus “**And Jesus answered and**

said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things” Luke 10:41

- † The Lord spoke about anxious people In Revelation and how they do not have a place in paradise **“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”** Revelation 21:8
- † St. Peter the apostle describes the calm Christian person as **“rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God”** 1 Peter 3:4
- † Similarly, Virgin Mary was very calm **“But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart”** Luke 2:19
- † Also, we read in **“The Paradise of the Fathers”**: **Once a group of people tried to shake Abba Agathon’s dignity by mocking him. They told him that he is arrogant, so he smiled and did not answer. Other times, they told him “peace to you Agathon the talkative”, and he smiled without answering them and continued to be calm and quiet. Yet in other times, they told him “peace to you Agathon the atheist and infidel”. He then answered and said I am not an atheist or an infidel, but a believer in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

2) FACTORS THAT HELP IN ACHIEVING QUIETNESS

A. Praying and asking for a life of quietness

A prayer is a meeting with God, and a person that prays receives a blessing, meaning that the person prays to the Lord to give him a clam life and manages that quietness for him. **“Therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,”** 1 Timothy 2-3

B. A Spiritual break

- + Outside quietness in a spiritual break gives inner peace
- + St. Arsenious was busy in the king’s palace teaching the children. He felt he had to leave this responsibility and travel the desert to live a quiet life.

- + The Lord asked His people to go to the wilderness to worship Him “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’” (Exo 5:1)
- + Vacations should be in calm places
- + A normal person ought to take few hours every week (e.g. 3 hours per week) as a true spiritual break (Note that during that time the person should avoid daydreaming as well as the use of cell phone or computers)
- + The Spiritual Monk says “I interrupt my talk with people so that I talk to you, O Lord”
- + If all your senses take a break from all the news, your soul will feel better.

C. Do not think too much about the things that make you anxious

- + All saints rejected troublesome thoughts. St. John the Short used to go around his cell before entering it. When asked why he did that, he answered and said “there are troublesome thoughts that I want to get rid of before I enter my cell so that I won’t lose my quietness.”
- + Do not consume yourself with the troublesome thoughts and do not tell them to others nor make of them an important subject. Run away from these thoughts that Satan normally brings to harm people, for “remembrance of evil entails death”

D. Do not focus on the problem, but rather put it aside and focus on Christ

- + Peter, the disciple, was able to walk on water and that in itself was a miraculous thing that indicated how he was on top of his troubles when his eyes were focused on Christ. However, the moment he started focusing on the high waters and how strong they were instead of focusing on Christ, he called out asking Christ for help and the Lord Jesus Christ came to his rescue. Therefore, do not focus on the problem and lift your eyes toward Christ. As the late, Thrice Blessed, Pope Shenouda III has said before “Put the Lord in between you and the problem that upsets you so it disappears.”
- + We ought to continuously entreat the Lord and ask for His mercy.

E. What psychology says about calmness

- + Exercise and fresh air
- + Calm music
- + Vacationing in calm places
- + Sleeping in quietness with getting enough sleep
- + Expectations: Do not over expect too much so that you lose your calmness when things do not happen accordingly. “to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly” Romans 12:3

3) FACTORS THAT DISTURB A PERSON'S QUIETNESS

A. **Competition:** “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, [a]wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So, they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’” Matthew 2:1-6

B. **Stubbornness:** The Egyptian Pharaoh was very stubborn with God and Moses and did not want to let the people of Israel go “**I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.**” Exodus 5:2.

Many families lose a lot because of stubbornness while the church teaches us in Sacraments of Holy Matrimony “*Submit yourselves to one other*”

C. **Not respecting the freedom of others:** and interfering into another people’s business. Just like Nebuchadnezzar that wanted people to worship the statue that he had made or they will be thrown in the fiery furnace “**But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.**” Daniel 3:18

The three young men challenged Nebuchadnezzar while he commanded the fiery furnace to be heated seven times hotter than it usually is to the extent that the flames of the fire killed the men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

Why wouldn’t we respect other people’s freedom even if it does not agree with our beliefs? Every person is responsible for himself.

D. **Uncontrolled sexual desire**

King Herod (not the one who was in distress due to the birth of Christ) wanted to marry his brother’s wife “**For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. Because John had said to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod’s birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and**

pleased Herod. Therefore, he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. So, she having been prompted by her mother, said, “Give me John the Baptist’s head here on a platter.” And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to *her*. So, he sent and had John beheaded in prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to her mother.” Matt 14: 3-11. A huge distress took place and the “king was sorry” and killed John the Baptist. Similarly, David in his distress fell into sin with the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Samson is another example of a person who lost his calmness and strength when he fell into sin with Delilah

- E. **Being extremely busy with worldly matters** makes the word of God unable to bear fruit just as we are told by the parable of the sower “**Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them**” Matt 13: 3-4. How can calmness exist if there is no fruit from the word of God?! It cannot!

F. **Addiction with all its types**

The human soul cannot bare addiction and loses its calmness as well as does not feel life. As an example, addiction to watching and viewing pornography

G. **The love of owning materialistic items**

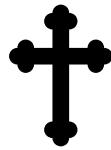
Ahab the king wanted to own Naboth the Jezreelite’s vineyard and lost his peace and started to cry.

- H. **Arrogance** and the setting up of very high earthly goals ... with no satisfaction
+ “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” 1 Tim 6:8
+ A person should have goals, but they should be realistic ones that do not cause undue stress, resulting in a loss of peace.

An example: A family wants its daughter to rank first at school and university and get into the best field of study. However, the daughter has limited abilities and cannot achieve that. So, she gets ill and often becomes depressed because she cannot satisfy her parents’ expectations.

Conclusion

Make sure you live your life in a way that you maintain a calm inner peace.



MY MEMORIES WITH HIS MOST BLESSED BEATITUDE THE LATE: H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III

INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS BOOKLET?

I felt that I had to write about my memories with his Most Blessed the late H.H Pope Shenouda III as God has graciously blessed me with knowing him since 1986. Every time I met with him I learned a lesson from him that was implanted in my heart and had a great affect. I would like to share this with everyone before it gets forgotten and so that this becomes a source of blessings and teachings for many. The eyes of Pope Shenouda III had a look that used to affect me deeply without any word from him. I saw deep love in these looks along with the fatherly love and kindness. Therefore, I used to make sure I was one of the receivers for him whenever he visited the USA or Canada to stay close to him. I also used to feel that he longed to see me although I did not deserve it whenever he arrived to the airport. I will do my best to describe in details every single incident from the times and lessons that I have met him and learned from.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRECISE TEACHINGS... MY MEETING WITH HIM IN JULY 1986.

Bishop Rueiss, the general bishop and the first pope secretary, has arranged a meeting for me with Pope Shenouda III at that time. The appointment was on Sunday and I was coming from Canada, together with my wife and children (this was before I became a priest). The appointment was to show Pope Shenouda the Sunday School curriculum for the churches in immigration lands which I have had the blessing of preparing. At that time the curriculum was reviewed by three editors: Hegomin Father Tadros Yacoub Malaty – the priest for St. George in Sporting Alexandria, Hegomin Father Morcus Morcus – the priest for St. Mark's Coptic Church in Toronto, and late Dr. Fayek Matta Eshak – a well-known English professor in the Canadian universities.

I met with Pope Shenouda on Saturday night (a day before the appointment) while he was leaving the church after the vesper prayer at St. Mark Cathedral in

Alexandria, and I introduced myself to him and mentioned that I came from Canada regarding the Sunday School curriculum for the churches in the immigration lands. He answered me with a firm voice “What curriculum! There is still no curriculum for Sunday School!” I grew fearful for I felt that it was a difficult start because I wanted to have his approval.

I met him together with my wife on Sunday at our arranged appointment at the papal residence in Alexandria. Pope Shenouda was waiting for me and ordered a hot drink for me. He also welcomed my wife. I started to calm down. I presented to Pope Shenouda a letter from Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty and another one from Fr. Morcos Morcos. His Holiness read both letters carefully and underlined some phrases in them. I had a huge luggage with me that had the full curriculum printed from JK to Grade 12. His Holiness started by asking “Show me the dogma and divinity lessons”. I started to bring them to His Holiness and he started reading them carefully and commenting on them as well as correcting some of the information by adding his comments. So I started to take notes from His Holiness. After two hours of discussion, His Holiness told me that this curriculum can be considered a preliminary curriculum for the final one, but not a final curriculum. He also explained to me that for this curriculum to be a final one it requires additional and further effort. Nevertheless, he encouraged me and thanked me abundantly. He also said that he would write a letter to me with that content (which is attached). This letter became the introduction for all the Sunday School curriculum books that was issued in Toronto now. I truly appreciate how important the teachings in the immigration churches should be for the future generations; and hence, it should be at its best and should be edited many times. I got upset at that time; however, I learned an important lesson about how significant the true teachings should be. I took it upon my shoulders to better and deepen the curriculum by enhancing every single lesson so that it becomes at its best. Yet this curriculum is still considered a preliminary curriculum through the blessings for Pope Shenouda III. After 15 years from preparing this Sunday School curriculum another curriculum was prepared by the Southern USA diocese. Some people wanted to cancel the Toronto curriculum, but Pope Shenouda III rejected that and stood still against such a suggestion. He also did not approve of the southern USA curriculum as a final curriculum. Pope Shenouda, on the other hand called me to Cairo (in 2004) and did the same with H.G. Bishop Youssef, bishop of southern USA. Pope Shenouda conducted a discussion between us together with Bishop Mousa and Bishop Ermia. Pope Shenouda then explained that he is satisfied with both curriculums and encouraged as well as blessed both curriculums. He never gave up with the burdensome work that had arisen with both, both curriculums have their own line of focus and both are a blessings from God for teaching.

THE LORD CHRIST CARES FOR THE SERVANTS... HE ORDAINED ME A PRIEST IN THE OPEN AIR.

At the time that I got ordained a priest (which I am not worthy of) there was no congregation to nominate me, no church building and not even a new church name. However, Bishop Rueiss called me from Montreal and told me to come because Pope Shenouda wanted to speak to me at 9am Alexandria time about ordaining a priest. At that time, Pope Shenouda was looking to ordain a priest for St. Mark church in Chicago and another priest for St. Mark church in Boston. This was what I felt from H.G. Bishop Rueiss. I headed to Montreal crying as I was neither worthy nor ready for such a great thing and I was happily satisfied in Toronto and didn't want to leave it. I arrived at the house of St. Mark church's Fr. Bishoy Saad in Montreal. I called the number that Bishop Rueiss gave me and Pope Shenouda was the person who answered. He told me to come immediately without delay as I am late since I still need to get both the black and priesthood cloth ready. I wanted to ask Pope Shenouda to postpone the request, but I found him telling me God be with you and then he hanged up. Then came the ordination and Pope Shenouda changed the plans altogether. I went with my wife to him on the Thursday before the ordination date, so he said to me "I want you to stay in Toronto and build a church in the middle of the distance between St. Mark church and St. Mary church. Don't go to a far place to build a new church." Then Pope Shenouda named the church and my priesthood name at the day of the ordination. Just like that the ordination took place without a congregation, a church building, a church board and not even a church place. However, the heavenly blessings was there along with the Godly power tighter with Pope Shenouda's encouragement.

POPE SHENOUDA ENCOURAGES HIS CHILDREN AND PROVIDES THEM WITH A FUTURE, FAITHFUL EYE... IN HIS VISIT OF 1989.

In 1989, Pope Shenouda along with a great number of bishops and metropolitans came to visit our rented church. During that historical visit, Pope Shenouda laid the foundation stone for many churches in the immigration land. At that visit Pope Shenouda gave me an advice in a fun atmosphere in front of the congregation and told me "Fr. Rueiss is upset because he cannot buy this rented church. I want to tell him that we want a true Coptic church with a dome and tower so that the new children who are born here do not have to go to Egypt to see a Coptic church, but can see one here. I also wanted to say to Fr. Rueiss that when you tell the Coptic congregation that we want to buy a church, they don't pay. When you show them the blueprints of the church, they pay some money. However, when you show them that you have started the building process and the digging, they pay a lot more. So please don't fear anything.

Indeed, we followed this teaching and we found that God has a lot of blessing and whenever there is a spiritual reason, God does prepare the road.

THE POPE GIVES RESPONSIBILITY TO HIS CHILDREN IN FRONT OF GOD.

I was in the receiving congregation of His Holiness in 1999 at New Jersey. I had the chance to sit with him the next day to take his blessings and guidance in the service. Before leaving him, Pope Shenouda told me “You need a letter from me dictating that you are responsible for the St. George and St. Rueiss church with regard to the building permits and that you are the chair and president of the church board.” His Holiness then wrote the letter with his own handwriting and stamped it with a huge yellow stamp. His Holiness gave me this letter with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and out of his wisdom. The miracles was when we were about to sign the mortgage, the bank asked for a translation of this letter so that I can sign as the person responsible of the church. Without such a letter, it would not have been possible to sign the mortgage as this letter was a requirement at that time.

WE OUGHT TO FULLY RESPECT THE LITURGY AND PREPARE FOR IT... THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH IN 1995.

On the night of September 16th, 1995, Pope Shenouda along with a group of bishops arrived to consecrate the church on Sunday the next day. H.H. started to tour around the church showing his happiness because at that time the church was the biggest church size-wise in all of the land of immigration. Pope Shenouda looked at the church and said “let it be full of activities”. He also admired the existence of the gym in the building. It was the first church in the land of immigration that places a gym inside its building for the youth. Although the church had prepared for an aghapy dinner when midnight arrived, H.H. entered into his papal apartment and refused to eat, drink, and even take his own medication. When I quickly spoke telling him “please take at least your medication with a glass of water”, Pope Shenouda looked at me with a reproach look and did not answer with one single word and entered into his papal apartment immediately. In the next morning he consecrated two churches and the Lord God has given him a lot of power to do so. He had such a great respect for God and the liturgy and so God honored him and gave him the power.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE “INDIVIDUAL” SERVICE... DURING THE BLESSING OF THE RETREAT HOUSE.

Based on our request, Pope Shenouda came to bless the first retreat house in the land of immigration which was about 100 acres and has a small villa in the middle

of it. The retreat house is located in the Collingwood area about 2.15 min from the church. I sat beside him during that trip towards the retreat house location where a congregation was waiting for us. When we arrived, Pope Shenouda entered the villa and blessed it. Then he entreated the attached hall where hundreds of people were waiting for him. He prayed a lot, blessed a lot, and then gave a beautiful sermon and answered the congregation questions. By then his flight time was approaching and the time came to leave. Just before leaving, a university student girl came telling him that she wants to enter into a law degree but she requires high grades. Pope Shenouda then left everyone and started to listen to her individually. One of the accompanying bishops told Pope Shenouda that this way he will miss the flight. Pope Shenouda then answered him and told him to let him speak to her. He said that in a fatherly, gentle and encouraging way then indeed this girl got accepted into law school after she was really depressed. The individual service is very important and is considered to be the most important one as the church is not just a place of activities.

PRECISION IN TRANSLATING THE BIBLE OR THE SPIRITUAL BOOKS... THE TRANSLATION COMMITTEE 1993.

At one point of time, several translations existed for the liturgy of St. Basil. Unfortunately, these translations had differences among each other in how precise they were and in the choice of words. Pope Shenouda then formed a committee to unify the translation of the liturgy. I was one of the committee members who were chosen by Pope Shenouda (although I am not worthy). Some members of the committee were experts in both the Coptic and English languages respectively. Some members were also experts in the liturgy tune as well. The committee met for a week at the papal residence in St. Bishoy Monastery. The committee used to meet for no less than 12 hours a day. The translation of the liturgy was taken from the original Coptic liturgy and not from the Arabic one as the translation loses its strength if it is done from another language. Therefore, we opted to use the Coptic original liturgy and not the Arabic one. Pope Shenouda used to follow up with us, answer our questions and points of disagreement. He used to solve these issues in deep love and precision without any favoritism. This led to the first unified translation of the Liturgy of St. Basil under Pope Shenouda's supervision. Everyone felt how important to be precise in studying the Bible and all the spiritual books alongside paying a lot of attention to translation as to not lose the true orthodox doctrine.

POPE SHENOUDA CELEBRATES EPIPHANY AT OUR CHURCH... FOR THE FIRST AND LAST TIME IN THE LAND OF IMMIGRATION.

I received a message from Pope Shenouda's secretary telling me that His Holiness will come and attend the Epiphany celebration at St. George and St. Rueiss Church in

Toronto. Winter was extremely cold at that year and the congregation of the church was unable to go to the church to prepare for the winter coldness and inability to travel. Exactly one day before Pope Shenouda arrived, the weather got better and so the congregation rushed with one spirit to prepare the church and the papal residence to welcome His Holiness and the accompanying bishops. His Holiness stayed at our church for three nights. How wonderful these nights were as they were full of blessings and of great light to our church. These days carried plenty of teachings and spiritual charge as well as prayers. On top of that, at one night, His Holiness entered the elevator to go up to his papal radiance and a woman came by to talk to him and take his blessings. The elevator door was about to close, but Pope Shenouda asked for the door to be reopened to talk to her and bless her. What a great fatherly and gentle feelings from him full of love and kindness.

THE COMPASSIONATE POPE DEALS WITH ME WITH KINDNESS WHEN SOME PEOPLE COMPLAINED ABOUT ME.

In one of His Holiness' visits, someone complained to him that the younger deacons do not take enough time to reply back in the liturgy as the older deacons lead the hymns and do not give a chance to the younger ones. His Holiness took the piece of paper and gave it to me without saying any word. He only looked in a compassionate way at me.

What was the result? The blessing of the Lord Christ in many liturgies and the creation of many deacons teams from older and younger ones in the church.

In another situation, another person complained that I sometimes read the names of the people who passed away in secret. His Holiness defended me and said that it must have been a long list. He then looked at me with great love.

THE POPE IN SERVING HIS SONS THE PRIESTS... (THE SERVICE OF WASHING THE FEET).

In one of the years, I had a problem and a question on my mind. I decided to go to Egypt to ask His Holiness for some guidance. I arrived to the Monastery of St. Bishoy at 10:30pm and asked to meet His holiness. At the door of his residence, I was asked whether I have an appointment or not. I answered no! So I wrote on a piece of paper "I am your son... I need your guidance. Please give me an appointment. Thank you!" They gave this piece of paper to Pope Shenouda. I was

expecting an appointment for the next day or another day, but instead he said to come in right now. I entered so he met me with great fatherly love. He ordered me something to drink and heard all what I wanted to say. After listening to me to the end, he said “You have to know why”. With these words, he calmed me down and pleased my heart. He asked me to rest. Instead of coming back after three days, I came back the second day with lots of pleasure, happiness and with a clear vision of what to do. In such a situation, His Holiness is the servant and I am being served. He taught me a great lesson in servicing and specifically, the service of the washing of the feet.

THE POPE SAYS “I DON’T KNOW” IN RESPONSE TO SOME OF THE QUESTIONS.

We were in a priesthood convention with His Holiness in Boston during which he lectures and answers many of our questions. In one of the times, one of the priests asked him a question and His Holiness answered with truth and said “I don’t know”. This is the Pope, the teacher and the humble Pope. Many of the attendees tried to answer but none of their answers came close to the best one “I don’t know”, which is an answer that requires wisdom and humility.

CARING FOR THE CHILDREN... POPE SHENUDA THE FOUNDER OF THE COPTIC CHURCHES’ SCHOOLS OPENED UP OUR COPTIC CHURCH SCHOOL AND DAYCARE CENTRE IN 1999.

Pope Shenouda came to open our Coptic Church School, which is named after St. Veronia, and our daycare, which is name after St. George in 1999. Indeed Pope Shenouda used to love children so much and would take care of them. His Holiness was the founder of all the Coptic schools in all of the lands of immigration. Initially, I was not convinced with the idea of a Coptic school in the lands of immigration, but for the sake of obedience, I obeyed to what Pope Shenouda had asked me to do. It was a great joy for everyone to have such a school and daycare. This is such an important event to the church congregation to serve our sons and daughters in the land of immigration and to those who want to raise their children in a Christian environment. What was the fruit of such obedience? The school and daycare grew out the church’s building and its facilities. As a result, we built the Logos centre which houses the Church of Archangel Michael and St. Mina and it also houses a huge Coptic Church and second daycare alongside the other facilities.

THE KIND POPE DOES NOT EMBARRASS ANYONE.

In one of the visits of His Holiness to St. George and St. Rueiss church a lady came to His Holiness and said “I wish I can kiss Sayedna and take the blessing”. He

laughed and told her “leave it till tomorrow”. She then laughed and we all did and so the situation ended without embarrassing her.

THE NECESSITY OF APPRECIATION AND GIFT.... POPE SHENOUDA.

When Pope Shenouda came together with a group of bishops to bless the foundation stone for St. George and St. Rueiss Church, it was a great event that took place at St. Paul Cathedral in the middle of Toronto. The event was so big that more than 1500 people attended it. The number was unimaginable and unexpected especially for many of them who came from across Canada. At the end of the event, Pope Shenouda headed to his hotel room to rest. I was given the task by all the other priests in the area to take care of His Holiness’ luggage in the morning. I had to sleepover at the same hotel so that I can near His Holiness in the early morning at 6:30 to provide any assistance for him that he might need. I stood outside his room earlier than 6:30 am. His Holiness noticed that I was outside and asked me to come in with a welcoming gesture. He then placed an international phone call from his room. He then pointed at well-wrapped edible fruit plate and told me to take it. I then thanked him for such a great gift and I was really delighted (although I was not worthy).

KINDNESS AND LOVE ARE THE BASIS FOR GROWING... POPE SHENOUDA'S VISIT TO THE EGYPTIAN EMBASSY IN USA.

I got used to sleeping over for two or three nights in New Jersey every time I fly there to welcome His Holiness so that I can meet him up to take his blessings and advices about the service. I used to stay over as well in order for me to accompany him when he visits the Egyptian embassy together with the bishops (although I am not worthy). He used to welcome me during these visits. When I accompanied him in these embassy visits, I noticed his love and kindness to all those who work in the embassy to the extent that they all feel that he is their father. He used to start his talk saying “in the name of God who we all worship”. What a wonderful and loving way of speaking! Even when anyone speaks an inappropriate word, His Holiness used to answer him in a wise and loving way that would not lead to any problem. On the contrary, when we are leaving the embassy, everyone asks His Holiness for another visit and requests a promise from him to that. Love, kindness and gentleness are the true servant’s character and that is the Lord Jesus picture.

WHEVER TEACHES SOMETHING, SHOULD ABIDE BY IT... THIS IS HOW POPE SHENOUDA WAS.

I used to accompany him in the airports and used to get pleased whenever the plane gets delayed as I can listen to him further. One time when I was sitting beside him

in the airport, a lady came by telling him “I don’t know how you can endure all that?”

At that time there were plenty of problems facing the church to which His Holiness had to deal with. His Holiness looked to her and said “All that does not even pass through my cloth to me”. This how he used to teach his children of how not to worry and place all the problems at the Lord’s hands so that the problem disappears and God appears with all His love and peace to calm down the person. Indeed we all used to see the smile on his face along with the peace and calmness. This way he used to not only show us the teachings, but also follow them. He was a practical saintly person and not theoretical who lived a deep life and enjoyed the fruits of the Holy Spirit “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.” Galatians 5:22

REPROACH SHOULD NOT BE DONE HARSHLY... THE POPE REPROACHES ME BUT WITH A SPIRIT OF KINDNESS, HAPPINESS AND JOY.

I went to visit Pope Shenouda together with the priests of St. George and St. Rueiss Church when he was in Cleveland. We visited him in the waiting room of the hospital in Cleveland and we sat with him when he started talking to me and said “Are you the church that sold the land?” I didn’t answer because I totally forgot the matter. So His Holiness continued and said “Either way, the seller is always the looser Fr. Rueiss” At that time, I remembered that we have sold the 100 acres of land that we have bought and which His Holiness Pope Shenouda came and blessed as he first retreat house in the land of immigration. I answered him saying that I came to Egypt specially to take his holiness’ permission to sell the land to which his holiness agreed.

We also wanted to sell the land because there used to be some agriculture activates in the land that have stopped. Additionally, the trips to these lands stopped on top of the fact that the church got busy with other services. This has led to for the villa on the land to become an abandoned place where thieves sought shelter and which they have stolen everything. Top that with the fact that the church was unable to endure all these issues and burden. As a result, the church board has reached the conclusion to sell the property provided that his holiness agreed to that and that has happened. Moreover, I have asked from his holiness in the past to appoint a priest to serve that place, but his holiness has rejected. At that point, Pope Shenouda told me, Abouna, I want to tell you something: “Once people found Juha laughing

hysterically, so they asked him why are you laughing like that? He answered them saying that they have stolen my donkey. So they replied and said and what is so funny about that? He answered them saying: it is great that they didn't steal me with the donkey" Pope Shenouda then added "Had I sent a priest or a monk to serve in that far place, then the thieves would have taken him also". Then he laughed and so did we. We were all happy and calm with him and when we left him we started wondering how His Holiness was able to remember all these details. He has so many churches to look after and yet he remembered our church and that we have sold the land. What a great memory! What a great love! A beautiful kindness even if it had reproach. Till today I still do not know if that was a reproach from His Holiness or just a story he remembered.

THE VISIT OF GOODBYE... GOD ORGANIZED IT WITH POPE SHENOUDA'S HAND IN 2011.

I took an appointment from Bishop Youaans, Pope Shenouda's secretary, to visit His Holiness together with a group of priests and their wives as well as my daughter, her husband, and her kids who came by from Chicago. We all met according to the appointment time at the visiting room of the Cleveland hospital where Pope Shenouda was being treated. Just when we arrived, we were informed that His Holiness will not be meeting anyone as he is truly tired and even his own secretary had left Cleveland to serve in another city. I requested another appointment from Hegomain Fr. Mikhail Edward, the priest of St. Mark Church in Cleveland, but he was unable to provide me with another one. When I asked him whether or not we will be able to meet Pope Shenouda in the morning if spent the night in Cleveland, he answered and said that it will be unlikely as the morning is normally booked for the doctors' rotations and examination of Pope Shenouda. If Pope Shenouda will be able to meet someone, then it will be at night. I told Fr. Mikhail that we will spend the night at Cleveland, which was not planned as we all were planning to go back to Toronto in the same night after meeting with Pope Shenouda. Fr. Mikhail then told me that he cannot guarantee anything, but asked me to give him my phone number and he will let me know, but he also added that it is unlikely that His Holiness will meet you all. We all went to a hotel and spent the night there. At 7:30am, I received a call from Fr. Mikhail Edward informing me that Pope Shenouda is going to meet all of us but in 15 minutes. I answered Fr. Mikhail that it would be impossible to make it in 15 minutes as we are in a far hotel and we need at least an hour to get ready and arrive at the hospital. Fr. Mikhail then informed Pope Shenouda whom has told him to let us come and wait downstairs until Pope Shenouda tells you come in. Indeed our group arrived and awaited till Fr. Mikhail called us and told us to come to visit Pope Shenouda. We

were really delighted. How wonderful it was when he was hugging the children! He told my daughter that he was really happy to see her with her husband and children. Pope Shenouda knew my daughter very well as he has accepted her years back when she was a university student, together with Tasyony Sawsan, at the retreat house in St. Bishoy Monastery in Egypt to take some quite time there. At that visit Pope Shenouda was smiling and joking with us and didn't want us to leave. I, on the other hand, wanted to leave but I was mistaken to do so as I didn't know that it would be our last visit to him. So we rushed and left in half an hour, although we could have spent much more time with His Holiness; yet, I was afraid he will get tired from the lengthy visit.

His Holiness knew that it was a goodbye visit. I did not know and so I rushed to leave, although he did not want us to, so that he can rest. The secretary bishops were amazed with how Pope Shenouda was so much welcoming, loving and kind to us. I didn't know it was our last time to meet him.

In my last visit to His Holiness after that by two months, I tried to take another appointment and I was not able to. Actually, no one was able to take an appointment to meet His Holiness as he was getting ready to go back to Egypt for his trip to heaven.

I RETURNED FROM EGYPT CRYING AFTER HIS HOLINESS DEATH... HE COMFORTED ME AND GAVE ME A GIFT.

I went to Egypt to attend the funeral service of the passing of our beloved Pope Shenouda and get the blessing from him. God has blessed me with the ability to attend all the prayers and get the blessing from his body after great distress. I cried a lot when I knew

of his departure and especially in the plane coming back from Cairo. I was really saddened for his departure and as remembered all these memories throughout this golden era that I have served under his leadership and fatherhood during which he blessed me tremendously. Once I arrived from Egypt to Toronto, I was informed that the nearby Korean church was about to be sold to a group of people that might cause many troubles to our church. But then the Lord's hand started to work and I felt the prayers of Pope Shenouda did lead to this matter. The church's board and the congregation responded with strength to the matter and they named this church St. Mercurious and Anba Shenouda church after we have purchased it. I felt as if it was a gift from Pope Shenouda to our church in the land of immigration and especially to his sons and daughters in St. George and St. Rueiss whom he has visited several times, loved it so much and blessed it a lot. I was comforted that his

hand was with us in this matter as it was completed in a miraculous way through the intercession of Pope Shenouda III.

THE CONCLUSION.

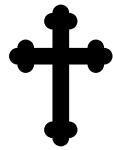
- 1) The Lord Jesus Christ, glory to be His Name, is the source of all love, blessing, and the beneficent of all good things. He has made His saints a blessed aroma for Him to us. Pope Shenouda III is the Lord's aroma in his love, loyalty to the church, fatherhood, wisdom, respect to others, happiness, kindness, peace, long suffering, encouragement, and following up. Intercede to us Pope Shenouda in front of the Lord's Throne. Amen.
- 2) The human being benefits tremendously from heartache more from being spoiled. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III was raised in a difficult environment especially after he lost his mother and father. The difficult situations strengthen a human being.
- 3) The Lord God prepared Pope Shenouda to lead the church just as He prepared Joseph in the Old Testament and just as He prepared Moses in the wilderness for forty years. God also prepared Saul to become Paul the apostle and said “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake”. Likewise, after Pope Shenouda graduated from university, he served in the army and then fasted a lot in the wilderness in extreme hermitic life. He then lived his life as a Pope in extreme hermitic life as well and continued to be a monk.
- 4) He memorized plenty of Holy Bible. He used to respect the Bible so much and used to say to not put anything above the Holy Bible. Many named him “The Holy Bible expert”.
- 5) His humanity: At one time he said “before you seek to become an angel, seek to become a human.” This applies perfectly in Pope Shenouda’s case to whom many Christians and Muslims witnessed that he was the Pope for everyone and named him “The Pope of the Arab” based on his humanity.

CONCLUSION

- † The Lord Christ has already prophesied about the fact that sin and the wrong and evil thoughts are going to come. Even from the beginning of Christianity, wrong thoughts have surfaced but they all vanished and Christianity grew stronger.

- † The world does not want to feel that it is doing sin nor does it want to feel that it needs repentance or salvation. Hence, the world welcomes all such wrong thoughts and these thoughts spread quickly into many people hearts and are welcomed by the media.
- † In the da Vinci code we find claims that are full of lies and imagination that mix matters to fulfill two goals: the first is a business and a profitable goal as the novel has sold more than 60 million copies, not to mention that it was transformed into a movie that attracted millions of people since it was opened on the 19th May 2006. The second goal is to attack Christianity with its faith, doctrine and history.
- † The story of the novel itself claims that the Lord Jesus Christ married Mary Magdalene and had a girl named Sarah as a result. This royal descendent still exists till today and the “Sion” group, which was established in 1099, still believes this claim. The group also claims that it knows facts and many other secrets and symbols that Christians are trying to fight against, as a result the Opus Dei has been established to encounter the “Sion” group.
- † One of the most important and known people who have followed the “Sion” group ideas and beliefs was the Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci who is from Vinci, Italy. His Last Supper drawing was intentionally drawn without the Holy Grail and with Mary Magdalene to indicate that Mary Magdalene’s descendent is instead of the Holy Grail. This is considered to be the most made-up claim that the author Dan Brown has used to prove himself with lies and imaginary myths.





LIVING THE GOSPEL (1)

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

Human needs detailed studies and lengthy subjects as well as practical advice on short topics "Living the Gospel". This expression, " Living the Gospel" has been learned from our beloved father the righteous priest Hegumen / Pishoy Kamel who was known for his humility, prayers and deep service inside and outside Egypt.

The term "Living the Gospel" means the practical application of the Scripture in the human life. If the word "gospel" means a joyous news, then the person who lives the gospel in his or her practical life will live joyfully and triumphantly in Christ Who is united in that person through the work of the Holy Trinity.

In life, it is important to have "gradualism". That is why when a person starts with nominal effort, and then is helped by God while loving God from all of his heart, that person will produce a lot of growth.

In this booklet, we will present some examples in the practical applications of "Living the Gospel".

- (1) Avoiding the tongue's sins
- (2) How to reduce the sins of the tongue
- (3) On the importance of praying with psalms
- (4) How do I create a spiritual program for my life?
- (5) Where do I seek joy in order to find it in my life?
- (6) Why we put paper with problems written on it on the altar?
- (7) What are the contents of the spiritual solitude?
- (8) A verse that summarizes the "acceptable" human life on earth by God
- (9) How do I enjoy the compassion of God in my life?
- (10) Why is Sunday especially important for Christians?

(1) AVOIDING THE TONGUE'S SINS

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue...” Proverbs 18:21

It is possible that man will carelessly allow the tongue to say what it wants despite having many blessings from our Lord. However, everything can be lost because of this negligence.

In James 3: 1-18, the whole chapter talks about the importance of the tongue and its danger. **“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.” James 3:6**

The sins of the tongue are many: pride and arrogance- self-pride - lying - cheating - deceit - fabrication - false testimony, falsehood and trickery - hatred or lack of love - insults - gossip - secrets disclosure - cruelty – hurtful words - fawning - blasphemy.

Exercise:

- (A) Beware and do not say any inappropriate words
- (B) Proverbs has 30 chapters. Read one chapter every day for a month and you would have read it all and benefit from it a lot.
- (C) You earn much when you train your tongue not to say any inappropriate word and when you treat people well in every word you say or mean.

(2) HOW TO REDUCE THE SINS OF THE TONGUE

Be slow to speak ... Do not rush your words, especially if you are in an emotional state. **“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” James 1:19**

- ❖ If someone angers you, do not rush to respond, but try to calm yourself first.
- Before uttering any word, try to review in your mind what reactions to this word would have from others. One of the saints said, "I have often spoken and regretted and I have never regretted silence."

Exercise: Reduce speech and speak only when it is necessary to speak.

(3) ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYING WITH PSALMS

The Psalms are the Word of God ... By praying with Psalms we speak to God in the same way as He speaks and not in a weak human words.

- ❖ St. Paul "... Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm..." (1 Corinthians 26:14).
- ❖ St. Paul also said, "**speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord**" (Ephesians 5:19).
- ❖ As per the teaching of the Apostles "Let most of the prayers every day and night be from the Psalms because of what it has of thankfulness, praise, supplication and confession of sins."
- ❖ Saint Athanasius the Apostolic "Praising with psalms is a healing medicine for the soul".
- ❖ St. Isaac "psalms are the food to the spirit".
- ❖ Without psalms, prayer becomes for the materialistic things as well as it becomes short and shallow. However, with the prayer of psalms, a person prays what is in his/her heart and say it to our Lord.

Exercise: For a person who is not accustomed to praying with psalms, begin with:

- Two psalms from the Prime (Morning)prayer
- Two psalms from the Vesper (Eleventh Hour) prayer
- Two psalms from the Compline (Twelfth Hour) prayer
- Then increase with time and as the person feels and enjoys the blessing of the Psalms.

(4) HOW DO I CREATE A SPIRITUAL PROGRAM FOR MY LIFE?

I have to raise my eyes to pray and ask our Lord to choose the right spiritual program for me.

- ❖ I am not concerned with the literal implementation of the spiritual program. What worries me is that my heart is with our Lord. I work according to the grace of our Lord, to build up myself and the people that are around me. "**I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh**" (Galatians 16: 5).
- ❖ Try to transform the spiritual program into good works such as visiting a patient, being with someone you love to share his/her grief, or giving food to someone in need.

- ❖ I have to balance my life: my body has a share and my spirit has a share ... Nothing dominates over the other so as not to have extremism/inequity in my life. Every need is within its limits.
- ❖ It is important that I do not push myself over its limits "**Stand on your feet and not on your toes in life.**"

(5) WHERE DO I SEEK JOY IN ORDER TO FIND IT IN MY LIFE?

- ❖ All humans seek joy. No one wants sadness and grief.
- ❖ Where does a person find joy? St. Paul says of joy, "... **Rejoice in the Lord ...**" (Philippians 3:1). Then he says, "**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**" (Philippians 4: 4).
- ❖ God created man in a Garden of Eden after He created all the earth. So God wants man to be happy.
- ❖ The problem is that human search for joy away from our Lord through being independent from God.
- ❖ "... **do not rejoice in this...**" (Luke 10:20) Jesus said to disciples when the disciples were happy with the reputation and the casting out of the demons. "... **but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven**" (Luke 10:20). The spirit then rejoices in Christ, the kingdom, and heaven.
- ❖ St. Augustine "**You have created us in Your likeness; so we will not find rest except in You**"
- ❖ Then I seek joy through seeking God, the source of joy. The Divine Liturgy rejoices: "**I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord**" (Psalm 122). Communion makes me happy - in a prayer after Communion, we say "My heart is filled with joy and my tongue with gladness" - prayers of Midnight praise with its tunes make me happy. If I am not used to attending it, I begin by attending a small portion of it and increase it as times goes by.

Note: Cain wanted to find happiness for himself so he built a city and all people got busy in search of joy but away from God ... They did not find joy.

The word "Gospel" means a joyous word "**Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**" (Matthew 11:28). Just reading some verses in the Bible makes me "rejoice". Try and experience it yourself.

(6) WHY WE PUT PAPER WITH PROBLEMS WRITTEN ON IT ON THE ALTAR?

- ❖ Every human being must pass through hardships in a part of his/her life and it is necessary that a person asks for his/her requests by faith ... and hope ... and trust "**And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive**" (Matthew 21:22)
- ❖ The church is the house of our Lord dedicated to prayer: "**My house shall be called a house of prayer**" (Matthew 21:13).
- ❖ The church is a holy place, because it is the place of God's Spirit descension. "**Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.**" **And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"** (Genesis 28: 16-17).
- ❖ At church, we are guests at our Lord's, the host, and He would like to give us our needs. He is a father among His children in the church and we are surrounded by angels.
- ❖ The priest puts the names of the confessors on a paper on the altar ... asking God to help them. He puts the names of those who have problems on the altar ... asking God's help to be with them. He puts the names of those who passed away on the altar asking for mercy to them.
- ❖ There is a fact in the Bible with Hezekiah the king in 2 Kings 19: 14-37 when King Sennacherib sent to him, with great pride, that he would destroy the city. Hezekiah prayed a long prayer and then took the letters and placed them before the Lord. And the LORD God of Israel said, "**I have heard**" (2 Kings 19:20).
- ❖ Sennacherib himself was attacked by his own sons and killed him. The LORD also sent His angel and killed 185,000 people from Sennacherib's army.

- ❖ Therefore, pray in the house ... Pray in the church ... Entreat to God in your request. Ask the priest to add you to his prayers ... Request the intercession of the saints ... and write a clear request and put it on the altar.

(7) WHAT ARE THE CONTENTS OF THE SPIRITUAL SOLITUDE?

- ❖ The spiritual solitude time with God is an essential element of the deep spiritual life with God as well as quietness "**that you also aspire to lead a quiet life**" (1 Thessalonians 4:11).
- ❖ It means to be alone with God. In Greek it is "Monos" and it means only me with our Lord and that means Quietness.
- ❖ The feelings in the spiritual solitude are these feelings that Mary felt while when she sat at Jesus' feet hearing His words and not preoccupied with anything else.
- ❖ The effect of the spiritual solitude is self-reflection as well as internal assurance and internal renewal of oneself "**For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: (a) In returning and rest you shall be saved; (b) In quietness and confidence shall be your strength**" Isaiah 30:15
- ❖ Spiritual solitude is a period of spiritual freedom. Be alone with God with no phone. You start by crossing yourself. If you felt that you want to pray an hour from the Agpya, then that is good... and if you felt that you want to read a chapter of the Bible, that is good. And if you felt that you want to hold yourself accountable "**In returning to God**" as mentioned in (Isaiah 30:15) - good. If you even feel that you want to relax your and take some minutes or sleep, that is good. What is meant to to enjoy our fellowship with our Lord in complete freedom.
- ❖ The first solitude teacher was Jesus Christ himself:
 - He used to resign to the wilderness to pray
 - And in the very early morning, He woke up and left to a vacant place and was praying
 - He went to the mountain to pray and spent the whole night praying.

- ❖ What is the duration of the spiritual solitude? It can be gradual ... but must be daily if possible ... and the person grows gradually in it... and loves and adores the loneliness with God. Similar to the story of Bishop Arsenius, the teacher of the children of kings, who left the life in the palace to live in loneliness and solitude with God

(8) A VERSE THAT SUMMARIES THE "ACCEPTABLE" HUMAN LIFE ON EARTH BY GOD

- ❖ It is said about David the prophet "**For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep**" Acts 13:36. David served his own generation by the will of God in every place he served whether: as a Sheppard, before Goliath, as a conscious-aware king, as a person who repented from sin, and as psalm writer.
- ❖ Serving is the work of love in any area in where human exist. Serving does not have to be through a service as in being priest or a deacon or teacher in schools Sunday unless that person was called by God for this. Nevertheless, the broad meaning of service is that a person lives life loving others and helping them in any field. Mother in motherhood. Father in parenthood. Ordinary human being in serving his/her family as well as the society so that the person has affection and love for others for the last moment in his/her life according to his/her talents and circumstances.
- ❖ Jesus said of his ministry, "**I have finished the work which You have given Me to do**" (John 17:4).
- ❖ The most important thing that honors the servant is the promise of Christ to him: "**... and where I am, there My servant will be also.**" (John 12:26).
- ❖ What is the amount of productivity and concentration of a servant of Christ in his/her life? "**You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.**" (2 Tim 2: 3-4).
- ❖ A sense of responsibility within the family, society and church "as a good soldier of Jesus **Christ**"

(9) HOW DO I ENJOY THE COMPASSION OF GOD IN MY LIFE?

- ❖ When Jesus approached the door of the city of Nain, and saw a woman weeping because she had lost her only son, He had compassion on her. "**When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep'**" (Luke 7:13). And He raised her son raised from death.
- ❖ God is almighty and of great-eminence. If He looks at me with compassion and mercy, then He will manage my life to the fullest.
- ❖ But how can I retrieve the mercy of our Lord to me?
 - I ask for the mercy of our Lord - most of the church's hymns has "**O Lord, have mercy**". Also in my own personal prayers I say "**O Lord, Have mercy on me**"
 - My feeling of weakness and lack of pride "**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.**" (2 Cor 12:9). I will gladly boast of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may be descend on me.
 - When I am merciful to my brethren, God is merciful with me. "**Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy**" (Matthew 5:7) - (David's example with Mephibosheth, the grandson of Saul the king). "**Blessed is he who considers the poor The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, And he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.**" (Psalm 41: 1-3).
 - When I respect the commandments of our Lord, I worship Him a true worship "And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation" (Luke 1:50).
 - When I offer the tears of repentance, God will have compassion on me "Give me, Lord, many tears as You have been given to women in the old days". Read the Agpeya litanies – Midnight Hour – Second Watch

(10) WHY IS SUNDAY ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT FOR CHRISTIANS?

- ❖ Sunday is of particular importance as Christ Himself gave it this special significance: through His resurrection on Sunday and the completion of His appearances all on Sunday to confirm this.
 - A) He first appeared on the first day of the week to Mary Magdalene and on the same day to the disciples in Emmaus and Peter (Luke 24:13).
 - B) He also appeared to the disciples gathered in the upper room, while Thomas was not present, during the noontime on the first day of the week. He later

appeared again to them eight days later in the presence of Thomas. The Lord was therefore keen to appear to the disciples on Sunday to make it the primary day for Christians (Refer to Luck 24: 36-43, John 20: 19-20, 26-29).

- ❖ The significance of Sunday also appears in the Epistles of the Paul and in the book of Acts.

When Paul was in Troas about to head towards Jerusalem, he called on the congregation to meet "**the first day of the week to break the bread.**" When the Christians of Corinth were asked to gather support for the Christians of Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 16), he wrote that at the age of fifty-five. Meaning that the memory of Christ rising from the dead was still firm in his mind although by that time Sunday has become an apostolic tradition.

- ❖ Sunday has maintained its basic value. St. Ignatius of Antioch says that "Christians do not celebrate Saturday but Sunday. Therefore we celebrate it with joy because on that day Jesus rose from the dead before he ascended to heaven"
- ❖ We can see the utmost importance of Sunday through the many titles it has been given. Every title refers to a side of how rich that day is and of its important characteristic. It is referred to as: The first day of the week - the first day - the day of the Lord - the master of days - the day of the sun - the eighth day of the day - the day of the Lord - the day of the sun - the day of the sun – The eighth day of Resurrection. They are titles associated with Christ. As for the church, there are many titles for Sunday: the day of the meeting, the day of the Word of the Lord, the Eucharist, and the Day of Resurrection. These titles refer to the many functions of this day: meeting, education and participation with the community. The faithful also call Sunday several titles: Christian feast - the day of joy and liberation - the day of rest - the day of love - family day
- ❖ St. Jerome "Sunday is the Day of Judgment - the day of the Christians - it is our day, and for Christians it is the" most important holiday" and its purpose is not only to determine the passage of time but to reveal its deepest meaning
- ❖ So we continue to pray the Sunday Liturgy with all its meanings, blessings and feelings.
- ❖ In the Bible "**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.**" (Deut 12 and Exodus 20:8)

- ❖ Sunday is the Christian's Sabbath because it Lord's rest was on Sunday and Sunday became the new Sabbath. The Lord's rest took place was when He rested the people from the condemnation of sin and its fruit, death, "**Remember Sunday, to keep it holy**"
- ❖ In the Coptic Orthodox Church Synaxarion - 4 Baramhat – the Holy Synod met and casted out a group that devalued Sunday as the Day of Resurrection and wanted to celebrate Easter on any day of the week (please read this story in detail in the Synaxarion).