

**THE SERVANTS BOOK: A SPIRITUAL GUIDE FOR
SUNDAY SCHOOL SERVICE**

**ST. MARY'S COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH
RALEIGH, NC**

Preface

This book is intended as a spiritual guide for Sunday School servants. The contents of the book are based on lessons given in servants meetings for the past 8 years in St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in Raleigh, NC, covering the period 2002 - 2010. The book is broken up into several chapters, covering topics that are suitable for discussion in servants meetings. Chapter 1 gives a comprehensive overview of the characteristics of a servant. Chapter 2 specifically studies the service of children. Chapter 3 presents Bible study of several books of the Bible. Chapter 4 discusses church fasts and feasts, while Chapter 5 takes a close look at tradition, church rites, and the Divine Liturgy. Chapter 6 covers saints of the Coptic Church and Chapter 7 examines important social issues facing the Orthodox Christian. Chapter 8 takes a deep look at church theology and dogma, while Chapter 9 presents several spiritual articles for meditation and spiritual growth. Chapter 10 gives selected Agpeya prayers suitable for servants meetings and Chapter 11 gives a comprehensive list of hymns that may be sung in servants meetings throughout the entire Coptic year.

This book is not yet finished. We will keep adding topics as they are completed. We ask that our Lord Jesus Christ accept this humble service. May Christ always guide us in our service and Shepherd His flock from generation to generation. By the prayers and supplications of our Lady and Queen St. Mary, St. Mark the Apostle, our beloved Pope and Patriarch Pope Shenouda III, and our beloved Bishop Michael, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

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The Purpose of Servants Meetings

1. **Unity** - Spiritual unity is a major component of service. Jesus met with his disciples often in the Upper Room. Also, we read in Acts 1:14, “They continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” This is a key verse for unity in service. Also, in Acts 2:1, we read, “When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were with one accord in one place.” These two verses serve as model verses for unity in our service.
2. **Spiritual Growth** - An important aspect of our service life is to grow spiritually. Servants meetings facilitate individual as well as group spiritual growth. When we grow spiritually together, we serve with one mind and one spirit, and this is critical in service. St. Paul sums this point up beautifully in Philippians 2:2-3, when he says, “fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”
3. **Knowledge** - An important aspect of Servants meetings is to increase our spiritual and Biblical knowledge, as well as our knowledge about the Church. St. Paul emphasizes this point in Hebrews 5:12-14, when he says, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* in milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”
4. **Solving problems** - Praying about Sunday School issues and problems together, and discussing problems together has a much more positive result and impact than trying to solve them on our own. Group prayer is very powerful in problem solving and in keeping the devil away from interfering in our service life. St. Paul again emphasizes this point in Philippians 4:6-7, when he says, “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Characteristics of a Servant - Part I

1. **Love of God** - The most important characteristic of a servant is that he/she knows and loves God, and is continually striving to know God better.
 - That is not to say that a servant must attain a certain spiritual level before they can serve. As St. Paul says, “not that I have already attained, or am perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that which Jesus Christ has also laid hold of me.” (Philippians 3:1).
 - The servant must be at a higher spiritual level than those they are serving. “O Zion that brings good tidings, get thee up in the high mountain.” (Isaiah 40:9). This verse means that whoever teaches others about the heavenly matters, has to leave the earthly matters and has to stand on a high mountain.
2. **Action and not words** - The servant has to be a *role model* in that they serve by action and not words. Actions have the greatest impact on others. Thus we should minimize our lecturing and maximize our actions. Jesus shows us this when he talks about the cost of discipleship and says, “Foxes have holes and birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Matthew 8:20). Also, in the Epistle of St. James we read “Thus also faith in itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17).
3. **Humility** - Humility is the foundation of service. It is humility that facilitates every service and it is the lack of humility that destroys every service. The lack of humility serves as a big stumbling for others in service and to those whom we serve. To be humble in service, we must understand who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. We must remember that
 - We are not saviors. We cannot develop a Messiah complex. Our goal is only to bring others closer to Christ.
 - It is not our right to serve. It is a Holy privilege. No one is qualified to serve, and none of us are worthy of it.
 - We are all sinners. We are not perfect and we never will be perfect. So we are no better than our fellow servants nor are we better than those we serve.

- God does not need our service. The Church service will do just fine without us. On the contrary, we are in need of service in order to strengthen our spiritual life.
 - We must know our identity. We must know who we are, where we came from and where we are going. We were made out of the dust of the ground: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” (Genesis 2:7).
 - “Jesus, knowing that that Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.” (John 13:3-5).
 - James and John - They asked Jesus that one sit on His left and the other on His right in the Kingdom (Mark 10:37). Jesus answered, “Yet is shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.” (Mark 10:43-45).
 - Philippians 2:1-11 talks about unity through humility. Philippians 2:5-11 is sometimes called the Incarnation Song of St. Paul.
4. **Responsible and Reliable** - The servant must be mature, responsible and reliable. They must be serious about their service. The “faithful servant” that Jesus talks about in the Gospels (Luke 12:35-48 as well as the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30), is the one who takes their service seriously. The servants struggle does not stop until he “presents every man perfect in Jesus Christ,” as St. Paul says.

Characteristics of a Servant - Part II

5. **Maturity** - The servant must be *emotionally and spiritual mature* in their service. They should be stable and balanced in their thoughts and actions. They must be able to withstand problems with spiritual strength. They should never panic, get shaken, or lose control with anyone, including the Sunday School kids and their fellow servants. They must be psychologically stable and balanced so that they can serve as an example to others and not be a stumbling block. They must have good self-control, as this is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). A Sunday school servant must be able to exercise authority in the right way, and with love, zeal, and liveliness. They must experience what they speak. St. Paul speaks of spiritual maturity in Hebrews 5:12-14.
6. **Obedience** - Obedience, like humility, is one of the fundamental foundations of service. Obedience is the key to God's heart. A servant must be obedient and respect the hierarchy and order laid down by the church. Obedience and humility are closely related. The humble servant is obedient, whereas when we lack humility, we also lack obedience. Part of obedience is being submissive, and to be submissive to God in our service is critical. St. Peter talks about being submissive in 1 Peter 5:5-6, when he says, "Likewise, you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." St. John (1 John 5:1-5) talks about the importance of obedience by faith, and links obedience to keeping the commandments.

Examples of Obedience in the Bible:

- Abraham - Offering of Isaac
- Philemon - St. Paul calls on Philemon to be obedient and to take Onesimus back. "Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will even do more than what I say." (Philemon 21).
- - Jesus was obedient to the point of death. St. Paul says in Philippians 2:8, "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

7. **Self-Denial and Sacrifice** - Self-denial and sacrifice involves giving our heart completely to God. “My son, give me your heart.” (Proverbs 23:36). Our heart cannot be divided between God and the things of this world. A servant must not love the world and the things of the world in all its forms. St. James says, “Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4). Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:24). We have to deny ourselves from the things of this world in order to serve, which involves giving time to our service, being role models, exercising self-control, and being peacemakers.
8. **Sincerity** - There is no place for superficiality in service. A servant must always be sincere and deep to those they serve and to their fellow servants. Superficiality in service is a dangerous disease which leads to spiritual stagnation and decline. One of the signs of superficiality is when we start emphasizing the outside appearance rather than the internal. We will be deprived of spiritual blessings if we are not sincere in our service. Jesus commanded Simon Peter to go into the *deep* and cast his net. When he did that, he caught a great number of fish. Likewise, when we obey God’s voice to be spiritually deep, we receive abundant blessings.
9. **One-on-One Service** - This is the most important and highest form of service. This type of service typically occurs outside of the church. One-on-one service involves serving to the needs of others, individually, by giving them words of encouragement, helping them with their problems, giving advice, helping them in their schoolwork, etc... One-on-one service should be done in secret, and we should not “sound a trumpet”, as Jesus says, when we serve others one-on-one. Jesus gives some great examples of one-on-one service in Matthew 25:35-36.

Characteristics of a Servant - Part III

We would like to discuss the proper conduct and characteristics of a servant. St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians is an excellent Epistle on characteristics of a servant that all servants should read. Here we want to focus on several verses. These are

“But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9).

“Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Corinthians 8:13).

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

1. In these verses, St. Paul talks about the notion that we might have the knowledge between right and wrong (1 Corinthians 8:1), and know the difference between sin and no sin, we can behave in such a way that we do *not* sin, and yet make our fellow man stumble.
2. This tells us that things that make other people stumble are not necessarily only sinful things. We can be behaving in a non-sinful way and yet make our brother stumble, and such behavior may even encourage our brother to sin (1 Corinthians 8:11).
3. St. Paul says, “knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (1 Corinthians 8:1). This means that we should focus on being an example to others by our love, not our knowledge. Knowledge can make us conceited and over-confident, and as a result, we can become a stumbling block to others due to our over-confidence in knowing what is sinful and what is not.

Here are some concrete examples that we should be aware of so that we do not make others stumble:

- **Clothing** - Servants are expected to wear proper clothing. It should not be too tight or revealing in the front or the back. It should be modest in fashion. We should have proper footwear, make-up, jewelry, and hair styles (1 Corinthians 11:3-15, 1 Timothy 2:9).

- **Alcohol** - We should never drink alcohol at any time, nor should we have alcohol at home and serve it to anyone. We must never go to nightclubs or bars. Alcohol is a *great* stumbling block for the kids (1 Corinthians 10:7, 1 Timothy 3:8).
- **Weddings** - Weddings are where we can be a great stumbling block. Matrimony is a Sacrament, but we have turned this Sacrament upside down by our behavior in church during the ceremony and at the wedding reception which follows.
 - We should not make loud noises, cheers, laugh, or make inappropriate gestures during the wedding ceremony. This is great disrespect to this Sacrament.
 - We must be properly dressed at all weddings. Servants are expected to wear proper clothing. It should not be too tight or revealing in the front or the back. It should be modest in fashion. We should have proper footwear, make-up, jewelry, and hair styles (1 Corinthians 11:3-15, 1 Timothy 2:9).
 - We must behave appropriately at the wedding reception. Servants should *not* dance, drink alcohol, make loud noises, play musical instruments, etc... They should be seated quietly in their seats socializing with others in a calm and decent way with good self-control, self-respect and dignity (1 Corinthians 10:7, Galatians 5:22, Titus 2:6-8).
- **Fasting** - We must observe and respect all church fasts. We must fast and encourage others to fast. It is inappropriate to make non-fasting food available to others or to encourage others to eat non-fasting food during fasting periods (Matthew 4:2).
- **Come Early to Church** - We must make every effort to come early to church on Sunday and be at church no later than 9:30 am (Mark 1:35).
- **The Tongue** - We must be soft-spoken, not yell or talk with a loud voice, even in fun. Servants should learn to speak in a reasonable and loving tone at all times. We must not use improper or harsh language, be argumentative with others, or be openly critical of others and belittling others (1 Timothy 6:3-5). We should try and discuss problems with others privately in a constructive manner. Jesus tells us in Matthew 12:36-37 that we must answer for every idle word we have spoken. He says, “I tell you on the day of judgment, men will render account for every careless word they utter. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37). Also see James 3:1-18.

- **Television** - We must not watch shows of immoral or sexual content, shows that have violence and use inappropriate language (2 Timothy 2:22).
- **Bad Company** - We should not maintain company and fellowship with those who are unbelievers, those against God and Christianity, and those against the Church. St. Paul says, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14).
- **Humility** - Humility is the basis and rock of service. A humble servant is an obedient servant who loves God and his fellow man, respects and honors the role and responsibility of a servant without questions or quarrels (2 Timothy 2:24-26). St. Paul says, “Do not be wise in your own opinion” (Romans 12:16).

Service and Ministry

1 Introduction

- Service is a call to unite with God and serve as spirits that God has united to deliver the Word to His people. “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14).
- Service does not depend on our ability or knowledge or talents, but it is the power of the Holy Spirit, which will fill us and put wisdom and words in our mouths, which has the ability to change hearts.
- Service is being an ambassador for Christ in every place and in every situation. “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).
- Service is not teaching or acting at the church or Sunday school, but rather living by the Bible - the word of God.
- We must take heed (that is, pay attention) of ourselves before serving others. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16).
 - How can we deliver the Word of God when we do not possess it?
 - How we can ask others to follow His commandments when we do not do the same?
- Service is being with God and for God all the time. It is being with the real source of life, peace, and joy, and having the feeling of His work and effect every day in our life. It is a real the blessing and reward in our life. “So He said to them, ”Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:29-30).
- God will bless any effort or time that we give for our service even though it may be very little.

- If we serve, then service must be a top priority in our life. We must give with all of our heart, without any limits. If we live according to the world, our priorities will be very different. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

Example: Saint Paul

- Through the Holy Spirit, Saint Paul spread Christianity all over the world with faith and became the greatest missionary who ever lived.
- He traveled and reached everybody in order to deliver the Word without limits, home or family.
- He had “in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths often” (2 Corinthians 11:23).
- He was the one who “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep” (2 Corinthians 11:24-25).

2 Importance of Service

1. **Christ Himself was a servant** - “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).
 - If He Himself came to serve, shouldn’t we?
 - We serve to glorify Christ.
2. **The Disciples served** - “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” (Acts 6:3-4).
3. **We are all called to service** - “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

4. **God is pleased and remembers our service** - “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Hebrews 6:10).

5. **Service is not supremacy or authority, but humility and labor** -

- When Saint Augustine prayed for his people, he said, “I ask you O Lord, on behalf of your servants, my lords...”
- Service is labor to the last breath: “Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).
- Service is feeling everything that those whom you serve feel: “Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” (2 Corinthians 11:28-30).

References

1. H.H. Pope Shenouda III “The Spiritual Servant and Spiritual Service.”

The Importance of Being a Good Role Model

1. **Ambassadors for Christ** - St. Paul calls on us to be “ambassadors for Christ.” In 2 Corinthians 5:20, we read, “Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” This ambassadorship is a very important part of being a good role model. We have to be representatives of Christ in our service.

Related to our ambassadorship is the great verse in 1 Corinthians 10:23, where St. Paul says, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful; all things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify.” This is a great verse for a servant to really meditate on. We have to be conscious of our visible position as role models, and as a result, we have to be careful in our actions, decisions, and way of life, even though they may not result in sin. If we do not watch ourselves closely, we can become stumbling blocks to the spiritual lives of others. St. Paul sums this up well in 1 Corinthians 8:9, (and also in 1 Corinthians 8:10-13) where he says, “But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.”

At the same time, we cannot be modern day pharisees in our service and we must serve everyone, regardless of their spiritual level. St. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, where he says, for example, in verse 20, “and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.”

2. **Orthodox Heritage** - St. Paul talks about preserving our heritage in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, where he says, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” Preserving our Coptic Orthodox heritage is a very important part of being a good role model. It is not enough just to be a “nice” person. We have to uphold and maintain our Coptic Orthodox traditions, without change. St. Paul says in Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” There are two main components that make up the Coptic heritage: i) Spiritual, ii) Cultural. Our spiritual heritage is focused upon worship. In particular, spiritual heritage concerns our faith, the Divine Liturgy, church history, early Church Fathers (such as the Desert Fathers of Egypt), Coptic hymns and songs, Coptic art, and relationships. Cultural heritage

includes things such as social gatherings, friendships, Egyptian food, etc... Preservation of faith involves more than believing that Jesus is the Son of God. It also involves the preservation of the Sacraments, preservation of the Divine Liturgy, the history and writings of the early Church Fathers, preservation of the Lord's feasts and fasts, and other feasts and fasts of the Coptic Orthodox church. Thus, in summary, part of being a good role model involves having *deep Coptic Orthodox* roots in our service.

3. **Leadership** - The church is always in need of good leadership through good role models. A servant, by definition, has been put in a leadership role in the church, and thus we must respect and honor this role by being a good role model. St. Paul talks about this in 1 Timothy 3, where he talks about qualifications of leaders in the church. In 1 Timothy 3:8, St. Paul says, "likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Jesus Christ."

4. **The Watchful Eye** - The Sunday School kids watch and imitate every single move of the elders and Sunday School servants. Thus, we must be aware of this and make an extra effort in being good role models. We want to be the kind of role models that can say to others, "imitate me." St. Paul mentions this in 1 Corinthians 4:16, where he says, "Therefore I urge you, imitate me." Also in St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, he talks about the consequences of not progressing in our spiritual life, and he says, in Hebrews 6:12 "that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." And in Hebrews 13:7 he says, "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct."

The Life of Thanksgiving

- Thanksgiving is a way of life. He who lives the life of thanksgiving is a noble person, acknowledges goodness and *never* forgets the goodness and love of God at all times.
- As servants, this must be our way of life. The servant who does not live a life of thanksgiving reflects that life in whom he serves. In this case, we should not then ask the question, “why don’t the Sunday School kids appreciate anything we do?” Do we live a life of thanksgiving and pass on this way of life to whom we serve?
- Thanksgiving is a critical aspect of our spiritual life. Jesus tells us in the Bible to be thankful. Recall when Jesus cleansed the ten lepers in Luke 17:15-18. Only one of the ten returned to thank Jesus, and Jesus said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?”
- The life of thanksgiving is not thanking God for a specific event, an occasion, or a gift, but rather it is a life of thanking God in all things and in all circumstances, *always*. As Saint Paul said, “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20). Also, Saint Paul says, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
- This is why the Prayer of Thanksgiving in the Coptic Church precedes all prayers. It is the first prayer in each hour of the Agpeya. It is the first prayer in the Matins, Vespers, and the Divine Liturgy. It is even the first prayer at funerals. We give thanks to God at all times of the day. As David the Psalmist says, “At midnight I will rise and give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments” (Psalm 119:62).
- We thank God for all things because everything that God does is good, and this is why we call God “beneficent” in the Thanksgiving Prayer. Saint Paul says, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28).
- God does not do except good, and the person who believes this can truly understand Saint Paul’s words, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28).

- An example of this is Joseph of the Old Testament. Joseph's brothers were evil and sold him as a slave. But God changed that evil into good and Joseph was made governor of the land in Egypt. He was the second in the Kingdom and his stay in Egypt was to preserve life. He told his brothers, "you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, ... to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

Levels of Thanksgiving

- The lowest level of thanksgiving is giving thanks to God for miracles, gifts, pleasures, worldly success, riches, and easiness of life. Sometimes, however, we do not even thank God for these things.
- There is a higher level of thanksgiving. We should thank God for the little and simple things in life as well, such as life itself, recovery from a cold, good health, our Christian roots, etc... These things are apparent and visible but quite often taken for granted.
- We should also give thanks for the hidden or unseen things in life. We should give thanks for the potential calamities that God has prevented from happening, God's care for us, and His mercy and compassion for us.
- The highest level of thanksgiving is to give thanks for our tribulations. We should thank God in the midst of difficult times and troubles, and to be content and thankful in times of tribulations. Saint Paul rejoiced in tribulations. We should be thankful that we are worthy to endure tribulations. As we read in Acts 5:41, "... they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name." The saints and the apostles considered all such suffering a blessing that they did not deserve. We also read, "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). Also, "at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God" in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:25). Saint Paul says in Philippians 4:6-7, "Have no anxiety about anything, but by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Virtues Related to Thanksgiving

The life of thanksgiving is deeply tied to many great Christian virtues.

- **Faith** - The person who lives a life of thanksgiving has strong faith. It is impossible to always give thanks to God without having strong faith. We have faith in God that He is the doer of all things, and lover of mankind for all things.
- **Patience** - Man must be patient to see the work of God in their life, and only then can they live a life of thanksgiving. Jesus says, “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).
- **Humility** - The humble person deeply feels the goodness of God and never feels he deserves what God has given him, and thus a life of thanksgiving is a natural response for the humble person. On the contrary, the proud person feels he deserves more than what he has and finds it very difficult to be thankful. An example of this is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14).
- **Contentment** - The thankful person is always content in their life, living life with joy in their heart, never complaining or grumbling. Saint Paul said, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Philippians 4:11).
- **Submission to God’s will** - The life of thanksgiving requires and results in a full and unconditional submission to God’s will in our life. A good example of this is Jonah in the whale when he said, “But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving” (Jonah 3:9).
- **God-centeredness** - Very often, there are those who have worldly or materially objectives, and become sad if they are not reached, and cannot thank God amidst his adherence to these objectives. But the spiritual person has only one objective: God. Therefore, it does not worry him if the world prospered or elapsed. He takes no interest in its vanishing objects, and does not feel sorry for missing its pleasures. In his contentment with God, he feels great joy for which he gives thanks to God.

Reasons for Not Giving Thanks

- **We do not know what is good for us** - We may think we know what is good for us, but in reality it is not. God is the only person who knows what is good for us, and we must trust Him and have faith in this fact. Saint Mary and Joseph did not complain when the angel told them to take the Christ child to Egypt.
- **We do not look ahead** - When we are unthankful, we tend to be unthankful regarding our current state (or the past) and we are unable to look ahead and have faith that God is preparing something better for us. Unfortunately, we often do not give thanks unless we see results first. Examples of giving thanks by looking ahead include the healing of the man born blind. Even the disciples thought that the blind man's condition was due to sin, and they ignorantly said, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" They were affected by wrong thoughts which were transferred from the pagan world. The Lord Jesus put before them His divine plan which deserves every thanksgiving, as He said to them, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but the works of God should be revealed in him" (John 9:3). Had it not been for his blindness from birth, this great miracle could not have happened to him, which resulted in his belief in God, worshiping and defending Him. And so, he entered history and the works of God were revealed in him, and were the cause for many to believe. This is something for which we thank God. Another example is the death of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha (John 11:1-45). Mary said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32). The raising of Lazarus was for the glory of God, as Jesus said, "... for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). Other examples include the famine in Egypt during Joseph's time and the life of Moses the prophet. Looking ahead requires faith, and the unthankful person lacks faith.
- **We do not remember the good things God has done for us** - The unthankful person always forgets the good things of the past, and does not meditate on the good things that God has given them or how God brought them out of troubles or hard times of the past. The unthankful person can only focus on their current condition in which they are consumed. David the Psalmist says, "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" (Psalm 103:1-2).

- **Arrogance and conceit** - We do not give thanks because we give credit to ourselves and our personal abilities for the things that God has done for us.
- **We remember our tribulations more than the good things we have** - The unthankful person always focuses on the negative, and only sees their hardships, whether in the present or in the past. Saint Paul tells us that we must not dwell on the negative past, as he says about his own life, “But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Philippians 3:13). Also, Jesus says, “No one, having put his hand on the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).
- **Lack of contentment** - The person who is discontent is never satisfied with whatever the Lord gives him, whereas the thankful person is content with whatever little he has. Lack of contentment often arises from greed and selfishness. Recall Philippians 4:11.
- **Grumbling** - A person who is always complaining and grumbling can never be thankful. For some, grumbling can become a psychological disease. He always grumbles, protests and complains, nothing appeals to him, nothing pleases him and consequently, of course, he is unthankful. It is a spiritual, psychological and social disease which requires treatment.
- **Selfishness** - The person who is self-centered and always thinking about how to satisfy themselves with various worldly matters and pleasures cannot live a life of thanksgiving.
- **Desire for worldly possessions** - Those whose goals are the things of this world: money, pleasure, power, prestige, and material possessions, can never be satisfied or live a life of thanksgiving. Once they lose any of their worldly possessions, even temporarily, they become distraught and bitter.
- **Insisting on our will rather than God’s will** - The person who does not submit his life to God and insists on his will rather than God’s, will always be disappointed in life and cannot be thankful.
- **We forget our sins** - The unthankful person does not spend time thinking about his sins. If we remember our sins and God’s great mercy, it becomes so much easier to be thankful.
- **We fail to see the blessings in suffering** - When we suffer or go through difficult times, our typical response is to be bitter and unthankful, failing to see the glory and blessing in

suffering. Recall Philipinas 1:29 and Romans 8:17. In Romans, 8:17, we read, “If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

- **We take too many things for granted** - We often do not give thanks because we take far too many things for granted like our health, food, clothing, money, work, etc... We feel that these are normal things to have in life in which there is no need to give thanks.

What to Thank God For

- **Thank God for He created us out of the dust of the ground** - David the Psalmist says, “Behold children are a heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3).
- **Thank God for the nature around us** - God created man on the sixth day after He created the nature to surround and comfort man.
- **Thank God for the talents He gives us** - Wisdom and knowledge were placed before healing and miracles (1 Corinthians 12:8-10).
- **Thank God for being born in the Christian faith** - Many people search and toil for Christianity but cannot find it.
- **Thank God for life** - We thank God for life in the Thanksgiving Prayer when we say “He brought us to this hour.” We should thank God for the time He gives us on earth to repent and to “lay up our treasure in heaven” (Matthew 6:20)
- **Thank God for the religious environment we were brought up in** - The Coptic Church is based on the early Church and the teachings are those of the apostles. We should thank God that we are raised in the straight and right faith.
- **Thank God because He did not deal with us according to our sins** - This is what David the Prophet said in Psalm 103 which begins, “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. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy... He has not dealt with us according to our sins nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west. So far has he removed our transgressions from us; as the father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows

our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” (Psalm 103:8-14). This is why we say in the liturgy “according to your mercy O Lord, and not according to our sins.” God’s mercy exceeds human comprehension, and we must thank Him for His mercy for us.

- **Thank God for His Loving kindness and care** - How many times has God rescued us in times of trouble? How many times has He forgiven us for our sins? How many times has He given us grace in the eyes of others?
- **Thank God for good health** - We take our good health for granted and never take time to thank God for it.
- **Thank God for sickness** - Sickness in itself is not bad. Poor Lazarus was full of sores and dogs were licking his sores. But, all this was not bad in itself and did not separate him from God, but on the contrary it was for his own good. When he was taken to Abraham’s bosom, it was said that, in his lifetime he received evil things; but now he is comforted (Luke 16:25). St Basil the great said, “you do not know what is good for you: health or sickness.” The Apostle St. Paul was given a thorn in the flesh for spiritual benefit, “Lest he should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations. He pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from him” (2 Corinthians 12:8). But God answered his prayer by saying to him, “My grace is sufficient for you.” Naturally, in our human weakness, we seek good health but we do not know what is beneficial to us. Perhaps sickness makes us weary, but it helps us enter the kingdom of Heaven.
- **Thank God because He has protected, assisted, preserved, accepted us, had compassion on us, supported us and brought us till this hour** - This is what the church teaches us in the Prayer of Thanksgiving, which we repeat many times in the Prayers of the Hours (Agpeya) every day and each contemplation.
- **Thank God for the good you see and the good you cannot see** - We thank him for the good we observe by sight, and the good we see by faith. God who calls us to do good in secret, and He sees what we do in secret, will reward us openly (Matthew 6:4-6). He also does many good things in secret for us in which we must thank Him openly. Many of the good things we now enjoy have been prepared for us by God many, many, years ago, and we did not know at the time that He was planning such things.
- **Thank God for the grace working in us** - Grace is among the principal matters which we must put at the top of our list of thanksgiving. The Apostle Saint Paul says, “But by

the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace towards me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me! (1 Corinthians 15:10). We then thank Him for the communion of the Holy Spirit in our lives, which is a part of the blessing given to us. We thank Him because He made us temples of His Holy Spirit, as the Apostle said, “Do you know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

- **Thank God for the great redemption He offered to us** - There is something more important than all the previous things, for which we ought to give thanks all day and night. It is the great redemption offered to us on the cross, and without it, we all would have perished. No one could have been saved from the sentence of death without the incarnation of the Son, His crucifixion, His death, and His Resurrection.
- **Thank God for giving us the ability to know Him** - In the prayers of the Liturgy of Saint Gregory, the priest says, “You gave me your knowledge and You sent me the law for support.” Do we thank Him for the good news in the Gospel, the Holy Bible, His work, and His holy attributes?
- **Thank God for His promises to us** - We thank Him for the eternal comfort He is preparing for us in the heavenly Jerusalem. “The tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people (Revelation 21:3). He promised us saying, ... “I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). He also promised us with what “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).
- **Thank God because He called us His children and His friends** - St John the beloved said, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1). He taught us to pray and say, “Our Father in heaven...” (Matthew 6:9). Jesus also said, “No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends” (John 15:15). He called us His own, and it was said, “having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

The Life of Humility

- Humility is the foundation and basis of the Christian life. We can never progress spiritually without first being humble.
- Humility is the key virtue and foundation in any service. No service can be blessed or successful without humility. Service always fails due to lack of humility. We often see Sunday School service, large church projects, and other church services fail due to lack of humility.
- Humility is the theme of the Nativity fast. We fast during this period so that we can humble and prepare our hearts to receive Christ in our life. All of the events surrounding the Nativity had elements of humility.
 - The Virgin Mary, a poor humble servant, was chosen to be the Mother of God.
 - Saint Mary humbly accepts the annunciation from Archangel Gabriel (Gospel reading for 2nd week of Kiahk).
 - Saint Mary humbly visits her cousin Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist (Gospel reading for 3rd week of Kiahk).
 - Elizabeth humbly exalts Saint Mary and calls her the Mother of God. Elizabeth says, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:42-43).
 - Mary rode on a donkey to Bethlehem when she was 9 months pregnant to give birth to Jesus.
 - Jesus was born in a manger (feeding trough for animals), in a barn with farm animals.
 - Saint Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus travel to Egypt on a donkey to avoid Herod.
- Humility is the only virtue where Jesus said, “Learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). Jesus never said “Learn from Me” about anything else except for the virtue of humility.
- A humble person feels that he owns nothing, but rather God owns everything, and it is God who has given him everything. Saint Paul said, “And you are Christ’s and Christ is

God's" (1 Corinthians 3:23). This is why a humble person finds it easy to give to others and to give tithes, because he feels that what he is giving is not his, but God's.

- A humble person feels that he can do nothing without God, and all his talents and accomplishments are not his, but God's. The humble person feels that God is always in control of everything. This way of life is what prevents a person from becoming arrogant and feeling self-sufficient, and feeling that they are in control of their life and their surroundings.
- The humble person is never selfish and never thinking about himself or his needs, but rather the needs of others. Saint Paul says, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also the interest of others" (Philippians 2:3-4). Thus, the humble person always puts himself last in everything.
- The humble person never seeks praise or recognition. Jesus says, "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" (Matthew 6:2). We often hear people say, "I am nothing", or "I am worthless". They do not say these things out of humility but rather to get praise. This type of person is not humble but rather self-centered.
- We often see servants avoiding responsibility and using humility as the excuse, when laziness and indifference is the real reason for avoiding responsibility. The humble person does not show off their talents nor do they flaunt them, but when asked to serve with their talents, they immediately respond and give account of their work. A humble person does not hide his talents when his talents are sought for service to God. Recall the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).
- The humble servants always says, "Here I am" when called to serve. The humble servant never questions or examines the service that they are called to do. Recall what Samuel said when God called him to serve, "that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, 'Here I am'" (1 Samuel 3:4).
- The humble person is never self-confident, but rather confident in Christ. Self-confidence is a very worldly concept. The Bible never tells us to be self-confident in anything, but rather confident in Christ. Saint Paul says, "In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 4:2).

- The humble person never speaks too much and knows when to be silent and when to speak. Silence is a great fruit of humility. God gives the humble person wisdom to know when to speak and when to stay silent. People who speak too much are destined to make mistakes with their speech and often make regrettable and hurtful comments. Jesus knew when to respond to Pilate and when to stay silent. We read, “Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus said to him, “It is as you say.” And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly” (Matthew 27:11-14).
- The humble person is always obedient, but the obedient person is not necessarily humble.
- The humble person is always thankful and full of joy. The humble person is not a complainer, grumbler, or gossip.
- The humble person is patient and slow to anger.
- The humble person has a pure heart and always seeks the best for others.
- The humble person is always a peacemaker and always strives for unity. This is a very important aspect in the humble person with respect to service. Jesus said in the beatitudes, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). The humble servant always strives to be in “one accord” with all other servants in their service. We read in Acts about the disciples that “That these all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14), and on the day of Pentecost, we read “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1), and “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:46). Saint Paul says “fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:2).
- Chapter 2 of Philippians is a great chapter on humility, and Philippians 2:5-11 are great verses on the humility of the incarnation of Christ. Philippians 2:5-11 was a song in the Early Church and that’s why this passage is often called the Incarnation Song of the Apostle Paul. Saint Paul says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11).

- Out of humility, all other Christian virtues are borne, including love, patience, self-control, perseverance, simplicity of heart, slow to anger, purity, and respect for others. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 totally emanates from the virtue of humility. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

The Life of Obedience

- Obedience is the fourth step among Climacus's thirty steps in his book *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Obedience is what he calls one of the "fundamental virtues." Thus, obedience is a very basic virtue in our spiritual life.
- Obedience to God involves the complete and unconditional surrender and submission to God's will in everything in our life. Submission to God's will is the most critical part of service.
- Obedience is the key to God's heart.
- All of the great events that happened to people in the Bible were the direct result of obedience to God.
 - Abraham's obedience to God in the offering of Isaac led to Abraham as being the father of the patriarchs, and God greatly blessed Abraham and said to him, "blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore" (Genesis 22:17).
 - Jonah's eventual obedience to God led to the repentance of the Ninevites.
 - Daniel's obedience to God while in captivity in Babylon made him ruler of the province of Babylon and he glorified God through the proclamation of king Darius.
 - Job's obedience to God during his calamity and suffering.
 - Samuel was obedient when God called him to be a prophet to His people. When the Lord called Samuel, Samuel answered "Here I am" (1 Samuel 3:4).
 - Saint Mary's obedience to the annunciation by Archangel Gabriel.
 - Saint Paul calls on Philemon to be obedient and to take Onesimus back. "Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will even do more than what I say." (Philemon 21).
 - Jesus's obedience to God the Father led to our salvation. Jesus was obedient to the point of death. Saint Paul says in *Philippians 2:8*, "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

- Disobedience to God results in storms, tribulations, and sin in our life.
 - Adam and Eve disobeyed God when they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and this led to their dismissal from the Garden of Eden. As a result of their disobedience, God promised them hardships in their life on earth.
 - The disobedience of Cain led to the murder of Abel. The Lord warned Cain of his disobedience when He told him, “And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door” (Genesis 4:7).
 - The disobedience of Abraham led to Hagar conceiving Ishmael. Nothing good came from the descendants of Ishmael.
 - The initial disobedience of Jonah led to a storm at sea, which is symbolic of storms in our life, and it also led Jonah “down to the pit” as he describes in Jonah Chapter 2.
 - The disobedience of Saul led God to reject Saul and take away His Spirit from him and made Saul lose his kingdom. Saul did not obey God when God told him to completely destroy the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15).
 - The disobedience of David led David to act like a crazy man in front of Achish the king of Gath. As we read, “So he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard” (1 Samuel 21:13).

- There are two types of obedience:
 - **conditional obedience** - this is a worldly obedience in which we obey in order to gain worldly things or in order not to lose worldly things.
 - **unconditional obedience** - this is a spiritual obedience that is done out of love and humility towards all. It is an obedience that is done out of spiritual desire with no rewards or losses at stake.

- Obedience is a way of life for the servant. It is a natural response for someone who loves God. Saint John Climacus says, “Obedience is a total renunciation of our own life, and it shows up clearly in the way we act.”

- The word “servant” itself implies that we are to be obedient, since a servant is always obedient to his master. We are not teachers, but servants. The name servant stresses the importance of the life of obedience.
- The spiritual person strives to live the life of obedience and finds joy, comfort, and spiritual growth in it.
- The person who is humble is also obedient, for genuine humility must lead to obedience. However, when we lack humility, we also lack obedience.
- The obedient person, however, is not necessarily humble, since the person may be obedient out of pressure and fear of losing worldly possessions, positions, or power, or it may be obedience out of desire for worldly gain.
- How do we live the life of obedience and who should we obey?
 - We must first learn to obey God in everything.
 - We must be obedient in reading the Bible, and read it with a mind that yearns to understand and not with a mind that examines our doubts. An obedient person puts the Bible above himself.
 - We must obey the church hierarchy and church order. This includes the rites and traditions of the church, the church clergy, and the writings of the church fathers.
 - We must be obedient to our superiors and authorities, such as our supervisors in our work, our parents, and our government.
 - We must be obedient to our elders. St. Peter talks about being submissive in 1 Peter 5:5-6, when he says, “Likewise, you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”
 - We must be obedient to our peers and fellow servants.
 - We must be obedient at home to parents and spouses. Saint Paul says in Ephesians 6:1, “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”
 - We must be obedient to those whom we have authority over. This is the highest spiritual level of obedience: when we seek to obey and submit to those whom we have authority over.

- Thus, we see that the Christian life of obedience has four stages:
 - obedience to divine authority (obedience to God, the Bible, and the Church)
 - obedience to worldly authorities (obedience to people who have authority over us in the world)
 - obedience to peers and fellow servants.
 - obedience to those whom we have authority over.

- Thus, the life of obedience touches every part of our daily life, and the truly obedient person enjoys this type of life. St. John (1 John 5:1-5) talks about the importance of obedience by faith, and links obedience to keeping the commandments.

- Like the virtue of humility, the obedient person always puts others before himself. Saint Paul says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also the interest of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

- The obedient person is a peacemaker, and Jesus calls peacemakers “sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

- Pride, conceit, and arrogance are the main causes of disobedience. We annihilate pride, conceit, and arrogance in our life by striving for the life of obedience. Obedience is a great spiritual exercise and remedy for those who struggle with pride, conceit, and arrogance. Recall Lucifer in Isaiah, Chapter 14. It was pride that led to his disobedience to God.

- Like humility, obedience demands silence from the person who is to obey. The virtues humility and obedience are very closely intertwined.

- The obedient person always knows and respects the limits of his authority. He never goes beyond the limits of his authority in his dealings with people and in making decisions and judgments.

- Worldly (conditional) obedience is the obedience to superiors for the purposes of worldly gain or to avoid worldly loss. This often leads to obedience with resentment and dissatisfaction, whereas spiritual (unconditional) obedience is a way of life towards all people that leads to spiritual gain.

- The world views obedience as a sign of weakness whereas God views obedience as a sign of strength.
- The world views obedience as something that is outdated and finished, whereas God views obedience as the beginning of a relationship with Him.

The Faithful Servant - Part I

- Being faithful in service is the most critical aspect of our service. What does it mean to be faithful in service? We shall define it by the following four aspects of our service life: tradition, holy zeal, honesty, and unity.
- These four aspects are discussed in detail in the Pastoral Epistles. These are St. Paul's Epistles to Timothy (1 and 2 Timothy) and Titus.
- The Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus) are all about service and are a must read for all servants.

1. Tradition

- The faithful servant serves according to the teachings of the Church and the Church Fathers. The servant serves with a deep conviction about the teachings of the Coptic Orthodox Church, and this conviction is lived out and communicated in humility and obedience.
- The servant should be hungry in learning and spreading Orthodoxy, and always searching and researching the sayings and teachings of the Coptic Orthodox Church through reading books by the Coptic Fathers, reading books from the early Church Fathers, listening to Church sermons, reading liturgical books such as the Agpeya or the Divine Liturgy books, etc....
- St. Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:5, "When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also."
- St. Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:10-15, "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love perseverance ... But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them. And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

- In 1 Timothy 6:20-21, St. Paul tells Timothy, “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge - by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.”
- In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, we read, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”

2. Holy Zeal

- We must serve with a holy zeal and a real fire. In order to serve with zeal, we must have fire in our spiritual life.
- We must never feel burdened by service, nor should we ever feel that service is taking too much of our time. We must learn to love to serve God. Thus, we must love to serve because we love God.
- A zealous person is never lukewarm or indifferent in their service. Lukewarmness is a very dangerous condition in service. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus warns us about being lukewarm in our service. In Revelation 3:14-22, we read about the Laodicean Church, which was a lukewarm church. Jesus gives the Laodicean Church the harshest judgment and tells them, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I 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” (Revelation 3:15-16).
- Jesus also says to the Laodiceans, “Therefore be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19).
- Zeal in service is given to us by the Holy Spirit as a result of our close relationship with Jesus Christ. The fire that is within us is the fire of the Holy Spirit being stirred up within.
- We read in 2 Timothy 1:6-7, “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind.”
- St. Paul also tells Timothy, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2).
- “But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5).

- In Titus 2:14, we read, “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”
- In Galatians 4:18, we read, “But it is good to be zealous in good things always, and not only when I am present with you.”
- “For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority” (2 Corinthians 9:2).
- We read about the zeal of Jesus when he overturned the tables in the temple. “And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!” Then His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up” (John 2:17 and Psalm 69:9).
- Saint Paul says, “The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me” (2 Timothy 1:16-17).
- Saint John the Baptist was very zealous in his ministry.
- Simon Peter was a very zealous disciple.
- Simon the zealot was also one of the twelve disciples whose name revealed his zeal in service.

3. **Honesty**

- The faithful servant must be honest in their service, and one who is always telling and seeking the truth.
- The honest servant is honest with their time, their words, their actions, their tithes, and in general, their way of life. They must never twist words or meanings to their own advantage or for their own purpose, or to fit their own meaning. They must seek the truth in reading the Bible and seek truth in all things.
- Saint Paul tells Timothy, “But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some” (2 Timothy 2:16-18).

- The honest servant uses the gifts and talents that God has given him to serve God. Recall the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:15-30). The two servants who were given 5 and 2 talents were honest and faithful in their service, and the servant who was given one talent was not.
- The honest servant is never lazy in serving God and always utilizes their talents to the fullest in serving God. The honest servant always does his absolute best in serving God and strives for perfection in their service. Such effort in service is also a sign of spiritual zeal. Jesus says, “Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).
- The honest servant is not hypocritical in their service. Saint Paul warns of this in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power”
- “Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith” (2 Timothy 3:8).

4. Unity

- The faithful servant is one who always strives for unity and harmony in their service, and in their relationships with others.
- Spiritual unity is a major component of service. Jesus met with his disciples often in the Upper Room. Also, we read in Acts 1:14, “They continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” This is a key verse for unity in service.
- Also, in Acts 2:1, we read, “When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were with one accord in one place.” These two verses serve as model verses for unity in our service.
- The desire for unity comes when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, as were the disciples before and after Pentecost. Thus, we become united in our service when our spiritual life is alive and inflamed by the Holy Spirit.
- Saint Paul also says “fulfill my joy in being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit,

but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:2-3). Saint Paul tells us here that unity in service requires humility and obedience.

- The servant who strives for unity is also a peacemaker. Peacemakers are mentioned in the beatitudes, where Jesus says, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).
- Thus, the servant who stirs up divisions, quarrels, arguments, or babbles things without knowing their meaning (“idle babblings”), is one who is not seeking unity in service.
- Indeed, Saint Paul says, “But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:23-26).

Spiritual Warfare in the Life of a Servant

- Satan fights everyone and those are are serving and growing in grace, he fights them all the more. St. Peter says, “... your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). He always always wandering around “to and fro” to catch his prey.
- It is especially critical for a servant to fight off the devil to be fruitful in their service. The devil tries to wear the servant down using his many diabolic weapons, for his main goal is for us to not serve and become failures at service.
- Here are some of the devils weapons in our service:

1. Cares, Worries, Affairs of this World, and People

- When a person gets caught up in the things of this world, their worldly cares increase and their spiritual desires decrease. Things of the world include careers, vacations, making money, buying and selling, cleaning, fixing, cooking, busy work, and material possessions.
- The devil increases our worldly desires by always giving us convincing excuses to prefer the things of the things of this world over the will of God, that is service. The devil then convinces us that we are far too busy to serve.
- Once a person starts leaning toward the things of this world, they lost their desire, energy, and zeal for service.
- Excuses from the devil often come in the form of people. People often get in the way of our service: our spouse, our kids, our friends, or our relatives.
- Jesus says “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly” (Luke 21:34).

2. Pleasures

- Entertainment, hobbies, socializing, vacations or “wanting a better and more exciting life” may hinder us from serving God. Here the temptations include wanting to visit or talk with relatives, go to the beach, going out for dinner, watching movies, reading books etc...
- The Scriptures tell us of Demas. He was a follower of Paul. But then Satan tempted him with the pleasures of this world. It is written “for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica” (2 Timothy 4:10).
- We also read “For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:2-4).
- A great enemy of Christianity is the “cult of comfortableness.” Beware. Following Jesus may not be the path of the least resistance, but it is the one that leads to eternal life.

3. Problems and Hardships in Life

- Sometimes when we face hardships in life, at home, at work, or at church, the devil penetrates our minds and tries to use these problems as stumbling blocks in our service.
- Even the smallest of problems that devil tries to magnify to get in the way of our service.
- Sickness often is a stumbling block to service.
- Moses said to the Israelites, “and evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands” (Deuteronomy 31:29).

4. Lusts

- Sometimes issues such as the desire for marriage or sexual desires prevent a person from service. Jesus said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

- Impure thoughts and an impure way of life is a major barrier to service. Sexually provocative music, videos, television, language or clothing.

5. Riches

- The desire for a better job.
- The desire for more money.
- The desire for more possessions.
- Jesus told the rich young man, “sell what you have and give it to the poor” (Matthew 19:21).
- Matthew 6:19-21.
- Philippians 3:8.

6. Separation from God’s People

- Satan pulls us from service by pulling us from church.
- Satan pulls us from service by encouraging us to mingle and make friends with the wrong crowd.

Solutions

- Encouragement. “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11).
- A Genuine concern (Philippians 2:1-4)
- Prayer (Acts 1:14, Acts 1:24-25)
- Spiritual unity and being of one accord (Acts 1:14, Acts 2:1)
- Victory in Christ
 - The devil tempted Christ and Christ defeated him, and thus I also can defeat the devil through Christ.
 - Having entered such diabolic wars and knowing that my fellow man also suffers, I can love and forgive him/her.

- Diabolic wars are for my own good. I am allowed to fight the devil that I may be humbled (Job 5:17, Hebrews 12:11).

Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home - Part I

- A strong Christian home is the foundation of effective, genuine, and spiritual service.
- We shall talk about three aspects of the Orthodox Christian Home: our personal spiritual life, our relationship with our spouse, and our relationship with our children.
- Our true relationship with Jesus shows in the way we act at home. It is easy to show that we love Jesus in church, school, work, or in the world in general, but the hardest of all is to show or have love for Jesus at home.
- We praise Him, we pray to Him, we worship Him, we build churches for Him, but we often fail to bring Him home. We fail to bring home His love, His forgiveness, His patience, and His understanding.
- We can never be effective servants if we do not have a deep and personal relationship with Jesus at home. We must have our own “church” at home to be holy and spiritual servants.
- How do we bring Jesus into our home in our personal spiritual life?
 1. **Prayer** - We must have a regular prayer life at home, both a personal prayer life, and a prayer life with our family. Jesus says, “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38). We should pray before we go to sleep, pray in the car on the way to work or school, and try and pray in the morning after we wake up.
 2. **Reading the Bible** - We must read the Bible on a regular basis at home, both alone and with our family. It need not be long, 10-20 minutes, with time for meditation and understanding. We should try and read passages in the Bible that address particular situations in our life, such as tribulation, discontent, lack of faith, anger, etc.... St. Paul tells Timothy, “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

3. **Ministering to others at home** - Serving the Lord through our home brings us closer to Jesus. Making a phone call to one in need, inviting and ministering to the lonely and those in distress, and making our home open to all. “Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home” (John 19:27). St. Paul says, “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time” (Colossians 4:5).
 4. **Purity of Heart and Purity of Life** - Part of the Christian home is to live a pure life, free from sinful and worldly pleasures, lusts, gossip, bad company, evil words and thoughts, pride, and self-righteousness. We must be careful what TV shows we watch, what music we listen to, what words we say, what we say on the phone, and what kinds of conversations we have. Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).
 5. **Do not be lazy** - Laziness leads to a wandering mind which often leads to sin, and at the very least, a waste of time. We should try and make good use of our time at home by reading, praying, working, ministering, and relaxing, but we should avoid wasting time. St. Paul says, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15).
 6. **Strive for Orthodoxy** - The Orthodox servant always wants to know more about Orthodoxy. At home, we should read Orthodox books, meditate on the liturgy, listen to tapes of sermons, songs, or hymns. St. Paul says “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). St. Paul tells Timothy, “When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (1 Timothy 1:5).
 7. **Make the Home Look Holy** - Having Icons and pictures of Jesus, St. Mary, and other saints hung on the walls at home creates a spiritual atmosphere and encourages holiness at home. We receive blessings from these Icons.
- The servant who does not have a strong spiritual life at home will
 - find service and church a burden in their life.
 - When they come to church, they will not enjoy praying or serving.

- When they serve in Sunday School, they will often feel insecure and uncomfortable because they are living a life away from God and a life of hypocrisy.
 - They feel naked and exposed like Adam and Eve did after their sin.
 - They will not serve with spiritual power and authority that is given by the Holy Spirit. They have a “form of godliness but deny its power” (2 Timothy 3:5).
 - They will be ineffective in their service, unable to be a good role model and unable to draw the kids to Christ.
- When a servant has a strong Orthodox spiritual life at home
 - they will serve with a convincing and effective spiritual power from the Holy Spirit. Examples include St. Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, and the disciples in the Book of Acts after Pentecost.
 - Their zeal and love of Christ will shine in their service and they will have a spiritual impact on whom they serve as well as others. They will draw people to Christ and they will be a reflection of Christ. As St. Paul says, “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home - Part II

- We want to talk about the second aspect of the Orthodox Christian Home: our relationship with our spouse.
- The ultimate test of our relationship with God is most closely tied with our relationship with our spouse: how a husband treats his wife and how a wife treats here husband is a great sign of their relationship with God.
- A strong Christian relationship with our spouse has the most influence on our spiritual life and has the biggest impact on our success, happiness in life, and our service.
- Many things go wrong in life when our relationship with our spouse is not in the right place, and not on solid spiritual ground: we lose our zeal and enthusiasm for life, our service life gets greatly affected, we lose our ambitions, our work gets affected, our relationships get affected, we lose self-esteem, we can alienate ourselves, and we lose security.
- A strong Christian marriage with a strong spiritual foundation often leads to a very successful service that is guided and guarded by the Holy Spirit, a service that bears fruits, a service that represents an ambassadorship to Jesus Christ.
- How do we build a strong Christian home with our spouse?
 - **Love One another** - Love, of course, is the key ingredient that keeps a marriage spiritually strong. The love that we have for our spouse is a direct reflection of the love we have for God. A person who deeply loves God will deeply love their spouse. St. Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). “So husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife, loves himself” (Ephesians 5:28).
 - **Treat Each Other as King and Queen** - God considers husband and wife as king and queen, respectively, of creation. As we read in Hebrews “You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of your hands” (Hebrews 2:7-8). The act of crowning that takes place during the wedding ceremony shows that the bride and groom are very important people in God’s eyes. As His living and redeemed images, they are crowned king and queen of the universe, reflecting the reality of God.

- **The Crowns of Martyrdom** - The marriage crowns in the Orthodox wedding ceremony have been compared to the crowns of martyrdom since every true marriage involves immeasurable self-sacrifice on both sides. Some rules for constructive quarreling are
 1. Keep little things little - don't make mountains out of molehills.
 2. Keep it a discussion - a difference of opinion need not turn into an argument.
 3. Keep your tongue and temper - we always hurt the one we love because we know his or her weakness.
 4. Keep it fair - reveal your feelings honestly. Don't insult or insinuate.
 5. Keep it to yourselves - two are enough for a fight. Don't bring in in-laws, friends, neighbors, children, etc...
 6. Keep it current - don't bring up the past to support your position. Let the past be the past.
 7. Keep talking - the silent treatment is deadly and defeating.
 8. Keep it short - As St. Paul says, "Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26). This means that we should not let any day come to an end without discussing our differences and resolving them through understanding and forgiveness.

- **Jesus must be the center of our marriage** - For any marriage to be successful, Jesus must be in the center. When Jesus is in the center of our marriage, he gives it joy and life. As an example, we consider the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-10). Three things should be pointed out in this miracle. First, when they discovered that they had a problem, that is, they had run out of wine, St. Mary, the mother of God, advised them to take their problem to Jesus, and they did. Secondly, she advised them to do whatever Jesus told them, and they did. And thirdly, they were wise enough to have invited Jesus to their wedding in the first place. Jesus turns the "water" into "wine" in our marriage life when we let Him take control of our marriage.

- **Read the Bible** - A Strong Christian home requires that husband and wife read the Bible together daily or at least on a very regular basis. Reading the Bible or spiritual books together is a key in becoming united spiritually and striving to be on equal spiritual levels. It also sets a great example for children. It is critical in service that husband and wife be on similar spiritual levels, and this should also be a criterion for

marriage. If husband and wife are not on similar spiritual levels, this could greatly affect one's service life and spiritual life.

- **Pray Together** - As in reading the Bible together, husband and wife praying together is key in building a strong Christian home. Husband and wife should pray together daily or at least on a very regular basis. They should pray for their problems and concerns openly, give thanks, and pray for others.
- **The Husband is the Initiator** - St. Paul says “Husbands, love your wives” (Ephesians 5:25). He does not say, “Wives, love your husbands.” The husband initiates the love relationship and the wife responds. God built man as the initiator, the wife as the responder. As he loves her, she will in turn love him. Thus, the husband sets the spiritual tone on the Orthodox Christian home and if things begin to slip spiritually, it is up to the husband to initiate and raise the spiritual level of the home.

To be continued...

Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home - Part III

We want to continue to talk about the second aspect of the Orthodox Christian Home: our relationship with our spouse. In this lesson, we want to focus on **How to love your spouse**.

- **Emotional and Physical Intimacy** - Love must be expressed through emotional and physical intimacy. Emotional intimacy involves telling your spouse that you love them, that you appreciate them, that you find them attractive, that you need them, that you enjoy their presence, that you think they are smart, etc.... Physical intimacy helps develop the oneness that God intended in marriage. St. Paul says, “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).
- **Praise and Appreciation** - True love results in continual praise of our spouse, and praise becomes natural in a loving relationship. We should not find it hard to give praise to our spouse, and praise must be accepted in complete humility. We must praise and show appreciation to our spouse for the work they do at home, their care of the children, their financial responsibilities, their general responsibilities in the marriage, their care of us, and for any good thing they do. Hunger for appreciation is a basic human need, like food, oxygen and sleep. All of us need it because it is a form of love, and without it we are like plants without water - we wither away. We read in Proverbs, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Proverbs 25:11). We should ask ourselves every day: “Have I tried to give my spouse at least one sincere compliment today?”
- **Respect** - Though we may disagree or quarrel with our spouse on many things, we must always treat each other with the utmost respect. St. Paul says, “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). The husband, as initiator, loves his wife, and out of love, comes respect. Respecting your spouse is also critical in the upbringing of children.

Children who grow up in a home where husband and wife respect one another are likely to grow up respecting their parents as well as other people.

- **No Yelling!** - No situation or problem in a house ever requires for a spouse to yell at the other spouse. Part of treating your spouse with respect is to *never* yell at them. Yelling is detrimental to the Christian household. It can greatly damage a marriage and have a negative and lasting effect on the children. Children who are raised in a home of constant yelling often have a lack of spirituality and desire for God, emotional problems, low self-esteem, behavioral problems, as well as academic problems.
- **Tame the Tongue** - If we love our spouse, we will watch our tongue and not say things that are hurtful. St. James the Apostle has a classic discourse on taming the tongue in his Epistle. It is in James 3:1-12. This is the Catholic Epistle reading for the third Sunday of Lent in the Coptic Orthodox Church. St. Basil said once, “The most and multifaceted sin is the one enacted by the tongue.” Ben Franklin said once, “Remember not only to say the right thing at the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.” Now we know why we say that verse in Psalm 141:3 in the Compline prayer of the Agpeya, “Set a watch O Lord about my mouth and a door of enclosure about my lips” (Psalm 141:3). How true that verse is in Proverbs, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21).

Words are our most prized possessions. And they really set us apart from the whole of creation because plants, rocks, and animals cannot speak. Words show us to be made in the image and likeness of God. Through words, we can communicate with God and with each other. And we sing His praises and teach His ways. And this is precisely the reason why the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost appeared in the form of tongues! (Acts 2:3). For it is the office of the tongue to proclaim the Good News and glorify the Almighty. There is a beautiful verse in Psalm 51 (Psalm 50 in the Agpeya) that we read in the beginning of every hour of the Agpeya, “Open Thou my lips O Lord, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise” (Psalm 51:15).

- **Humility** - We must be humble with our spouse, always pointing to their strengths rather than their weaknesses. We should be aware of their weaknesses and try and work through them with patience and humility, but we should not point to and exploit their weaknesses. We should never make them feel that we are better than them in anything. When we are

given praise, we must accept it with the utmost humility, and we should not dwell on it and shrug it off quickly.

- **Patience** - Patience is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). We must be patient with our spouse in all things. We must be patient with their weaknesses, bad habits, faults, etc... We must encourage rather than discourage and uplift instead of bring down. St. James says, "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).
- **Realistic Expectations** - We must not set expectations too high of our spouse. On the contrary, we should try and set expectations low and treat whatever happens after that as a bonus. Don't expect your partner to be perfect, only God is perfect. A perfect wife is one who does not expect a perfect husband and a perfect husband is one who does not expect a perfect wife. Two imperfect people marry in order to help each other grow toward perfection. Marriage helps us know and overcome our faults. Marriage is not a 50-50 proposition. In some areas, we may have to give 80% and get back only 20%, or give 100% and get back 0%. In other areas, our spouse will supply 80% and we give 20% and so on. However, true love never counts the cost. It only gives and gives again.
- **Be Loyal** - Our first loyalty in marriage after God is our spouse. Children, mother, father, etc.. come after our spouse. We must keep our priorities straight in marriage by placing our spouse above all other people. Jesus says, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:5-6).
- **It is More Blessed to give than to Receive** - We must always be in the spirit of giving with our spouse. Jesus says in Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." We must learn to serve our spouse as Jesus served His disciples at the last supper. Our attitude and mindset in marriage should always be one of service and giving.

To be continued ...

Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home - Part IV

In this part, we conclude the second aspect of the Orthodox Christian Home: our relationship with our spouse.

- **Honesty**

- The Christian home is always built around honesty and trust. Husband and wife must be honest and completely truthful with one another about everything.
- There should never be half-truths, deceptions, lies, or information withheld from a spouse.
- If a relationship does not have honesty as one its foundations, then there can never be trust.
- We must always speak the truth to our spouse, but of course, speak it in love. St. Paul says, “but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

- **Do Not Let the Sun Go Down on Your Wrath**

- St. Paul says, “Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26). Husband and wife should never end the day angry at one another. They should do whatever they can to resolve issues at the end of each and every day.
- Letting problems stretch over a period of time hardens ones heart and makes a person grow cold, more bitter, more resentful, and more angry! Evil thoughts continue to occupy ones mind when they are upset with someone.
- So “do not let the sun go down on your wrath” here means that we should not let any day come to an end without discussing our differences and resolving them through understanding and forgiveness.
- Few things are more harmful to a marriage than the accumulation of unresolved differences. Every such difference is like a cement block. After a period of years all those cement blocks will form a wall running through the center of the home. The husband will live on one side and the wife on the other, with no communication

between them. This is what happens indeed when we let the sun go down on our anger.

- Daily forgiveness is a *must* for a marriage in order to have a strong Orthodox Christian home. Forgiveness is one of the fruits of the love of Christ. If we abide in His love, we will always be able to forgive others.

- **Confession and Forgiveness**

- In relation to the above, one who desires to imitate Christ in their life can easily and eagerly forgive others. Such a person is a peacemaker, and Jesus says, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).
- We should never struggle with our spouse in forgiveness. Forgiveness is not based on saying sorry 100 or 1000 times nor is it based on punishment, retribution, or discipline. True forgiveness is based on unconditional love and should be always granted once a simple statement is made acknowledging one’s wrongdoing, that is a confession of one’s mistakes.
- The other side of forgiveness is confession. The one to be forgiven must be able to acknowledge and admit their mistakes in order to be forgiven. Thus, tied with forgiveness, is confession. In order to be forgiven, one must first confess what they have done wrong. It is the admission of being at fault, of accepting ones own mistakes that is usually the beginning of a breakthrough in resolving a problem. This is *not* to say that confession is a pre-condition or requirement for forgiveness. It is not. As noted earlier, we must forgive unconditionally, without confession or anything else, but the person who examines and humbles themselves and admits their faults will be a better Christian and better person for doing so, they will have a clearer and pure conscience and this will ultimately lead to a much stronger marriage and Orthodox Christian home.
- We should never underestimate the power of confession. St. James says, “Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). Confession and forgiveness should be a routine part of the marriage life.
- The person who is unable to forgive cannot love God, for forgiveness reveals the presence of God in one’s heart. We say in the Lord’s prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses

as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Luke 11:4). Jesus also says, “But if you do not forgive, neither will your father in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mark 11:26).

- One of the Desert fathers once told the following story. A brother monk once came to Abba Poemen and said to him, “Father, if I fall into a shameful sin, my conscience devours me”. And Abba Poemen replied and said to this brother, “At the moment a person goes astray and sins, if that person says, I’ve sinned, immediately, that sin is erased”. Immediately. We see the immediate forgiveness and immediate acceptance that God offers us in Christ. We should do the same with our spouse.
- It is more common to find in a marriage that instead of confessing faults, each partner is trying to fix blame. Blame fixing is an escape where we evade responsibility and pass our failures to our spouse and hold them accountable.
- When we forgive someone, we must commit ourselves *never* to bring it up again. We commit ourselves to never to use it as a club on the other person.

- **Gain Understanding and Wisdom**

- Husband and wife need to spend quality time with each other every day so that they can understand one another better, and so that they can deal with each other in Godly wisdom.
- Understanding your spouse requires spending lots of time with them, talking a lot to one another, caring for each others problems and concerns, listening carefully to them, prayer, patience, and love. St. Paul says, “with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2).

- **Good Communication**

- Good communication is key to a strong Christian marriage. We have to develop good listening and communication skills with our spouse, and be on the same page as our spouse mentally and spiritually.
- A strong Christian marriage not only communicates the good feelings we have, but it also lovingly communicates the bad feelings we have.
- One of the most important areas where we need to work on our communication is in how we communicate the bad feelings to our spouse. If we tell our spouse early

in a problem that we are angry and the reasons for it in a loving way, then this will prevent hostility, built up anger, and frustration. Recall the words of St. Paul: “but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

- Husband and wife who have good communication work and live as a unified team in Christ. They work well together, they play well together, they pray well together, they talk well together, they laugh well together, and everything they do together is smooth and harmonious.

Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home: Part V - The Art of Successful Christian Living

1. Introduction

- There are many kinds of art. There is the art of music - the sweetest of all the arts, for this art connects to the spirit and emotions and all of our nerves. There are so many great composers who have enriched humanity with their glorious genius. Music can lift up the soul and send it soaring to the heights. There is also the art of photography and then there is the art of sculpture, which takes stone with all its colors and carves it into different forms. Shapes and figures of famous people are often so accurate that they seem to capture reality and portray nature itself. Such figures, in their magnificence, even become objects of worship to ignorant people, and the simpleminded are easily entranced by such other worldly beauty. However all these works come from the dust, from the natural creation of rocks and colors. There are other kinds of art, as well, that have expressed man's various talents, but have caused many to overlook the real art of life, which is much more sublime.
- The art of life has the greatest variety: there is the art of fatherhood and motherhood, the art of obedience to parents, to employers and to one's superior in religion or work; and there is the art of education and upbringing, as well as that of emulating superior models in life.

2. The Art of Fatherhood

- **The Example of God the Father and God the Son**

- This is the first and foremost art of life to pass on the secret of life and nurturing. St. Paul the apostle was breaking new ground when he attributed fatherhood to the source of its Creator "the Heavenly Father." He said in Ephesians 3:14-15: "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (He said 'family' and not 'tribe').

- The Son possessed the embrace of the Father in John 1:18: “The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” These are the exact words of the Lord Jesus, the only begotten and beloved son, declaring the Father’s love to the Son, the all perfect love that is so immeasurable.
- What is truly amazing in both the Father and the Son’s love, is that Christ said to the Father in St. John 17:26: “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” Here the words “declared it to them” refer to Jesus’ life before He was crucified, and “will declare it to them” refer to events after the resurrection, when Jesus says, through the Holy Spirit, in John 16:14, “He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”
- The same idea is also found in the words of the Lord Jesus, when He speaks of the Father’s love for the world in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”
- The prayer of Jesus to the Father before He was crucified - “that the love with which You loved Me may be in them” - expresses the core of what lies in the Father’s heart: “For God so loved the world” means the world of men.

- **Earthly Fatherhood**

- In these words we glimpse the source of fatherhood, in its all fullness, its height and its depth. This vision has been given to the man newly recreated in the image and likeness of the Father, so that he may speak to the Father about His fatherly love and tenderness and about the sacrifice of His Son - the Son who takes life from His Father and even parenthood itself.
- This man will soon be a father himself and beget boys and girls. So fatherhood is the first and greatest gift that a man delivers to his son (or daughter), when he treats him with love, tenderness and sacrifice. This is truly the greatest thing owed to a son by his father.
- Fatherhood, therefore, is the greatest secret of life because of its divine source, as St. Paul said. God himself is the source of all fatherhood, endowing it with all its gifts. The first of the gifts God has granted to the human father is to bequeath this fatherhood to his children, so that God will be “father to all.”

- Christ denoted this when He taught us the only prayer given us by the Lord, in Luke 11:2: “When you pray, say ‘Our Father in heaven...’ ” He commanded, in Matthew 23:9: “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.” So the human father is an image in miniature of our great heavenly Father, and therefore a man is responsible for keeping this fatherhood safe and holy.
- So, when you discipline the son in fatherly love, you are equipping him to carry on this mission of fatherhood from one generation to the next.
- Here is the basic teaching which the father must pass on to his son:
 - * The father must behave as a God-fearing person before his children, whether they are young or old. The little ones will learn much when they see their father engaging in prayer to God, in all humility, and praising and glorifying His holy name with reverence. He will kneel down both physically and spiritually in complete sincerity, whenever the kindling of the Spirit is felt. It would be a great example if he made his little son stand next to him and learn how to worship. Indeed, the impact of this will remain with him all his life. The father can also read the psalms in a gracious way so that the child will learn how to appreciate those works of praise while he is very young.
 - * The father’s behavior towards the mother, servants and everyone else, should be truly honest, full of reverence for God’s name. He should not swear or lie, or accept any lying; he must punish anyone who lies, swears or curses. He has to make it clear that such bad behavior brings God’s anger on their home and causes them to stumble. The father is responsible for his children’s failure, because he has not taught them the fear of God and sincere worship, so that God’s power accompanies them and His guidance directs them throughout their lives. “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).
 - * The children’s success in life depends on the Lord’s leadership, and this begins with the father and extends to the children. A father begins disciplining his son when he is only an infant. In early life he shows his love for him, but after infancy plays his role in guiding the child’s behavior. He should make clear his love and tenderness, whenever the child accepts and obeys his guidance. However, if the child is disobedient, the father should show

his concern and displeasure. When the child disobeys, the first punishment should be administered to the back of his hands and feet, but a father should never beat the child on his face, because this is humiliating and could cause him emotional damage. Never beat a son on his bottom, because this is likely to arouse his sexual feelings too early. A child should not be kissed on the lips, because, apart from carrying germs and being an unhealthy practice, it can arouse his sexual tendencies. If a beating is used for discipline, it should be given on the back of the hands or feet, but not so as to inflict pain, just as a punishment.

- * When the child grows older, discipline has to be exercised rather through discussion and stories, or by going for a friendly walk, according to the proverb: “When your son grows up, be his friend.” Let him share with you in all your comings and goings, so he learns manhood and how to relate to others. At this stage the father begins to give his son pieces of advice and, as soon as his mind begins to develop, spiritual examples. This must happen before he receives any learning outside spiritual discipline and training.
- * Whether these teachings are in the spiritual life or taken from his own life and experiences, as well as those of his ancestors, the father should know that his teachings will remain engraved in his son’s mind more than any education from another source. The son’s feelings for his father are full of reverence and respect, as the father’s words make a great impression on the youth’s feelings, as do the words of the Bible where his self-confidence is concerned.
- * So the father should plant the seeds of faith and trust in the young boy’s heart and these seeds will remain in his memory all his life. One of the features of fatherhood that the father must firmly establish in his son’s emotional character is to discipline the young man’s spirit regarding his adult manhood and future interactions with others. Thus the son will be reared to be a brave young man, unafraid of meeting people or speaking to others. This is achieved when the father shares with his son both his own life experience and his personal relationship with God.
- * As for self-confidence, science and knowledge, this should be provided by the school and university. The father has to ensure access for his son to religious and secular magazines, as well as historical and educational ones. These will

enable him to study the thoughts of the great heroes of humanity through photography, music and travel. The youth can also have his own albums and enjoy other hobbies that may increase his talents, which are gifts from God.

- * The father has both to foster and discipline these talents within reasonable limits. A father must train his youngster to consider his father as the best person to turn to in confession, so that the child will share his concerns and his relationships with others. The father will therefore give guidance and warnings against possible risks in life.
- * As for those fathers who are careless in raising their children, letting them become the prey of circumstances and bad companions, God will not hear them should they later reproach Him for the evil outcome, since they themselves have brought about the perdition of their children.
- * A father remains responsible for his son until old age, because the authority of the father is given by the Spirit of God. With God's help it is possible to safeguard the child's integrity and purity, and direct his youth and manhood in a straight path.
- * Fathers, beware of complaining about your children to anyone - whether that person is close or distant, for you will only create a barrier between you and him. He will no longer have any confidence or trust in you, and will no longer rely on you. You will sever all relations between yourself and his emotional life - a division you will never be able to erase, and which could even grow greater with time.
- * If you wish to draw his attention to something, sit with him privately and talk it over; ask him to restore your peace of heart and not to make the same mistake again. Add to this your prayers on his behalf, so that God's Spirit may intervene and correct him. You will win him to God and to yourself, and also restore him to himself. Through following God's way and through your prayer, honesty, love and trust, you can never go astray.
- * Another aspect of fatherhood is to develop the habit of praising your son before his mother, his brothers and sisters, his relatives and guests. This will encourage him, by increasing his self-confidence and his trust in you, and he will then always try to fulfill your wishes and expectations. If you praise him before others, he too will praise you and be proud of you as a father. So your

mutual relationship will be a strong one, through the goodness of God and for the sake of a healthy spiritual life.

- * We should limit the amount of time our children watch television and closely monitor the programs they watch and approve of what they watch. Some church fathers even prefer that children to be brought up without a television set at home, because with television they will receive teaching otherwise than God, or what you yourself desire.
- * Do not lead your children into any temptation, for that will subsequently lead to their destruction and you will be held responsible at the Last Judgment, when there will be no hope of intercession.
- * Try to avoid the over-excitement at social gatherings, whether at your own home or in others' houses. There is great emotional damage to those who take part in such gatherings.
- * We are accountable for all our sins which will bring judgment on us, since they arise from lust and passion and obstinacy, and therefore what self-justification can we offer?!
- * On the other hand, in our home, we should arrange evenings of praise and prayer that include all the family. We will be happy with the Lord, and the Lord will be happy with us, because He has promised to be among us. If the Lord is present, He fills the house and all our hearts with His name, so the home is fortified against the temptations of the evil one. The family has then won the indwelling presence of the Lord.

Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home: Part VI - The Art of Successful Christian Living

1. Introduction: The Art of Motherhood

- The art of fatherhood and of motherhood together are part of the art of life itself. It was truly the greatest honor that the Virgin Saint Mary was chosen to be the mother of the Son of God without 'knowing' any man.
- Motherhood itself was thus raised high to embrace the Father, the very Godhead, and she was exalted by the birth of Christ, being called the Mother of the Son of God. St. Mary thus removed the shame of Eve, and the blood shed at her delivery washed away the sin of all those who are reborn as children of Jesus and the Father. She has gone beyond the words of King David in Psalm 51:5: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."
- With Adam, 'sex' began between male and female to preserve the human race from dying out, but with Jesus the age of sex of male and female has come to an end, for when death is conquered the door to everlasting life is opened. Therefore after the coming of the second birth from above, by water and the Spirit, sex no longer exists because the age of righteousness has prevailed.
- Thus the new age has come about, according to God's words: "With righteousness the Church has given me birth." It is now more appropriate to say, "in the name of Christ, my mother gave me birth." So every woman's infant born in Christ is made worthy of the kingdom of God. He has guardian angels, who are accountable for their guardianship before the face of God.
- Christ has exalted mothers to the honor of giving birth to God's boys and girls. Saint Paul opened our eyes to the knowledge that boys and girls in Christ have become one; there is no longer any distinction between boys and girls. In Christ there is no male or female - they have become one.
- In 2 Corinthians 11:2, St. Paul summed this up by calling every believer in Christ - whether a man or a woman - "a chaste virgin to Christ." Therefore he restores all those who are married in Christ to virginity, whether male or female. In the eyes of

God and Christ, all have become chaste virgins. This is the Church that begets boys and girls and is called the Virgin Bride of Christ, that is His Body.

- We see here how high St. Paul raises motherhood in Christ! A woman who begets boys and girls to God is considered by Him a chaste virgin. From the virginity of St. Mary the virgin Body of Christ came forth; thus from the virginity of the Body of Christ we all came forth as chaste virgins.
- So we have called motherhood in Christ an art of life, and indeed it is more distinguished than any other art. We are lifting up the normal human view of a woman to that level attained by the Virgin Mary - a level attributed to the woman found 'in Christ' by the apostle St. Paul, when he said that we are all Christ's virgins and members of His Body.
- In Christianity, all this glory and honor conferred on the woman flows from the Church, and the Church's honor and glory comes from the body of Christ. Her husband shares in this task of raising up children of Christ and young people to God, who are pleasing to His will and heart. As St. Paul said of God, when writing to the Ephesians in 1:5, "Having predestined us by Jesus Christ to adoption as His sons, according to the good pleasure of His will."

The Vital and Critical Functions of a Mother

- The first of these daily arts is the pregnancy period. There is agreement among scientists that during pregnancy a woman transfers to her newborn baby its temperament and nervous qualities. She can feed the baby with her bad temper, her worries, her thoughts, her sorrows, which are in turn carried over into childhood and adulthood and even passed on to the next generation. A woman can feed her child with her tranquilizers and sedatives, bringing about an ugly and depressed attitude, which she then complains about, although this moodiness and depression was actually derived from the mother herself.
- On the other hand the mother who realizes the value of the art of life and takes seriously her responsibility towards her baby confers on the child a peaceful and happy disposition. This mother will sing sweet praises to God during her pregnancy period with Biblical thoughts and meditations, as well as quietly reading the Bible. All this will make the baby's spirit absorb and be enriched by the Word. The child's

body and spirit receives and responds to all this, so the mother will rejoice in the beauty of her son and his delightful spirit, liveliness and intelligence.

- The mother's role in nursing is even more important than what is mentioned above. When the baby is feeding at the breast, together with the milk it takes in all her emotional and spiritual qualities, without her being aware of it. Even as the baby nurses, it keeps looking at her and her features, absorbing whether she is sorrowful and depressed, or full of happiness and smiles.
- In addition, the food which a mother eats greatly affects the milk she produces. Specialists say there are foods that are preferable to eat when nursing for the good nutrition of the baby. Weaning has to be gradual, a time for nursing and a time for feeding by hand for the child to get used to, and this will help the baby to quit nursing and becoming too attached to breast feeding.
- A sensible mother tries to pay more attention to her baby when weaning him. She would pat him on the back and touch him for him to burp, because the air inside his intestines would cause a stomach-ache and he would be cranky.
- She tucks him in bed and pats him after feeding until he is comforted and sleeps peacefully. He will then wake up, and actively play with hands and feet. This early exercise is his most important task in life, as it prepares him for the coming struggles in life and can also reduce the time he has to be carried around, except in cases of need. He will gradually get used to being on his own and will be ready for his first steps.
- A child who is used to being carried in his mother's arms will dislike the chore of walking and will grow up wanting to rely on his mother. He will whine a lot until she eventually picks him up, so to get his own way he cries and screams. At this point it is very necessary to discipline the child, by the mother or father showing him some severity.
- From childhood, he should learn how to be obedient to orders. The child has to begin to learn about life, in order to grow up as an independent self-reliant person. A father or mother does not have to resort spanking until he feels pain and cries out, as this is very undesirable; it is sufficient to be firm. If punishment is necessary, let it be light taps on the back of the hand or on his feet, just enough to make him realize his parents are upset and so he will stop being so stubborn.

- Once a child starts his education, the positive facts of learning are more important than grades or scores. He should not be scared by ghost stories or frightening tales, because these highly imaginative stories could cause hallucinations and make him cowardly.
- A child has to be taught that God is the giver of all good things. He sends us food and clothes, delicacies, special candies made by the angels for good children. He should also learn the natural facts of life; he should not be afraid of dogs or cats, or any other animals, but come to know their names and shapes without fearing them, even those beasts of the forest, lions, tigers or elephants.
- Next the child should recognize the pictures of the saints and be able to distinguish them apart, for these saints pray for the sick to be healed.
- However, the encounter with the sufferings of Christ on the cross should be deferred until he is ten years old, so that the image of His pain will not make a sad impression on the child's emotions.
- Jesus is the lover of little children, friend to the family, caregiver of little ones and giver of all that is good. He is the One who will help us succeed in examinations, if we work hard and are obedient to our parents.
- This is the role of the mother in the education of her child. Later on, the father takes the child out of doors with him, so as to teach him the practicalities of the art of life and how to interact with people. He should also be in touch with those who are poor and should give them some of his pocket-money.

Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home - Part VII - Obedience of a Child

1. Introduction

- Obedience should be paid to whomever obedience is due. First to the father, which is very important and very serious; to obey one's father is more important than food or drink.
- The obedience to the father is modeled by the mother when the child sees how she obeys the father, by saying 'yes' or 'certainly', or of 'course' when the father makes a request.
- St. Paul says, "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord," (Colossians 3:20). Also, St. Paul says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1).
- So Whatever the father asks of the child, he must do it unhesitatingly, or he will be deprived of something that he really cherishes. For example, the father will not bring him his favorite toy unless he is really obedient.
- The child also has to be obedient to the mother since since she is the one who has all the candy; if he is disobedient, he will not be allowed to have candy and will receive only frowns.

2. Extending Obedience Beyond Parents

- After learning parental obedience, the boy's obedience will be extended to his teacher. This is a holy obligation, so he will grow up to love obedience as an art to achieve the best way of living.
- Later, through good manners and obedience to his employer, a smooth path to a successful life will open up before him. Obedience of the employees to his employer is invaluable.
- Employers will wish him to work for them and his reputation will grow as a reliable employee, who is wise and useful. This is all due to the parent's upbringing of their child from the kindergarten years.

- They have planted in him the virtues of obedience, love, respect, pleasant ways and kindly dealing with people - all of which compound the art of successful living.
- A child is instructed in all these things from childhood onwards. The parents will teach him to be courteous to guests, whether he knows them or not, and also what questions are appropriate, or not, to ask of them.
- He will then learn how to be hospitable to guests and how to answer their questions. He will also be rewarded with a nice little gift for his good behavior with guests.
- A child cannot be obedient to others outside the home if he is not taught obedience in the home.

3. Parents can be a Stumbling Block to a Child's Obedience

- Do not allow children to lock themselves up in their room when guests come, as if it were mandatory to stay in a cage until the guests leave. This is damaging to the child's personality and will cause him to fail in his dealings with others; he may then shun company and become shy and timid, unable to be socially successful.
- Do not complain about the child to outsiders, as this will build up a hidden barrier between him and his parents and will become engraved in his personality, remaining as an ugly memory of his parents.
- Spanking, cursing and restricting his freedom, depriving him of love and other natural rights will be remembered with bitterness in relation to his parents.
- He may even wish them dead, or commit suicide to escape the hell caused by their stupid ignorance.
- Such turmoil may be created in a child's heart by ignorant parents. Though they may desire to see the face of God, they will not attain to that vision. Beware of being a stumbling block to your child, for a millstone in the depths of the sea awaits you! For Jesus said, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).
- Also, St. Paul says, "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak" (1 Corinthians 8:9).

4. Obedience to Others Leads to Obedience to God

- Obedience to others leads to obedience to God and His laws. The orders of the father, if they are wise and sensible, will definitely teach the child continual obedience to God and His words.
- See what blessing and means of salvation you can be to your son (or daughter) when you teach him obedience, however hard this may be.
- Obedience may sometimes mean self-sacrifice for the father; this enables emotional strength and grace to be established in the child's character. As the father sets an example by love, kindness, generosity, and self-sacrifice, this makes his son content and at ease.
- Our own salvation is established on the foundation of obedience to God; the obedience of the Son to the Father unto death, the death of the cross.
- So Christ made this His path and the only way: "Whoever would follow Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). How can a man carry a cross when he hates obedience?
- Obedience is indeed the secret of a successful life, because it is the secret of salvation and the pleasure of the heavenly Father. In Philippians 2:9, we read "He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name."
- So God has bestowed on us the art of obedience in its amazing strength in Christ Himself with His cross. He called us to carry it, that is to say, to carry His obedience!
- Jesus says it so clearly in Matthew 16:25: "Whosoever loses his life for My sake will find it." And where are we to destroy and die to self fully? In heaven alone! If we do not desire to lose our life here by every possible means, then we will not find it there!

Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home - Part VIII - Obedience of a Child

1. Introduction

- Learning obedience is an important part of child development. This is the tool that allows you as parents to train your child. Through obedience your child will learn self-control and develop other positive character traits that he will need as an adult.
- However, obedience cannot be forced upon the child. Parents who simply command their children will foster resentment, which will eventually lead to rebellion. In fact, some researchers feel that poor parenting techniques contribute to the development of oppositional defiant disorder in some children.
- Although you can punish a child for not obeying, this will not foster any long-term obedience. When the child reaches his teen years and becomes more independent, punishment will only serve to destroy the already faltering parent child relationship.
- Our goal then is not to force our children to obey us, but to get them to want to obey us. This willingness to obey will only come about if the parent's commands are based upon the following seven principles.

2. Loving Concern for the Child

- A child knows quickly whether a parent's demands are for the sake of the child or for the personal convenience of the parent. If the parent's primary motive for giving orders is to make his own life easier, then the child learns to place his own interests first also.
- If you want to be successful in raising your child, then your reason for giving orders must be for the benefit of your child.
- When your child senses that your demands are for his sake, he will much more readily obey you. He knows that it is for his own good. He will know that any demands made of him, no matter how unpleasant, come from a genuine concern for his welfare.

3. Sincere Respect for the Child

- Parents must respect their children. This is a concept that is not well practiced by our society. Western society focuses on possessions. Somehow in the back of many parents' minds, their children are counted among those possessions.
- We must remember that our children are not objects, but people. As people, they are deserving of respect. We must remember to give respect to our child to the same degree we would like others to respect us.

4. Patience

- Very often our children do things that bother us. This is usually unintentional on their part and is just a reflection of their immaturity. However, if we show our children that we are annoyed they will begin to resent us.
- This resentment feeds their desire to rebel against our wishes. One of our goals as parents must be to try to keep our negative emotions in check.

5. Speak Softly

- Nothing gains a child's cooperation more than a gentle tone of voice. Speaking softly helps us to control our negative emotions, especially anger.
- A soft voice soothes and is more likely to be met with cooperation. It creates a relaxed atmosphere and is reassuring to children.
- When we speak in a soft voice it also conveys strength. We show our children that we are in control of the situation and not merely reacting to it.
- If the only step you take is to control the volume of your voice, particularly in stressful situations, that alone will foster better child compliance. You will find that everything around you goes more smoothly.

6. Make Moderate Demands

- No one likes having demands placed upon him. Children are no different. Yet we are constantly commanding our children.

- We feel that as parents we must take steps to correct every misdemeanor that we see. When the orders become excessive or arbitrary, the parent becomes more like a dictator than an educator.
- If you place a lot of obligations on your child, then your child is going to resent and resist your authority.
- One of the most important steps in getting your child to listen to you is to reduce the amount of demands that you place upon him. This will require you to stay calm and overlook a lot of childish behavior.
- Commands should be made thoughtfully and be within reasonable limits. The general rule is that if a certain behavior is not something your child will be doing as an adult and if it is not sinful or dangerous, then you should not make it a priority to correct.

7. Follow Through

- Even if you do all that has been mentioned so far, you will still need to give your child orders.
- When you do so, you must be firm and make sure that your child obeys. If you give your child an instruction you must insist that he fulfill it. Jesus says, “let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’, ‘No’” (Matthew 5:37).
- Often it will be easier or more convenient to just overlook disobedience. This, in the end, will erode your authority as a parent.
- You should only make moderate and well thought out demands on your child. However, when you do make those orders, your child must fulfill them.
- If we want our children to take our words seriously, then we must show them that we are serious.
- Be Free with ‘Yes’, but not with ‘No’.
- We must try to grant every reasonable request our children make of us. They should feel that we are giving to them freely and in overflowing abundance at all times.
- You should make it a rule to give your child whatever he wants unless you have a good reason not to do so. This is the way that Jesus treats us. Jesus says, “If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:14).

- In addition, we should try to temper our use of 'No.' Try to avoid saying 'No' whenever possible. For example, if your child wants to have a treat before dinner and you want him to eat first, rather than say 'No' or 'Not now' say, 'Yes, after dinner.'
- This small change in the way you use the words 'Yes' and 'No' will change your child's perception from the feeling that most of his desires are being denied to that most of them are being granted.

8. Conclusion

- It is natural for a child to want to obey his parents.
- It is also necessary for his proper growth and development.
- Applying these seven keys will help you to make it easier for your child to obey you.

Bless the Crown of the Year with Your Goodness O Lord

- As we begin a new Coptic year in the Sunday School, there are several spiritual goals that we should strive for so that our own spiritual life can grow, and our service become fruitful.
- As Sunday School servants, we must work towards strengthening and developing our God given virtues so that we can serve effectively and fruitfully.

1. Humility

- The Church Fathers say that humility is the pillar of Christianity and in particular, the pillar in service and is single most important virtue in service.
- Humility is the rock and foundation of service.
- The humble person never fails in their service. In contrast, the person who lacks humility fails in every aspect of their service.
- Every single problem, disagreement, tension, etc.. can always be traced back to a lack of humility of one servant or the other.
- The reason we have the devil in the first place is because of a lack of humility. When one lacks humility, they are full of pride and arrogance, and this was precisely the problem of Lucifer.
- Humility immediately leads to other holy virtues and spiritual living, such as love, patience, forgiveness, unselfishness, the recognition of our sins, and repentance.
- Chapter 2 of Philippians is an excellent chapter on humility.
- Servants, be humble in your service! As love never fails, humility also never fails in service.

2. Obedience

- Obedience is a key element in service. Every servant must not only be obedient to the Lord, but also obedient to the church doctrine, church hierarchy, and church authority.

- The obedient person in service always says as Samuel did when they are called: ‘Here I am Lord’ (1 Samuel 3:4).
- All of the successful people in the Bible became successful because of their total submission and obedience to God.
- Obedience requires total and unconditional surrender to the will of God in our life, including our service life.
- The humble person is always obedient. The obedient person is not necessarily humble. Thus, humility indeed leads to obedience.
- The obedient person who is not humble is obedient with resentment and feels compelled to be obedient in order that they not lose their status, position, or prestige in the world.
- Humility and obedience are the two pillars on which service is based.

3. Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brothers eye (Matthew 7:5)

- A critical aspect of service is that we must *not* be judgmental of others, whether they be Sunday School kids, fellow servants, the congregation, or whomever.
- We must constantly examine ourselves instead of examining others.
- The judgmental person can never grow spiritually, and is doomed for failure in their service. Such a person is arrogant and a hypocrite.
- Thus, let us indeed remove the plank from our eye before we say anything about anyone, so that we can see clearly and think clearly in our service.

4. Take the Kingdom of God by Force

- There is a great verse in the Bible that says, “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12).
- Our spiritual life is a struggle. We have many temptations and setbacks. We have to fight the devil and work through our circumstances take the kingdom of God “by force.”
- It was said of Saint Moses that Black that “he took the kingdom of God by force.”

- We cannot let our circumstances, the environment we are in, or the people we encounter bring us down in our service and lead us down the path of despair, despondency and loss of hope. We have to fight and take the kingdom of God “by force.”
- Taking the kingdom of God by force is based on developing a personal relationship with Jesus with which no one or no environment can interfere.
- Sometimes servants lose hope and become ineffective in service because they depend too much on others to build and uplift their spiritual life. They depend too much on the environment around them for their spirituality. We should depend only on Jesus and fight to take His kingdom “by force.”
- Jacob “wrestled with God” so that he could take the kingdom of God by force.
- The dependence of the environment around us for building our spiritual life is a subtle deception from the devil. Let us look at two examples in the Bible.
 - Adam and Eve - Adam and Eve lived in the most perfect environment in the history of the world. They walked and talked with God. Yet, in this most perfect environment, they sinned and were rejected from the Garden of Eden.
 - Noah - The entire world surrounding Noah was bad, except for his family, yet Noah lived in righteousness and was faithful to God. The entire world around him was wicked and died in the flood.
- The person who is a hearer and lover of the word of God is one who takes the kingdom of God “by force”, exerting all earnestness and desire to enter the Kingdom.

5. We not I: Unselfishness

- Servants must always be unselfish in everything they do, and refrain from using the word “I”, which is the shortest but most destructive word in the English language.
- We must get into the habit of saying “we” and put it into action by doing things together as “we” and not as “I.”
- If we take the letter “I” and cross it out, it makes a plus sign, +. The plus sign is a cross which represents Jesus. Thus + = we = Jesus and I.
- In our service, we can never achieve good anything by ourselves. Our service is always done with the partnership of Jesus Christ. Every fruit and blessing in our service can only be done in a partnership with Jesus Christ. The person who does things “alone”

without giving God the glory never receives the blessings and fruits in their service. “Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above, and comes down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17).

6. Serve with Joy

- The servant who has a strong personal relationship with Jesus always serves with joy. Such a servant always has a smile on their face and has peace in their heart.
- A joyous servant never feels burdened or overwhelmed by their service. They love their service and enjoy their time in church and being with the Sunday School kids.
- The joyous servant never feels that service occupies too much of their time.
- Let us serve with the joy that St. Paul and Silas had in the Philippian jail, where the word ‘joy’ appears more than 15 times in St. Paul’s epistle to the Philippians.

7. Being of One Accord

- Spiritual unity is a major component of service. Jesus met with his disciples often in the Upper Room.
- As servants, we must all serve with one accord for our service to grow and be successful.
- We all must be “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:2).
- We read in Acts 1:14, “They continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” This is a key verse for unity in service.
- Also, in Acts 2:1, we read, “When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were with one accord in one place.” These verses serve as model verses for unity in our service.
- Also, we read “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:46).

Purification of the Heart

1. Introduction

- According to the Bible, the heart is the source of all of the potentiality of the spiritual and physical life: “Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).
- This applies not only to good potential but to evil ones as well: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander” (Matthew 15:19).
- So the heart has become the expression of the final condition of man, whether he be good or evil: “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil” (Luke 6:45). This means that the inclinations of the inmost heart set the tone of the whole man - they color his thoughts, his words, and his deeds.
- Purity of heart is critical in our own personal spiritual life as well as our service life. We cannot grow spiritually nor serve effectively without a pure heart.
- God always looks to the heart when he evaluates the condition of man. When God rejected Saul and told Samuel to anoint David king, He said “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see man as he is; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). We must learn to do the same. It is too easy to evaluate and judge people based on external things, rather than the internal. We must learn to look at the heart of others, and this requires time as well as a relationship with them.

2. The Heart and the Tongue

- We can often know that state of ones heart by the words they speak. Jesus says, “For out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). So man’s words usually testify to the state of his heart. They can justify or condemn him: “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:37).

- One of the best ways to examine our spiritual condition is to examine every single word we say: Do we speak kindly? Do we speak humbly? Do we speak respectfully? Do we gossip? Do we slander? Do we condemn? Do we degrade? Do we mock? Do we ridicule?
- The relationship between ones heart and ones lips is defined by St. Paul as follows: “For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved” (Romans 10:10). So when the heart believes, the lips must confess what kind of faith is in the heart.

3. The Devil Hides in the Heart

- The Bible tells us that it is possible for two kinds of heart to exist side by side in man, one expressing his true nature and another falsifying his thoughts, words, and deeds. In the latter case, a person talks of good deeds and actually does them to give people the false impression that he is virtuous, while in fact, he is wicked: “You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34).
- Jesus tells us here that it is impossible for man to speak good words out of himself while being wicked. Good words coming from an evil source could only occur with the help of an additional power - or of another heart implanted by the devil to mimic good deeds.
- Thus, the devil’s work, with regard to the heart, is not merely confined to contaminating it with evil desires. The devil hides evil and keeps his intentions secret through good works and deeds by wicked men in order to guarantee that they will be carried out and have a lasting effect.

4. God’s Work on the Purification of the Human Heart

- Hence, first among man’s struggles and concerns is to purify his heart. He must overcome the deviations of the will and to correct the inclinations and instincts that have been subjected to the rule of evil. This means that he has to confront the tendency of his heart toward evil activity. He has to bridle it, curb it, and finally destroy its tendency.

- As for God’s work concerning the heart, it is the complete removal of the evil heart and the creation of a new heart that He implants into man.
- When man’s heart is transformed by God, he becomes, out of necessity, another man: “Then the spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon you, and you shall prophesy with them and be turned into another man.... When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart” (1 Samuel 10:6,9).
- In the Bible, the reality of creating a new heart for man goes hand in hand with three basic actions:
 - Contrition of the sinner’s heart (Faith and Repentance)
 - Man’s complete cleansing or purging from within (Christ’s act of renewal and forgiveness)
 - The indwelling of the Holy Spirit (The transformation of man through the work of the Holy Spirit within)
- We find these three elements in Psalm 50 (Psalm 51 in the Bible) in David’s confession.
- We also find these three elements in the Sacrament of Baptism (see Acts 15:9, Acts 2:38).
- Thus, the central element of purification of the heart is faith and repentance.
- Through faith and repentance, the Holy Spirit works within us through baptism to create a new heart within us. This is a divine mystery and power that enable us to be transformed in our spiritual life.
- With this transformation, we are able to hate wickedness and evil, we are able to dispel evil thoughts and passions, and we are able to embrace the power of holiness.
- Indeed, we put off the old man and put on the new: “Seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator (Colossians 3:9-10).
- God gives the highest honor to those who are pure in heart: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). There is no higher honor in the beatitudes than seeing God.
- The purification of the heart is a vital basis for our salvation.

5. Why Did God Choose the Heart?

- Why did God especially choose the heart of man to set apart exclusively for Himself and not any other part? “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways” (Proverbs 23:26). Also, the first commandment is “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5).
- Man has nothing deeper than the heart as far as compassion, tenderness, mercy, and love are concerned. The heart expresses the center of the most tender and sincere of man’s emotions. However, it is not for this that God seeks the heart of man.
- For there exists another characteristic of the heart that transcends kindness, tenderness, mercy, or love. This consists in its being the wellspring of man’s personality, from which all its main characteristics flow.
- The Church Fathers say that the heart is man’s holy of holies. It is exclusively this feature that makes it fit for the indwelling of God. For if man loves God with all his heart, it means that he loves him with all his being. He has given himself unreservedly to God.

6. Conclusion

- Hence, the purification of the heart is to those who love God a matter of overriding importance.
- For God never seeks nor is ever satisfied with half-hearted or partial love. The whole heart must be dedicated to Him.
- The word “whole-hearted” means clearing the heart completely from the impurities of human emotions, for such emotions stem from the bonds of flesh and blood or sensual inclinations and affections.
- It also means cleansing entirely from all secret idols and gods, for the holy of holies should be consecrated and adorned for God alone.

Wisdom

1. Introduction

- To be wise in a spiritual sense means to have good godly judgment. Wisdom is an understanding of what is true, right, and lasting.
- Wisdom is an important gift from God that is vital in effective and fruit-bearing service.
- Wisdom is given to those who servants who are truly are humble and obedient, and servants who seek an honest and deep intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.
- The Bible speaks much about the importance of wisdom. Several books in the Bible are dedicated to that topic alone, including Proverbs, and the Wisdom of Solomon.
- The Bible also talks about the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon, who wrote Song of Solomon, Proverbs, Wisdom of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. All of these books contain major sayings and instructions about living and acting wisely.
- In the book of Proverbs, we are encouraged to seek wisdom, as Solomon says, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7).
- Likewise in the New Testament, we are also expected to walk in wisdom, as the Apostle Paul says, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15). We also read, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:17).

2. Earthly Wisdom and Heavenly Wisdom

- In James 3:13-18, we also learn that there is more than just one kind of wisdom. St. James says, “Who is wise among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. 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 are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

- The dictionary definition of wisdom is “knowledge and good judgment”. It is something intellectual in nature, something obtained through learning and experience. But wisdom in St. James’s view is a moral rather than intellectual quality.
- St. James in these verses (James 3:13-18) explains that wisdom is different from knowledge. Wisdom is knowledge that is obeyed and applied.
- Earthly wisdom is *not* from above (James 3:15). St. James says that the origin of man’s wisdom is “earthly, sensual, and demonic.” In the absence of God, man’s wisdom is drawn from the three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil.
 - Earthly (worldly) wisdom is wisdom according to the worlds standards. St. Paul says that this type of wisdom is foolishness to God: “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (1 Corinthians 1:20).
 - Man’s wisdom is sensual in the sense that is is guided by what is appealing to the senses, the emotions, and the passions. It is wisdom according to what feels right, but is not necessarily right in the eyes of God.
 - Man’s wisdom is demonic in the sense it the exact wisdom that is possessed by the devil and his angels. It is a wisdom that originates from the influences of Satan.
- In contrast, heavenly wisdom is from above (James 3:17). It is a wisdom that comes from God.
 - It is a wisdom that comes through prayer, as St. James says, “If any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5).
 - It is a wisdom that comes through guidance: “But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge” (Proverbs 21:11). “And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel” (Proverbs 1:5).
 - It is a wisdom that is first and foremost an attribute of Jesus Christ, in which St. Paul says, “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”

(Colossians 2:3). St. Paul also says, “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).

3. **Contrasting earthly and heavenly wisdom (James 3:14-17)**

- **Earthly Wisdom**

- Earthly wisdom full of bitter envy, and stems from a lack of love, that is, hatred.
- Earthly wisdom possesses self-seeking in the heart. It is self-serving, selfish, and egotistical.
- Earthly wisdom seeks power and prestige.
- Earthly wisdom is the kind of wisdom that prompted Satan and his angels to rebel against God.
- Earthly wisdom is the wisdom that prompted the disciples to argue who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
- The wisdom of the world is good for nothing, and is inherited through our sinful nature. We do not have to teach anyone worldly wisdom for they are born with it.

- **Heavenly Wisdom**

- Heavenly wisdom is pure. It is true to God’s will. We are called to be 100% pure.
- Heavenly wisdom is peaceable. Holding firm to the truth, it makes every effort to be at peace. St. Paul says, “If it is possible as much depends on you, live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18). It speaks the truth in an attitude of love: “Speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).
- Heavenly wisdom is gentle. It is never harsh, especially in dealing with others whose opinions differ from us. As the Apostle Paul says, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24-25).
- Heavenly wisdom is willing to yield. It yields not in matters of truth but rather in matters of opinion. St. Paul says, “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things” (Romans 14:1).
- Heavenly wisdom is full of mercy. It is quick to forgive the offenses of others. It wisely understands one’s own need of mercy from God. St. James says, “For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy” (James 2:13).
- Heavenly wisdom produces good fruits. St. James says, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13). Heavenly wisdom takes one beyond being a hearer to being a doer” “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).
- Heavenly wisdom is without partiality. St. James says, “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, with partiality” (James 2:1). St. James also says, “But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:9).
- Heavenly wisdom is without hypocrisy. Heavenly wisdom comes from those who have a heart desiring to please God and not man.

4. **Wisdom and Knowledge**

- As St. James has correctly pointed out, wisdom is different from knowledge. We must be careful to never think that by accumulating knowledge, we gain Godly wisdom or can solve problems.

- In our spiritual life, knowledge must be *balanced* by wisdom. Knowledge becomes destructive if it is not balanced by Godly wisdom. Jesus makes this clear when He says, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required” (Luke 12:48). Another way of thinking about this verse is “For everyone to whom much knowledge is given, from him much wisdom will be required.”

5. Wisdom and Speech

- As we have now studied carefully in James 3:13-18, wisdom is closely tied to our speech.
- It is not a coincidence that James 3:1-12 is about taming the tongue, of which he then discusses wisdom in James 3:13-18.
- Just as speech reveals what is in our heart, our speech also reveals our wisdom in dealing with others and dealing with situations. St. James says that the wise are meek, pure, willing to yield, gentle, without partiality, peaceable, without hypocrisy, and produce good fruits.
- Wisdom in speech is governed by three important things:
 - What we say: speak without partiality and in truth.
 - How we say it: speak gently, in meekness, and peaceably.
 - When we say it: finding the right time to say things so that no one is embarrassed, insulted or offended.
- These three elements determine our Godly wisdom in speech.
- Before we say anything to anybody, we must ask ourselves the following three questions: i) Is it true?, ii) Is it necessary?, iii) Is it kind? We should speak only if the answer is “Yes” to all three questions.
- Silence is an important virtue we must all practice to make us more spiritual and more wise. The wise person, out of humility, is slow to speak up and speaks only when called upon and out of necessity.
- Silence is a virtue that the church fathers constantly encourage and it is Step 27 in the Ladder of Divine Ascent by St. John Climacus.

6. Wisdom and Discernment

- The Church fathers often talk about the importance of the virtue of discernment. It is Step 26 in the Ladder of Divine Ascent by St. John Climacus.
- St. John Climacus says, “Among beginners, discernment is real self-knowledge; among those midway along the road to perfection, it is a spiritual capacity to distinguish unfailingly between what is truly good and what in nature is opposed to the good; among the perfect, it is a knowledge resulting from divine illumination, which with its lamp can light up what is dark to others.”
- St. John Climacus then says, “To put the matter more generally, discernment is, and is recognized to be, as solid understanding of the will of God in all times, in all places, in all things; and is found only among those who are pure in heart, in body, and in speech.”

7. Conclusion

- What kind of wisdom do we have?
 - Those who have earthly wisdom boast in their wisdom (James 3:14)
 - Those that have heavenly wisdom show their wisdom by good conduct and meekness (James 3:13).
- What kind of wisdom do we want?
 - If earthly, then no effort is necessary: Just do what the world tells you and do what feels right to you.
 - If heavenly, then we must be diligent and seek the wisdom which comes *only* from God. We demonstrate such wisdom by our conduct.
 - Solomon says, “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding” (Proverbs 3:13).

The Human Personality - Part I

1. Introduction

- The human personality is one of the most difficult but yet one of the most important things to understand and study in Sunday School service.
- It is well known in education that the high school age is the age of *personality formation* while the college age is that of *intimate friendship*.
- The period from graduation from college until the age of 40 is called the *stage of fertility* because it is then that marriage takes place. It is also the time of spiritual, scientific, and material development, as well as the acquisition of work experience. It is the period of greatest productivity in life.
- This is why is it important to achieve an **integrated personality** during the early years of youth in order to reach a maturity that is useful to the individual, his family, his church, and his country.
- A key element in Sunday School service is to help kids achieve their potential in developing this integrated personality.

2. The Components of Human Personality

The two fundamental factors that contribute to the development and formation of the human personality are **man** and his **environment**. The human personality traits are molded though the interaction of man with his environment.

Man: The are four basic components of human nature. These are the spirit, the mind, the soul, and the body.

- **The Spirit**

- The spirit is the immaterial part of man. It is through this element that man transcends his finiteness to penetrate the infinite and what is beyond matter, the universe, time, nature, and death.
- It is only through the spirit that we can have a relationship with God and an indwelling of God in us. The spirit is what distinguishes man from all other living

things. Animals and all other living things do not have a spirit, and thus cannot have a personal relationship with God.

- The spirit is what enables us to move towards God, know Him, love Him, and ascend towards Him. Our faith in God and its growth is grounded in our spirit. When a person gets closer to God, we say that he “grows spiritually.”

- **The Mind**

- The human mind is responsible for thinking, learning, understanding, expression, discussion, discovery, and invention. It is not similar to the instinctive animal which recognizes food and prey and how to obtain it.
- The mind is a divine gift from God. Through the mind, we can meditate, study, and make inferences.
- Though the mind is limited and cannot fully comprehend God, it can however be enlightened by the Spirit of God to understand doctrinal truths. The mind begins and faith completes the work without conflict and without dispensing one with the other: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Hebrews 11:3).
- Like the naked eye, the mind is a telescope to see form afar what is beyond its capacity. The eye cannot dispense with the telescope and the telescope cannot do away with the eye.

- **The Soul**

- The soul contains the instincts (or psychological motives) that are essential for the survival of the human species, such as: hunger fear, sex, curiosity, etc.. It also contains the various psychological needs, such as the need for love, security, appreciation, and belonging.
- St. Paul makes it clear that soul and spirit are in fact different. He says, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).
- The soul is also responsible for behaviors that reflect these needs, from breast feeding to other behaviors that are necessary for the survival of man.
- The soul is also responsible for the general motives of man: liking, imitating, etc... It also includes other acquired elements (not inherited) such as feelings,

habits, and inclinations.

- The soul has undoubtedly a vital role in determining personality traits including those that can benefit and those that can harm. We must recognize the necessity of controlling emotions or getting rid of certain drives such as harmful habits, and acquiring useful ones or of examining tendencies.
- The soul also has a vital role in anxiety, depression, confusion, and fear.

- **The body**

- Man's body, whether healthy or affected by various diseases, definitely helps determine personality traits.
- For instance, physical defects and their effects, the stages of life, the degree of beauty, the size of the body, and other factors can affect personality and an individual's view of himself. They can determine the degree to which he is satisfied or rebels, and his efforts to change certain traits.
- The body is also influenced by handicaps or various diseases that might affect one's mobility, feelings, productivity, etc.... Drugs, smoking, alcohol, and sexually transmitted diseases play a big role in determining one's health and hence personality.
- In this sense of the definition of soul, animals have a mind, body, and soul, but not a spirit. When man dies, the Godly virtues of the spirit, soul, and mind are preserved, and the physical body dies. Thus, spirit, soul, and mind are reunited with a new body, a spiritual body, at the resurrection of man.
- Some church fathers simplify things and say that the mind and the spirit are part of the soul and thus, according to this simplification, man consists of body and soul.

3. **The Environment**

- A person's environment has a vital impact on the shaping of personality.
- There is a difference between children who are brought up in a real Christian home and others that are brought up in a home that is Christian in name only.
- There is a difference between a child reared in a rural environment and one who is reared in an industrial or urban one, a child who grows up in a slum area and one from a better neighborhood, a child from an educated family and one from an uneducated

family. There is a difference between a child who was educated in a good school and one who was educated in a school that neglected him.

- Children's games, the media, poverty or wealth, level of education, and geography are all factors in the development of personality.
- Therefore, intentional and unintentional factors in the upbringing of children have a great impact on determining personality traits. That does not mean, for example, that poverty or a poor neighborhood are necessarily bad, nor does it mean that wealth is necessarily good. There are good and bad values and influences in every environment. What is significant is that all of these factors leave their imprint on the human personality.
- The environment consists of five basic elements. These are
 - The home, the family, and the neighborhood
 - preschool, school, and college
 - The church and its influence
 - Society and geography (country or state of residence)
 - The world through travel and communication
- The interaction between the elements of the individual and the components of the environment produces the personality types and determines its traits.
- It is important to note that negative aspects of personalities can be changed into positive ones which are acquired through Christian upbringing in the home, school, church, and in society. This is one of the critical roles of the Sunday School servant.

4. Conclusion

- The Sunday School servant should pay special attention to the development of the child's life in the 4 basic elements that make up man: the spirit, the mind, the soul, and the body.
- The servant must nourish the spirit with prayer, the mind with reading, the soul through control, the body through purity, and relationships through holy love.
- The servant must also provide a good environment for the kids to grow in Sunday School and the servant must understand the role and the impact of the child's environment (family, school, church, friends, media) in shaping his personality.

Discipleship

1. Introduction

- The life of discipleship is a very important aspect of a servant's life. Servants need to
 - be disciples of a spiritual counselor or spiritual father.
 - build disciples by their example, ambassadorship to Jesus Christ, and way of life.
- Success and fruits in service are measured by discipleship.
- Everyone who believes in Christ is called to be His disciple.
- Christ was called the Teacher, and the Good Teacher.
- Being His disciple is something for all Christians to claim. Jesus had His special disciples who were called “His own” (John 13:1). These were the men whom He prepared for ministering the word (Acts 6:4). The Bible says about them that: “He had called His twelve disciples to [Him], He gave them power [over] unclean spirits,” (Matthew 10:1).
- It says in the Sermon on the Mount: “His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them,” (Matthew 5:1-2).
- And when He wanted to celebrate the Passover, He sent two of His disciples to say that, “The Teacher says, ‘Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’” (Mark 14:13-14).
- We observe that preaching the gospel was taken to mean making disciples. When the Lord sent His disciples to preach the gospel, He said to them: “... Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). And when St. Paul and Barnabas went to Derbe, it was said that, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples” (Acts 14:21).

2. The Necessary Conditions for Discipleship

- Discipleship is not just a matter of learning particular facts, but rather, is a way of life.

- Discipleship has certain conditions which should be fulfilled in practical aspects of life. Jesus said to His disciples: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed” (John 8:31). So then simply listening to the words of a teacher does not mean that one is his disciple. One has to be firmly grounded in his teaching. This means converting the teacher’s words into a way of life, so that they become principles that are firmly established in the one who is learning.
- The Lord Jesus gave us a sign and a practical example when He said to His disciples: “love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34,50).
- Here the Lord Jesus is laying down a necessary qualification, a standard, without which they would not be considered His disciples. No matter how much they had learned from Him in theory about life. If people did not find in the Lord Jesus’s disciples that mutual love, then those disciples had no right to say that they were disciples of Christ! It was an essential sign. Just as Christ loved everyone, so His disciples must be like Him. They, too, should behave and “to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6).
- This reminds us of what the Lord said to the Jews who prided themselves on being sons of Abraham: “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham” (John 8:39). So true discipleship, then, is a discipleship of life which is manifested in a practical way in a person’s way of living.
- It also reveals itself as being a discipleship according to a particular teacher who was himself distinguished by that quality of life and type of teaching. This is why the Lord Jesus provided examples of people who could not be considered His disciples. For instance, He said: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple”. And “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26,27,33).
- In this way Christ laid down the foundation for those who would be His disciples, which was that they should renounce the world in whole hearted dedication to Him, and love of God, above their friends or family relations.

- And in taking this point further when His disciple Peter asked him: “we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” (Matthew 19:27), the Lord answered, with the same kind of spiritual instruction: “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29).
- So it is a basic principle, then, in discipleship for the Lord, that you leave everything for His sake, or that you are at least ready in you heart to leave everything, without feeling any regrets.
- This is why the Lord added another necessary condition, which is that: “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Being a disciple of the Lord needs steadfastness upon the way, with no turning back. It requires that a person be ready to endure for the sake of the Lord and His ministry, and that he should work hard for that purpose. Thus the Lord says: “And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).
- There are other necessary conditions of discipleship such as commitment and hard work. Anyone who wants to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus must take on what he has heard and been taught as his duty, and carry it out, thereby transforming what he has learned in theory into his practical life.

3. Discipleship Through Spiritual Counselors and Spiritual Fathers

- Everyone needs a spiritual counselor and spiritual father to guide them in their spiritual life and give them counsel on life in general.
- Happy is the person who has a spiritual father who is on the level of giving him spiritual guidance. What this means is a father of confession who not only listens to him and recites the absolution, but who also guides and teaches him, and explains the spiritual road, and who gives his spiritual son or daughter, in his or her confession, the gift of discernment and discretion. This kind of father is a teacher who has studied the spiritual path and experienced it who has studied the human soul and come to know its weaknesses, its impulses, its tendencies and what motivates it. He will also have studied the attacks of the devil and the tricks, cunning and deceptions of evil spirits and knew how to overcome them. From such a father, one can learn as a disciple.

- In addition to this, it is often quite valuable and critical to have spiritual guides in the form of fellow servants or friends in the Church who are role models in the church and ones who can give us guidance and spiritual advice according to church teachings and doctrine.
- Some points on spiritual guidance include:
 - (a) The guide must be secure in his belief, sound in his directives and guidance, and he should be experienced, otherwise it will be as the Bible says: “if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch ” (Matthew 15:14). This is the situation which our Lord criticized in relation to the Scribes and Pharisees, when He said that they were “blind guides” (Matthew 23:16,24). And when He rebuked them saying: “For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matthew 23:15).
 - (b) If the spiritual guide should go astray or deviate from his correct position, he ought not to be obeyed, nor should his guidance be accepted. So a person should seek guidance, but at the same time keep his eyes open, and make sure that his conscience feels comfortable with the advice that he receives. The spiritual guide should not be content just to give instructions but should try to convince, and reinforce his teaching by verses from the Bible, or by stories and sayings of the saints.
 - (c) There is nothing wrong with a person asking his teacher or guide or spiritual father about something. The disciples of our Lord Jesus Himself used to ask Him questions, and ask Him to explain things to them. And He used to interpret things for them and give them parables and mention some of the verses of the Scriptures and explain them (Luke 24:27). If someone should ever find, though, that the advice given by his guide is contrary to the word of God, then he should remember what the Bible says: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).
 - (d) It is not a good idea for the son or daughter to try to be a copy of his or her spiritual guide in everything. For what suits their father may not suit them at all. And perhaps their guides' circumstances, capabilities, and psychology might be completely different from theirs. But what they should do is to take the principles and apply them, as far as they are able to spiritually, and in accordance with what is appropriate for them and best suits their character. At the same time, the

spiritual guide should not try to cancel out the character of the one who follows him as a disciple. Nor should the guide make that person follow a course against his or her will, which can happen if the guide doesn't take into consideration that person's circumstances, psychology and inclinations. If the spiritual guidance, for example, involves calmness and solitariness, he shouldn't put pressure on all his pupils to be like that, for some of them might be sociable in character, and prefer serving people and being with them, helping them and gaining benefit from them in doing so.

- (e) Also, a person can have more than one guide, so that he can ask them individually for guidance concerning whatever aspects of life they are particularly experienced in, providing he does not fall into any contradictions in the advice he is given. If this or something like this should happen, then he can take it as an area for questioning, study and finding out more information. He should also be prepared to confront one view with another, without embarrassment, and to do so without mentioning any names. The saint Anba Antonius the Great used to take lessons from all the hermits around him, when he was starting out on his monastic life. He learned humility from one, silence from another, piety and asceticism from a third, how to pray and contemplate from a fourth and wisdom from a fifth etc...
- (f) A person might also need to make a step by step approach to the things that he learns from his guide, or from books. Not all the virtues are easy to put into practice. It probably needs time, and a long time at that, because the soul is unaccustomed to practicing this new virtue, and might put up opposition to it. It might also need a long time because of attacks by Satan, who always tries to obstruct those who are on the road to God, and these people might also encounter obstacles from their home life or from their surrounding environment, which hinder their progress on the spiritual road. Something which one grasps easily, may just as easily be lost! What is important is not that a person just practices a particular virtue, but that he makes it so firmly rooted in him that it becomes an integral part of his character. Therefore, every virtue which one does not persevere at acquiring over a period of time, is not likely to take root in one's life, and is liable to be inconsistent. So it is not good for a person to jump rapidly along the spiritual road, and try to cover it too soon, but rather he should take it calmly and deliberately, in a balanced way, and he must take

it one step at a time, until his footsteps are firm and steady, remembering the apostle's advice Not to think [of] [himself] more highly than he ought to think ... ” (Romans 12:3). Nor must he go rushing to the next particular step, until he has mastered the one before. And he should not try to put pressure on his guide or spiritual father to allow him to go too quickly.

- (g) One should not consider their spiritual guide merely as a means of implementing your spiritual desires. Don't present him with decisions that you have already made up your mind that you are going to carry out, but rather, present him with your desires, or better still, with suggestions, questions, or aspirations, so that he can tell you whether they are good for you or not. Do not press him to allow you to do something, and do not get angry if he doesn't give you permission. If you do, then the guidance given will be superficial, and in such a situation, you will become like someone following his own whims, just wanting his father to agree with him in order to give those whims or fancies spiritual legitimacy.
- (h) Before one seeks spiritual guidance, we must pray that God will give your guide the right thoughts which will be most appropriate for our life. This means that you pray that God's will be done in your life, through the guidance of this father or guide, and that God will lead you to receive the guidance that He wants to give you, by guiding your spiritual father or guide in what advice to give to you.
- (i) Realize that any virtues which you might practice according to your mood may lead you to seek or feel a false sense of glory. The church father say, “If you find a young man climbing to heaven on the strength of his own fancies, pull him back down to earth.” The point to watch here is that the person is acting according to his own understanding, and the Bible says: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding... ” (Proverbs 3:5). A person might cling to that path which seems to him to be straight, but by doing so he might bring upon himself a lot of harm. That road which appears to be so straight, might well be part of Satan s deception.
- (j) But what a dangerous situation it is when someone says that he receives his knowledge directly from God, and that he learns directly from Christ! Because of this, that person refuses to learn from others. And at the same time, he cannot be sure whether that thought which has come to him, is from God or not! The surprising thing is that people who have said that they have received knowledge

directly from God, have not been prophets, nor of the twelve disciples. Nor have such people been able to say, as the apostle Paul said: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you...” (1 Corinthians 11:23).

- (k) Instruction from God may mean learning from divine sources. We learn from God through the Holy Bible. We learn from our Lord Jesus from His holy life. Even so, we need somebody to explain these books and these examples to us, and we need somebody to lead us on the spiritual path. Learning is not just theoretical understanding, as much as it is actually putting that new knowledge into practice. If this were not the case, then why did God create teachers and guides? Why did the Lord say to the disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).
- (l) Whoever seeks to learn directly from God, or learn directly from Christ, probably lacks the humility to accept instruction from a teacher or guide, and has probably forgotten the words of the apostle: “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you” (Hebrews 13:7). And he goes on to say: “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17). St. Paul praised his disciple Timothy, the bishop, saying: “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith,” (2 Timothy 3:10). If learning from a teacher were unnecessary, then Paul would just have advised Timothy that his instruction and way of life would come to him directly from God.
- (m) The kind of thought or idea which rejects learning from the church and which wants to learn directly from God, is not an Orthodox one, nor is it one that is based on the gospels or the Bible. (By which I mean in the light of the Biblical texts which we have mentioned, and many others like them, which include all the verses which speak of teaching, spreading the gospel, guidance and preaching and the church’s duty to instruct). The spiritual life calls for a humble heart, and in being a disciple there is humbleness. Anyone who insists on learning directly from God, might run the risk of falling into pride. And pride can hand him over as an easy prey to Satan, who will give him whatever teaching he likes. All those who have ever invented new sects, and all heretics in the history of the

Church, have refused to learn from the Church and instead followed their own ideas, imagining that those ideas were from God. St. Macarius the Great had the idea of visiting the anchorite fathers in the very heart of the desert, and this great saint said: “I fought that idea for three years to see if it were from God or not!”

- (n) Sometimes we imagine that the Holy Spirit speaks to us to do this and that. The Bible 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 ” (1 John 4:1). And St. Paul also says: “Test all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). There are probably many sources of ideas which you imagine are from God. There are your own ideas, or your personal fantasies. And there are those ideas which have sunk into your mind when it was empty, which have come from things that you have read or heard before. This may be a trick of the Devil though, and so you need to proceed slowly and cautiously, to read the Bible, ask questions and seek guidance. We need to be humble and be disciples, and remember our guides who have spoken the word of God to us.

A Complete Surrender to God's Will: The Life of Abandonment

1. Introduction

- The single most important element in our spiritual life and our service life is total submission and surrender to God's will.
- Such total surrender to God's will is referred to by the early Church Fathers as *abandonment*.
- In order for our service life and personal spiritual life to be fruitful, we must live the life of abandonment.
- There is a prayer called the "whatever prayer" which represents this notion of abandonment. It goes like this:

Whatever You want Lord, I want.

Whatever You choose, I choose.

Whatever You say, I'll do.

Whatever You give, I'll receive.

Whatever You withhold, I'll accept.

Whatever You plan, I'll rejoice in.

Whatever, Lord, Whatever!

- The life of abandonment gives God permission to do with us whatever He pleases. If I'm really allowing Jesus to be the Lord and Master of my life, I've got to be ready to give up my will for His will, my plan for His plans, and my timetable for His timetable.

2. Examples of Those Who Prayed This Prayer

- Jesus Himself prayed the "whatever" prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane just before His crucifixion. Jesus prayed, "My Father, if this cup cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done."
- God's will was done. The crucifixion led to the Resurrection, which opened the door of salvation for us.

- Sometimes we prevent God’s will in our lives when we try to dictate to God what to do and when. We try to take matters into our own hands and leave God out of the picture due to our impatience, discouragement, and frustration. When we prevent God from carrying out His will in our lives, we prevent good things from happening in our lives. As an example, when a certain woman was sick with tuberculosis, she languished in bed for months, and the months turned into years. As her body grew weaker, she stopped struggling. She stopped beseeching God to do as she asked. She prayed that God do with her life whatever He desired. She prayed, “Do with me, Lord, whatever You want. Whatever You wish.” From that point on, she says, she began to recover.
- It is only in the life of total surrender to God, abandonment, that God’s work can be done and wonderful things can happen in our service life, spiritual life, and life in general.
- When a devout Christian who was told that he was coming down with Alzheimer’s disease, he said, “All my life I have given everything to God. If He wants my mind, He can have that too.” Whatever Lord, whatever!

3. Giving God Permission to Do Glorious Things With Our Lives

- There is no limit to what God can do with someone who prays the “whatever” prayer, the prayer of total surrender to God. Here are some further examples:
 - A simple virgin named Mary became the Mother of God when at the Annunciation she said “Be it done to me according to Your will.” She prayed the whatever prayer.
 - Simon Peter the fisherman became Simon Peter the rock on whose confession of the faith, that Jesus is Lord, the Church was built.
 - A tax collector named Matthew became an evangelist who wrote the first of the four Gospels.
 - Mary Magdalene, who had been a prostitute, became the first to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus.
 - A persecutor named Saul became Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles and the greatest missionary who ever lived.
- A Christian writer said the following about a complete self-surrender to God:

“The sure and solid foundation of our spiritual life is to give ourselves to God and put ourselves entirely in His hands, body, and soul. To forget ourselves completely so that He becomes our whole joy and His pleasure and glory, His being, our only good. To think of ourselves as objects sold and delivered, for God to do with what He likes. With this foundation laid, souls have but to spend their entire existence rejoicing that God is God, surrendering themselves so completely that they are happy to obey His commands whatever they may be and without question.”

4. Why Should We Pray the Whatever Prayer?

- Someone came up with the following answer as to why we should pray the whatever prayer.

“Many years ago, when I was trying to make a difficult decision, I turned to God for guidance. As I prayed, I came up with the following thoughts, and I’ve referred to them again and again when faced with a problem:

God is. God is good.

God is good to me.

God loves me - even more than I love myself.

God knows me - even better than I know myself.

God knows what is best for me

and lovingly works to make that happen.

Since God is good and loves me

and wants the best for me,

I can say a wholehearted yes to what God calls me to

be or do.

5. Have No Anxiety About Anything

- There is a great verse by St. Paul in times of anxiety that is consistent with the whatever prayer. It is, “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

- There is a beautiful story about the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was in prison during the second world war in Hitler's Germany. He was separated from his family until the time of his execution. He was certainly no stranger to anxiety. But through Christ, he had learned to overcome his anxiety, and he wrote in his diary these beautiful words: "From the moment we wake until we fall asleep, we must commend our loved ones wholly and unreservedly to God, and leave them in His hands, transforming our anxiety for them into prayers on their behalf." Total surrender, and abandonment to God.
- In the Old Testament, there is a beautiful example of total surrender from the life of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:14. Hezekiah received a very disturbing letter from his enemy. We read, "And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord" (2 Kings 19:14). So whatever our invading anxiety is, we can always do as Hezekiah did, spread it before the Lord in prayer. Total surrender and abandonment to God.
- When St. Paul says, "Have no anxiety about anything," he does *not* mean that we ought to be careless and indifferent about life. Of course, there are many things that we ought to be concerned about and be anxious about. But what St. Paul is saying here is that, after we have done all we can for them, we are to cast these burdens, every detail of them, upon the Lord, for "He cares for you," says the Apostle Peter. Total surrender and abandonment to God.

6. Conclusion

- For us to grow in our spiritual life, we must live the life of abandonment to God.
- For our service to become fruitful, we must constantly seek God's will and serve in total obedience and surrender (abandonment) to God.
- We close with this prayer: "Lord, help me not to dread what might happen, not to worry about what could happen, but to accept what does happen. Because You care for me and You love me more than I love myself. Whatever Lord, whatever! Amen."

Knowing God's Will

Introduction

- Knowing and doing God's will is essential for our spiritual journey. It is the only way we can experience the fullness of God in our life.
- Does the Bible give us a formula for discovering God's will? The scriptures do not describe a precise approach for finding God's plan. However, they clearly indicate our need to rely on our Lord Jesus for guidance. We are to rationally seek His will in our lives (our part), and we must depend on the Lord Jesus for guidance (His part).
- The reason that there is no formula for discovering God's will is because God does not want to lead us "with a bridle like a horse or a mule that has to be reigned in." He wants to lead us intelligently by the Holy Spirit according to the Word. As Psalm 32:8-9 says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you."
- There are many, many ways God can reveal His will to us. We certainly cannot enumerate all of them because God cannot be fully comprehended or understood, but we describe below several steps in discovering God's will.

1. Be in Harmony with God's Word and Law

- The first step in knowing God's will is that we have to be in harmony with the Bible, the Church, and the church teachings. We have to love what the Bible says and what the church says, and believe it is correct and the absolute truth. Psalm 40:8 says, "I delight to do Your will, Your law is within my heart."
- The Bible is the cornerstone for knowing God's will. If we read and meditate on the Bible daily, we will have a new way of thinking. When we are seeking God's guidance in a given situation, we will have the advantage of recalling what the scripture says about this situation.

- The Bible is God’s revelation and love letter to us. Without the Bible, we would not know about salvation, for example.
- The Bible describes God’s moral values such as the Ten Commandments. Isaiah 8:20 says, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to the word, it is because there is no light in them.”
- The Bible provides spiritual guidance and truths that will come into play when making decisions. Psalm 119:105 says “Your word is a Lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”
- The Bible is where God’s promises are revealed.

2. Surrender (Abandonment): Be Willing to do God’s Will

- In order to know God’s will, we must first have the desire and be willing to do God’s will. To do God’s will, we must surrender our life to Jesus Christ. When we surrender our life to Jesus, there is a merging of wills, and His will becomes our will. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus gives us a great example, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39).
- Knowing God’s will is not relevant for us if we have no desire to do it.
- God most often reveals His will when we turn our life over to Him and totally depend on Him for guidance. Surrender requires developing an intimate and faithful relationship with Jesus.
- Thus, in order to know God’s will, we must first have the desire to do His will, and this comes by developing a deep and intimate relationship with Him and surrendering our life completely to Him.
- Jesus is a great example of surrender. He came to do His Father’s will. “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).
- If we are willing to do God’s will, God will reveal His will to us. “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17).
- St. James tells us that we should not be planning our life and that we should be trying to do God’s will. “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 4:13-15).

- In the Book of Jeremiah, we read that God's will is much more beneficial than our own. "For I know that thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).
- Also, we read in Proverbs that our will leads to sorrow, death, and destruction. "There is a way that seems right to a man. But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 16:25).

3. Fervent Faithful Prayer for Guidance

- Prayer is perhaps the main key to knowing God's will. There is nothing more personal to God than prayer. Prayer is our dialogue with Jesus. We can only get to know Him personally through prayer.
- With God's infinite knowledge, He already knows what we need. However, we still need to ask God for His help in a specific situation because we need the spiritual discipline of asking in order to be reminded that everything happens through His will.
- Jesus says, "If you Ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:14). Thus, God guarantees us that His will always be done if we seek it for our life.
- When we pray for guidance or for anything, we should always ask in faith. St. James says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind" (James 1:5-6).
- Praying for others also facilitates God's will to happen in our lives as well as the lives of those we pray for. "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 5:16).
- We should always have confidence that if we ask anything in prayer according to God's will, He will hear us. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14).

4. Do What Lies Nearest You First

- A great way of knowing God's will is to look around us and use our circumstances and the opportunities that come our way and are most feasible and realistic for us. For example, we can serve and minister in our own church rather than look far away and try to serve elsewhere. We should seek friendships and relationships that are near by and within our grasp. We should look for opportunities that are close by. God puts us in certain places for a reason, to carry out His will. God's will is always close by.
- We should do things step by step and not try and do too much at once, or look too far ahead into the future. God usually only reveals the part of His will for us that is necessary at the time, and thus we should only focus on that and not extrapolate out into the future. Examples include where to live, children, friends, career, marriage, relationships, service, etc...
- In John 16:12, we read that Jesus has many things to tell us, but we can't bear them now. Jesus says, "I still have many thing to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). We should do what we can do and what we know to be correct, right now. Then He will show us what to do next.
- In Proverbs 3:6, we read "In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path"
- Luke 16:10 tells us to be faithful in the least first and God will give you more. We read, "He who is faithful in what is least is also faithful in much" (Luke 16:10).
- In Jeremiah 12:5 we read that if we don't obey God in the small things how will we obey during the big test? "If you have run with footmen and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?" (Jeremiah 12:5).

5. Always Take the Option that Will Bring the Most Glory to God

- In 1 Corinthians 10:31-32, we read " Do ALL to the glory of God! Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or or to the Church of God".
- In 1 Peter 4:11, we read "That God in all things might be glorified!
- In Revelation 14:7, we read that part of the last warning messages to the world contain these instructions "give glory to Him". This indicates that most of the world will not be giving glory to God at the end of times.

- The decisions we make in our daily life indicate whose side we are on.
- Romans 14:13 says “ Don’t cause anyone to stumble.”
- Mark 9:42 says “Don’t hurt ever, the least of God’s children.”

6. Seek Christian Counsel

- One of the greatest ways of knowing God’s will is to seek counsel from parents, priests, church elders, mentors, godly people, or trusted Christian friends. The Book of Proverbs says, “Prepare plans by consultation” (Proverbs 20:18).
- When seeking such counsel, we will most often find God’s will coming in the form of consistent advice from several different sources. In Proverbs 11:14, we read that “There is safety in a multitude of counselors.”
- It is good to seek several sources of counsel when pondering a decision or issue in life. We read, “In abundance of counselors there is victory” (Proverbs 24:6).
- We must however, be careful with who we counsel with. St. Paul says that many people have a “form of Godliness, but they deny its power” (2 Timothy 3:5-8). St. Paul also spoke of many false teachers in these verses.
- Psalms 1:1-2 says “Don’t follow the counsel of the ungodly.” Jeremiah 17:5-10 says “cursed is the man that puts his trust in man.”
- A good Christian counselor should always point us to a “Thus says the Lord”. “A man’s counsel is sweet to his friend” (Proverbs 27:9).
- Some of the areas that need great Christian counsel are dating, marriage, relationships, purity, choosing a career, choosing where to live or where to go to school, children, choosing friends, relationships with parents, service, and Church doctrine.
- Some examples of counselors: Timothy and St. Paul, St. Antony and St. Athanasius. These are examples of mentor and disciple. The Apostles Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) is an example of Christian counsel provided by the Church.

7. Listen to the Voice of the Holy Spirit

- God's will is revealed to us many times through the voice of the Holy Spirit who speaks to us. When we are willing to listen, we can hear His voice.
- When we are at peace and ready to do God's will, we hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. It is a peaceful voice within that we keep hearing until we have conviction to do God's will.
- Isaiah 30:20-21 tells us that though we go through adversity and affliction, God will talk to us. We read, "And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:20-21).
- That still small voice that makes us feel uncomfortable sometimes is the Holy Spirit speaking to us. The voice that makes us feel peace and comfort is the Holy Spirit speaking to us. In 1 Kings 19:11-12, we read that God doesn't speak to us in a earthquake or fire, but in a still small voice. "Then He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord, And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind and earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice" (1 Kings 19-11-12).

8. Humbly Wait on the Lord

- Patience is a key virtue in knowing God's will. As God is patient with us, we must also be patient in knowing and discovering God's will. Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- Patience requires that we not jump to conclusions and make spontaneous, impulsive, emotional, and irrational decisions. Decisions made under those circumstances can never be God's will.
- We read in Proverbs, "Wait on the Lord, and He will save you" (Proverbs 20:22).
- In Psalm 37:4-7, we read, "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord. Trust also in Him, and He

shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.”

- God cannot forget us or forget our problems or struggles. God thinks about us constantly. Isaiah 49:15-16 says, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget; yet I will not forget you. See I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me.”
- In Revelation 14:12, we read “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” Thus, those who overcome the beast and his mark have an identifying characteristic of patience. They keep God’s commandments and they humbly wait for Jesus.

9. God’s Providence: God Opens and Closes Doors in Our Life

- Doors opening and doors closing is perhaps our most common experience in learning and knowing God’s will. We have all experienced open and closed doors. This is perhaps the easiest way that God can clearly reveal His will to us.
- We have to learn from our experiences in life on which doors open and which doors close so that we can better understand God’s will. When we encounter obstacles in life, we should learn from it, and when we see things going smoothly, we ought to learn from it as well.
- When God opens a door for us to accomplish His will, it is accompanied by peace, joy, security and God’s confidence, no obstacles or friction whatsoever, and victory.
- When God closes doors it is quite often accompanied by friction, obstacles, anger, loss of peace and joy, hostility, injustice, sadness, loss of hope, and despair.
- When a door becomes closed for us, we should not fight it. Things will become worse. When a door is opened, we should go in and not fear what is on the other side.
- St. Paul tells us to watch for open and closed doors in our life. We read, “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord” (2 Corinthians 2:12).
- When doors become open for us, we should not worry about what is on the other side of the door. We move forward with our eyes on Jesus and watch for His lead and make sure that we do not violate His Word as we move forward.

- In Isaiah 45:1-3, we read that God will open doors and break in pieces the gates to accomplish His will for our life. We can count on it! We read, “Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus whose right hand I have held - to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: ‘I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel” (Isaiah 45:1-3).
- Even the mighty city and nation of Babylon was no match for our Lord. All throughout the Bible we can see incident after incident of God’s will being accomplished by the opening and closing of doors. Here are some more examples:
 - Jonah - God swiftly closed the door to Tarshish when Jonah disobeyed God, and later opened the door to Nineveh when Jonah repented and obeyed.
 - Balaam - God closed the door on Balaam when Balaam disobeyed God, and we read “And the Angel of the Lord took His stand in the way as an adversary against him” (Numbers 22:22).
 - Saul - Jesus closed the door on Saul on his way to Damascus and this closed door transformed Saul’s life.
 - Moses - God opened the doors for Moses and the Israelites to leave Egypt.
 - Peter - Jesus forgave Peter for his denials and opened the doors for him (John 21) by forgiving him and asking him to “tend His sheep.”
- One of the methods that God uses in opening and closing doors and to accomplish His will is that He turns people’s hearts. The turning of hearts is a very common device God uses to accomplish His will.
 - God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and in the end God was glorified and the Israelites were freed.
 - On Palm Sunday, as Jesus rode through Jerusalem, He was treated like a king, and then moments later, their hearts were turned and Jesus was treated like a criminal.
- Some verses showing God’s control on the heart are:
 - “just as it is written, ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day.’” (Romans 11:8).

- In Mark 4:11-12, we read “And He was saying to them, ‘To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, in order that while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing, they may hear and not understand lest they return and be forgiven.’”
- In 2 Thessalonians 2:11, we read “And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false.”
- In Romans 9:18, we read “So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”
- In Exodus 4:21, we read “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.’” See also Exodus 7:3; 9:12; 10:1; 11:10; 14:4 where God hardens Pharaoh’s heart.
- In Exodus 8:32, we read “But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.”
- In Exodus 14:17, we read “And as for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen.”
- In Deuteronomy 2:30, we read “But Sihon king of Heshbon was not willing for us to pass through his land; for the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to deliver him into your hand, as he is today.”
- In 2 Chronicles 25:20, we read “But Amaziah would not listen, for it was from God, that He might deliver them into the hand of Joash because they had sought the gods of Edom.”
- In Isaiah 6:10, we read “Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed.”
- In Deuteronomy 29:4, we read, “Yet to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.”
- In Jeremiah 24:7, we read, “And I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.”
- In 1 Samuel 10:9, we read, “Then it happened when he turned his back to leave

Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day.”

- We must be careful with this issue of “open and shut doors”, because Satan himself can also open and shut doors of opportunity. St. Paul says that “Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).
- We also have to be careful that we do not manipulate our circumstances in order “open and close doors” according to our desire and will.

10. Make a Decision and Implement It

- After we have gone through all these steps, now we move forward in the Lord. We must have courage that the Lord is with us! (Joshua 1:5-6)
- “You have wholly followed the Lord. He has kept you alive to do His will.” Now go after it! Be like Joshua and say “Give me this mountain!” (Joshua 14:9-12).

Holy Zeal

Introduction

- What is Holy Zeal? Zeal is a fire that burns: Holy zeal is a fire burning in the heart of a believer which impels him, with great enthusiasm, to strive his hardest for the purpose of saving others and building the Kingdom. This is the kind of zeal we should have in our service life and Sunday School service in particular.
- Just as it was said about our Lord and Master, that He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4) so too, the person who is aglow with holy zeal wants everybody to be saved.
- He not only wants it, but works for it with all his might and all his feelings, without letting up, like David the prophet, who 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. 132:3-5).
- Thus someone whom holy zeal has set ablaze, never lets up or rests, until he finds a place for the Lord in the heart of everyone, so that by all possible means he might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22).
- Holy Zeal is that fire about which our Lord Jesus Christ said: “I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Luke 12:49)
- How beautiful are the words of the Psalm: “Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flames of fire” (Psalm 104:4).

1. Making God our Number One Priority

- It is impossible to have zeal and spiritually burn within if God is not the number one priority in our life. For God to be the number one priority in our life, we must
 - develop an intimate relationship with Jesus and make that relationship the most important relationship in our life, through prayer, reading the Bible, coming to church, taking communion, living a life of purity, and doing good deeds.

- surrender our life to Jesus Christ, putting everything in His hands and letting Him be in charge of our life in every possible way.
- truly feel that the cares of the world are secondary to God in our life, including our careers, school, making money, entertainment, worldly pleasures, and even family.
- always reorganize our schedule to make our service to God our number one priority, and then honestly carry out the tasks that we were assigned to do.

2. Place our Concerns, Problems, Tribulations at the Feet of Jesus

- The only way a person can “fly” in their spiritual life, is to literally unload *all* of their troubles and spread all of their concerns, troubles, and anxieties before Jesus.
- In the Old Testament, there is a beautiful example from the life of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:14. Hezekiah received a very disturbing letter from his enemy. It was the kind of letter that would cause a person much anxiety. We read, “And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord” (2 Kings 19:14). So whatever our invading concern or anxiety is, we can always do as Hezekiah did, spread it before the Lord in prayer.
- St. Paul says, “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, and whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:6-8).
- The person who constantly carries their troubles and problems becomes enslaved to them and is unable to move forward and grow spiritually. Their troubles always weigh them down like chains, and their troubles always increase, eventually choking them.
- The zeal of a servant can be assessed by the parable of the sower. Seeds either fall by the wayside (lacking understanding or interest in spirituality), on stony ground (no roots to our spirituality), thorns (we get choked up from the cares and problems of this world), or on good ground.

- Jesus says, “Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). And if we have no rest today, it is because we do not bring our problems and troubles to Jesus. We try to carry them alone, or we take them elsewhere, and they literally choke us.
- Now it is interesting when we look at the life of Jesus, we see that He Himself was certainly no stranger to anxieties or concerns. He was terribly anxious, for example, in the Garden of Gethsemane right before His crucifixion. Just before His crucifixion recall that Jesus was so anxious that His “sweat became like great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). And we hear Jesus spreading His anxieties before the Lord in prayer in Gethsemane, as He says to God the Father, “Now My soul is troubled” (Matthew 26:38). Then He said, “Father save Me from this hour. Remove this cup from Me” (Matthew 26:39). But then after prayer came relinquishment (surrender), as He was able to say, “Nevertheless, not My will but Yours be done heavenly Father” (Matthew 26:39). So we see how Jesus dealt with His anxiety. First there is prayer, then there is relinquishment, and then comes peace, as Jesus says, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). “Father into Your hands I commend My spirit” (Luke 23:46).

So we see the steps that Jesus teaches us in dealing with anxiety, as He did in the Garden of Gethsemane:

- **Prayer** - Matthew 26:38-39
- **Relinquishment (surrender)** - Matthew 26:39
- **Peace** - Luke 23:34, Luke 23:46
- David the Psalmist followed these three steps. Nearly every Psalm he wrote starts out with prayer about his anxieties, then he surrenders his life to God, then he finds peace.
- In addition to our problems, we must not get caught up in our day to day affairs and let worldly cares consume our time, thinking and energy. Such worldly cares include taking care of things in the house, food, our jobs, school, clothing, entertainment, computers, hobbies, etc...

3. Have an Inner Peace

- It is impossible to grow spiritually if we do not have a real, permanent peace within,

the peace that comes from the Holy Spirit. It is the peace from God that “surpasses all understanding” as St. Paul says.

- We must have peace in our life to be filled with Holy Zeal. This peace can only come when we have a real and loving relationship with Jesus Christ.
- We read, “Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14). Also, “Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble” (Psalm 119:165).
- The person who is peaceful is slow to anger, is very careful with their words, and seeks to build up and encourage.
- The person who has true inner peace remains peaceful when criticized, insulted, slandered, despised, or unjustly treated.
- The person who has inner peace is also a peacemaker. Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.”
- So a person becomes peaceful when he “loves the law” of God, as David says. Also, a person becomes peaceful when he trusts in the Lord. “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” (Isaiah 26:3).
- Setting our sights on God gives us peace. “For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).
- St. Paul said “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Romans 14:17-19).
- Jesus says “My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).
- Jesus says “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

4. Contentment

- For a servant to move higher on the spiritual ladder, they must be content with their life. We cannot have zeal while we are resentful, envious, jealous, feeling insecure, or bitter. We must be content with our circumstances and conditions.
- St. Paul says, “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am” (Philippians 4:11). St. Paul goes on to say, “I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (Philippians 4:12).
- We read “Some soldiers were questioning Him, saying, what about us, what shall we do? And He said to them, ‘Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages’” (Luke 3:14).
- St. Paul says “Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).
- Thus, the person who is truly content remains content when insulted, slandered, criticized, or unjustly treated.
- St. Paul also says “But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction” (2 Timothy 6:6-9).
- St. Paul again says “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).

5. Giving: Being Active in Good Deeds and Works

- The true servant greatly seeks a balance between faith and works in their life. They heed the words of St. James in the verse “faith without works is dead.”
- Doing good deeds and being active in church works is a great tool for building up one’s spiritual zeal. This is why we must encourage servants to seek those who need help in various ways whether it be in school, finding a job, writing a letter, listening to ones problems or concerns, etc... These are all examples of good works and deeds.
- St. Paul says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24).
- Examples of works include physical work for the church, such as cleaning, maintenance, cooking, or other needs. These are great tools for building one’s zeal. They can serve as igniters and energizers.
- Giving to others is one of the greatest deeds we can do. We must learn and enjoy giving to others. Jesus said, ‘ “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).
- Those people who truly follow Jesus are above all, *givers*. Giving is therapy for the soul. It keeps our hearts open to others, and sensitive to their needs. Giving is the secret of a mentally and emotionally healthy life.
- We need to give for our mental and physical well being. A child becomes an adult when he or she stops taking and starts giving. In fact one of the best signs of maturity is the ability to give. So Jesus was indeed correct when He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”
- During a church retreat once, one of the servants complained to the priest that Christianity is one continual give, give, give! And the priest replied, “Thank you for the finest definition of Christianity I have ever heard! Christianity is indeed one constant and continual give, give, give. That’s the way it all began. God gave, He gave His only Son. His Son gave, He gave His life on the cross so that we might have eternal life. His disciples gave. They left their homes and their businesses to devote themselves full time to Christ as spreaders of His good news throughout the world. And nearly all of the twelve apostles died a martyrs death. They gave their very lives for the Lord Jesus. And through the ages, the the work of Christ has prospered to the extent that Christians have been willing to give, give, give.”

6. Encouragement

- Encouragement is key tool for building zeal. We must learn to encourage one another. We must learn in our service life to be positive thinkers and always view the cup as half full rather than half empty.
- It is much easier to be negative rather than positive. Negativity destroys and tears down. We have to practice and gain the spiritual virtue of encouragement. The right encouragement can really ignite and elevate one's spiritual level. Encouragement is what is needed to build Holy Zeal.
- "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).
- "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going" (John 14:1-4).
- "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).
- "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, and whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Concluding Remarks

- If we are not hot, then we must be either cold or lukewarm. Lukewarmness is the most dangerous spiritual condition to be in. Jesus says, "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:16).
- We become lukewarm towards God when we make worldly things our priority in life. Jesus warns us of this when He says, "Everyone therefore who acknowledges Me before others, I also will acknowledge before My Father in heaven; but whoever

denies Me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for My sake will find it. Whoever welcomes you welcomes Me, and whoever welcomes Me welcomes the one who sent Me" (Matthew 10:32-40).

Spiritual Maturity

Introduction

- Spiritual maturity a key element in service. The servant who is spiritually mature is a fruitful servant and a great ambassador for Jesus Christ. Here, we describe the major criteria in spiritual maturity.

1. A Real Relationship with Jesus Christ

- One cannot grow or mature spiritually without a deep, intimate, and real relationship with Jesus Christ. This is by far the most important and fundamental element in service. Jesus says, “without Me, you can do nothing (John 15:5).”
- What does it mean to have a relationship with Christ? There are five key elements:
 - **Personal prayer** - This is by far the most important element in developing a relationship with Christ. Jesus says, “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:5-7). There are two forms of prayer: personal prayer and group prayer. The devil tempts us most in personal prayer since this is the most powerful type of prayer in developing a relationship with Jesus. Group prayer is much easier and comes with less obstacles, hindrances, and temptations. The devil even encourages it so as to instill in us the sin of pride and self-righteousness, as we saw in the parable of the pharisee and the publican. It is in personal prayer that we struggle to stand on our feet and earnestly pray. The fruits of this type of prayer are infinite.
 - **Reading the Bible** - The Bible is the word of God. It is his love letter to us. We know who Jesus is when reading the Bible, and the Holy Spirit has a profound effect on our lives when we submit ourselves to the teachings of the Bible. Jesus speaks to us through the Bible.
 - **The Sacraments** - Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ is an essential aspect of developing a relationship with Christ. We cannot have eternal life without it.

Jesus says, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54). Christ abides in us when we take Holy Communion, as He says, “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (John 6:56). Repentance and confession is another essential aspect of our relationship with Christ.

- **Works** - Our relationship with Christ develops as we do good works and good deeds. Works puts our relationship with Christ into action. Our relationship with Christ is proved and demonstrated by our works and actions. St. James says, “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20)
- **Fasting** - Fasting and prayer go hand in hand, and our relationship with Christ cannot be fully developed without fasting. Jesus consistently puts fasting and prayer hand in hand in the Gospels, as He repeatedly says, “However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21).

2. Sacrifice and Humility

- The person who is spiritually mature always puts others before himself. He tries to comfort others first before he seeks comfort for himself. The sacrificial person is content with being last. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:3).
- The spiritually mature person is one who is totally unselfish, and always seeks what is best for the church service through prayer and guidance, showing total impartiality at all times. “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21).
- One of the greatest signs of spiritual maturity is when a person stops taking and starts giving. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).
- Humility is a fundamental aspect of spiritual maturity. The spiritually mature person never feels they are important, rather they feel that they are privileged and unworthy to serve. They never feel or dwell on their talents or accomplishments, and they truly give God the glory in everything they do. St. Paul says, “serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting

of the Jews” (Acts 20:19). Also, St. Paul says, “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12).

3. Emotional and Mental Stability

- The one who is emotionally unstable can never be spiritual mature. Spiritually mature people are predictable, strong, and steady. They don’t go up and down in their moods not do they have mood swings. They are not pouters, nor do they have instantaneous flaring and then calming of temper. “For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:7-8). Also, we read “as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16).
- The spiritually mature person does not go in and out of depression. For it is quite often the case that the person who is depressed is greatly lacking and may be weak in his relationship with Christ. Christ is the one who puts us in our right mind. “Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind” (Mark 5:15).

4. Wisdom

- To be wise in a spiritual sense means to have good godly judgment. Wisdom is an understanding of what is true, right, and lasting.
- Wisdom is an important gift from God that is vital in effective and fruit-bearing service.
- Wisdom is given to those who servants who are truly are humble and obedient, and servants who seek an honest and deep intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.
- The wise person always sees the big picture in service, handles matters with care, love, and respect.
- The wise person knows when to speak and when to say silent and how to diffuse a difficult situation with the right speech or actions. The wise person always knows how to unite people and be a peacemaker.
- The wise person has a sharp and alert conscience, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and speaks as the Holy Spirit commands him.
- In the book of Proverbs, we are encouraged to seek wisdom, as Solomon says, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7).
- Likewise in the New Testament, we are also expected to walk in wisdom, as the Apostle Paul says, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15). We also read, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:17).
- St. John Climacus says, “To put the matter more generally, discernment is, and is recognized to be, as solid understanding of the will of God in all times, in all places, in all things; and is found only among those who are pure in heart, in body, and in speech.”

5. Unity

- The spiritually mature servant is one who always strives for unity and harmony in their service, and in their relationships with others.

- Spiritual unity is a major component of service. Jesus met with his disciples often in the Upper Room. Also, we read in Acts 1:14, “They continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” This is a key verse for unity in service.
- Also, in Acts 2:1, we read, “When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were with one accord in one place.” These two verses serve as model verses for unity in our service.
- The desire for unity comes when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, as were the disciples before and after Pentecost. Thus, we become united in our service when our spiritual life is alive and inflamed by the Holy Spirit.
- Saint Paul also says “fulfill my joy in being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:2-3). Saint Paul tells us here that unity in service requires humility and obedience.
- The servant who strives for unity is also a peacemaker. Peacemakers are mentioned in the beatitudes, where Jesus says, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).
- Thus, the servant who stirs up divisions, quarrels, arguments, or babbles things without knowing their meaning (“idle babblings”), is one who is not seeking unity in service. St. Paul says, “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Timothy 6:20).
- Indeed, Saint Paul says, “But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:23-26).

6. Obedience

7. Church Tradition and Teachings

8. Give God the Glory

Impartiality in Service

1. Introduction

- The word “impartial” means to be unbiased or just.
- A critical part of service is to be impartial with all those whom we serve, that is, to be unbiased, just, and fair.
- Impartiality means never showing favoritism to anyone, or never being unreasonably tough on anyone. The impartial servant is completely balanced in their treatment of everyone.
- The impartial servant is one who is spiritually mature and one who is able to always use wisdom in their relationship with others. It is the person who seeks unity and oneness in service. It is a person whose actions and decisions are guided by the Holy Spirit. Impartiality is a sign of unselfishness and humility.
- Partiality creates division, disharmony, and discontent from others in our service.

2. What does the Bible about Impartiality?

- St. Paul makes this issue abundantly clear when he says in Romans 2:11, “For there is no partiality with God.” He says this in the context of salvation for Jews and Gentiles.
- God doesn’t look at the person, but at his conduct to see if it is righteous or unrighteous. The issue is not whether a person is poor or rich, Jew or Gentile, man or woman, educated or uneducated, wise or foolish. God’s sentence is based strictly on character as manifested by our deeds. He is impartial and cannot be bribed. This is the way we should all serve.
- Impartiality by God means that God does not look at the outward appearance but rather at one’s heart. First Samuel 16:7 says, “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” God is not partial. Partiality is the sin of judging outward circumstances and not inward merit. To have respect for a person’s appearance is to rule in favor of what you see on the surface rather than what you know to

be true in the heart. Only an evil judge would so violate justice. God cannot and will not do that.

- God does not have a chosen people. Jesus came equally for everyone. Likewise, we should serve everyone equally. There is no one chosen for service nor is anyone special in being served. We're all the same and we must treat all of the kids in the same manner.
- Partiality creates division and disharmony in service, as it did at one point with St. Peter.
- Jesus taught St. Peter a great lesson about impartiality in Acts Chapter 10 when Peter had his vision in which he was told to eat all of the four-footed animals, etc... This was God's way of teaching Peter that Christianity is not only for the Jews, but for the Gentiles also. Peter then went on to preach the Gospel to Cornelius and to baptize him and his family.
- We thus learn from Peter's experience that our service is not only to a select group of people, but rather to all. This is the way God intended it, and God does not bless our service unless it is done with impartiality.
- As another example, our impartial God requires the same conditions of repentance for each and all. God has given one plan of salvation for all mankind. St. Peter gave the terms of salvation when he stated, "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" (Acts 2:38).
- In Acts 17:30, St. Paul states "Truly, the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent."
- Thus God did not give you one command and to me a different command. Each and all, that is, everyone of us has been given the same commandments. God does not expect you to do one thing for salvation and for me to do something else. If we are going to be saved, it will be because we have done the same thing. If not, then God is not impartial.
- One person does not become a Christian one way, and another person becomes a Christian some other way. Jesus said, "Unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

- St. Paul says in Galatians 2:6, “But from those who seemed to be something whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me”.
- Also, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:7-8).
- “And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him” (Ephesians 6:9).
- In the Book of Revelation, we read, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (Revelation 7:9).
- Here, the Apostle John describes an assembly of redeemed people. This innumerable assembly transcended every demographic barrier. He saw them stand before the Supreme Throne indicating their right to stand in proximity to the King of Kings. He saw them stand before the Lamb which signified the imputation of righteousness to their life and salvation also. There were not any restrictions placed upon these people, no biased treatment because of gender, race, age, or native language.
- Notice John’s demographic account of the saved believers:
 - They were from all nations.
 - They were from all kindred and people (Races and Tribes).
 - They all had different tongues and were diverse in their spoken language.
- The Apostle James writes “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality” (James 2:1). Here, St. James is instructing the people to not possess or embrace the Christian faith in one hand while holding partiality and prejudicial favoritism in the other. This combination is intolerable. When St. James addressed this situation, it was an era of thought when wealth and possessions indicated God’s favoritism. St. Paul says, “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him” (Romans 10:12).

3. Practical Questions We Should Ask Ourselves

- Am I always all-inclusive in my church service? Am I fair and consistent with everyone?
- Am I always willing to do the same service for everyone in my Sunday School class?
- Do I treat everyone with the same attention, love, and respect?
- Do I tend to favor the “good kids” or the “popular kids”?
- Do I give the same attention and service to the “hard, troubled, and not so popular” kids?
- Do I apply the same sets of rules, regulations, and standards to everyone?

4. Correctives to Partiality

- Pray to God to give me wisdom in treating others equally and impartially.
- Ask for guidance from the Holy Spirit to give me an alert conscience and to be sensitive to this issue of impartiality.
- Constantly examine my actions towards others and make sure they are consistent, fair, and impartial.
- Always strive for unity and obedience in my service.

5. Conclusion

- The church service must maintain an attitude of inclusiveness and never exclusiveness. If we cease to function as impartial and approachable God-fearing servants, our service is doomed for failure. God will not bless our service and our service will create division and disharmony in the church.
- As long as there is opportunity to reach someone for Christ, we must do so apart from of any predisposition that would be perceived as partial. Partiality is *not* an attribute of God and it can't be in our service either!

Whom are You Trying to Please?

1. Introduction

- There are three types of pleasers in this world: self-pleasers, men-pleasers, and God-pleasers.
- In our service life, we must continually examine ourselves to see who we are trying to please. Being a self-pleaser or men-pleaser is an extremely dangerous condition in service, and the servant who is in this condition can become a great stumbling block to others in their spiritual life.
- A servant is at a very high risk of total spiritual decline and losing their salvation as a result of being a self-pleaser or men-pleaser.
- The single most spiritual goal in service is to be a God-pleaser, that is one who truly seeks to only glorify God in their service, and seeks only to please God in their service. They do this through the utmost humility, honesty, love, and obedience to God.

2. Self-pleasers

- The self-pleaser is one who is selfish. They do things to only please and glorify themselves. They have various motives for this, including satisfying their ego, their pride, their self-righteousness, their popularity, and their self-image.
- We exhibit selfishness when
 - **we are lovers of ourselves** - St. Paul says that in the last days, “For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Timothy 3:2-5).
 - **we please ourselves** - “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1).

- **we seek our own profit** - “Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 10:33).
“For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:21).
- **we seek after gain** - “Yes, they are greedy dogs Which never have enough. And they are shepherds Who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, Every one for his own gain, From his own territory” (Isaiah 56:11).
- **we seek glory** - “And He said to her, What do you wish? She said to Him, Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom” (Matthew 20:21).
- **we live to ourselves** - “and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15).
- **we neglect the poor** - “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).
- **we serve God for reward** - “Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, So that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you, Says the LORD of hosts, Nor will I accept an offering from your hands” (Malachi 1:10).
- **we perform duty for reward** - “Her heads judge for a bribe, Her priests teach for pay, And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us” (Micah 3:11).
- St. Paul gives a beautiful discourse on the God-pleaser when he says “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:1-4). These are model verses for a servant. If we could do what St. Paul says in these verses, our service would be heavenly.

3. Men-pleasers

- The men-pleaser is the most subtle and perhaps most dangerous condition for a servant because it is hard to detect and often goes unnoticed by the servant himself and unnoticed by others.
- St. Paul says, “Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him” (Ephesians 6:5-9).
- Also, we read “Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God” (Colossians 3:22).
- In Galatians, we read “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).
- Characteristics of a men-pleaser:
 - **They seek the approval of men above the approval of God**
 - * Human beings have a propensity that welcomes the praise of their fellows. They enjoy being complimented or honored, and become intoxicated and consumed by this need, then crave the praise of men.
 - * The next step in this moral digression is, to seek human approval as a personal priority. Those exposed by the Lord in Matthew 6 were guilty of this. They did their “charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.”
 - * The same motive prompted their ostentatious praying and fasting. Among some of the leading Pharisees, there was at least intellectual confidence in the claims of Christ, but “they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God,” (John 12:41).
 - * Again the problem was described by our Lord when He said: “Woe to you

when all men speak well of you, for so did their father to the false prophets,” (Luke 6:26).

- * The personal priority of every child of God must be, to first and foremost seek the approval of God, regardless of how men respond to our “service.” Our Father is a “rewarder of those who diligently seek Him,” (Hebrews 11:6).

– **They yearn for and cling to positions, social standing, and authority**

- * One of the great characteristics of a men-pleaser is that they are people who love positions, social standing, and authority, and will do anything to cling to them: thus they become men-pleasers to retain or obtain positions, social standing, and authority.
- * This type of men-pleaser puts himself in a very dangerous trap. They become willing to stray from the truth, backbite, gossip, slander, and act unjustly in order to please others, so that they can retain their positions, authority, or social standing.
- * Their salvation no longer becomes a priority in their life, and they grow to love the things of the world. They become blind to the spiritual way of life.
- * The servant must get away from this trap by always speaking and standing up for the truth in love, obedience, and respect. St. Paul says, “Speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). The servant must constantly examine himself and place God above the world. He must place God above men!
- * The classic example of a men-pleaser in the Bible was Pontius Pilate. Pilate knew Jesus had done nothing wrong, but we read “So Pilate wanting to gratify the crowd released Barabbas to them” (Mark 15:15).
- * Recall how Pilate and Herod became friends. Jesus was sent back and forth between Pilate and Herod. We read “That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other” (Luke 23:12). Men-pleasers will go out of their way to be cruel and unjust to others for worldly gain.

– **They adapt their message to their audiences**

- * Men-pleasers deliver to their audience (Sunday School kids, fellow servants, peers, church leadership, clergy, members of the congregation) that which will elicit their approval. They have made this their priority. They change

and adapt their message from audience to audience, not out of conviction, but to please and to become known as crowd pleasers.

- * St. Paul and St. Timothy are examples of men who were not willing to do this. St. Paul told the Corinthians: “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church,” (1 Corinthians 4:17).
- * When people “will not endure sound doctrine,” they should hear it anyway, regardless of their response or consequences. When sound doctrine is not the desire of the heart, audiences will “heap up for themselves teachers,” and men-pleasers will heap up for themselves a following. Specifically, in 2 Timothy 4:1-5, we read, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”
- * This craving to please your audience can quickly lead to language so concerned with diplomacy, it conveys nothing substantial or scriptural, only sentiment. This kind of diplomacy often leads to a twist of the truth, deceptions of the truth, and erroneous Orthodox teachings.

– **They overlook and neglect the truth**

- * God requires servants to “convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2). This duty is neglected by men-pleasers in situations where such wouldn’t be welcomed, and therefore, the truth is put aside and it vanishes from one’s conscience.
- * It is one thing to “speak the truth in love,” (Ephesians 4:15), but to speak without truth is not loving, even if praised and applauded by men.
- * There is the exhibition of this, when servants step so delicately, they trample over truth to keep people happy.

* An honest reading of First and Second Timothy and Titus can bring us to a better understanding of real service, and supply both motive and method to avoid the immature, frenzied work to gain the good esteem of men, leaving truth unspoken and sinners lost.

4. **Conclusion** - Every servant must ask himself the question stated in Galatians 1:10. "Do I seek to please men?" St. Paul responds to his own question by saying, "For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ." Therefore, the men-pleaser can never be a true servant of Christ.

To be continued...

Christian Communication

1. Introduction

- Christian communication, especially in service, is the most important element in Christian unity.
- Christian communication is what makes a service thrive and grow in its spiritual fervor and potential.
- Many problems in service arise from poor communication, no communication, or inappropriate and sinful communication.
- To study Christian communication, we focus on Ephesian 4:1-3: “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”.
- The text above says that we must “endeavor” to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This word means to give diligence in the matter.
- Perhaps one of our greatest failures as members of the church is our lack of communication skills. The Bible actually contains the principles of communication that we need to communicate effectively with our fellow man and one another. It is incumbent upon us to “give diligence” to make sure that we do communicate appropriately.
- Our very unity as a church depends upon our effective communication one with another.
- These principles also apply in the work place, at school, in our families, and anywhere we interact with other humans in our society.
- To communicate effectively, we must realize
 - the need for Christian communication
 - the prerequisites to Christian communication
 - the work of Christian communication

2. The Need for Christian Communication

- **For Bible Study and Spreading the Gospel**

- We read in Acts 17:2, “Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’”
- In Romans 10:10-17, we read “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?” So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

- **To Work Together**

- One cannot work with someone else without communicating with them even in the simplest of tasks.
- God did not make us to be “mind readers.”
- Notice how God communicated to Saint Paul in Acts 16:6-10: “Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.”
 - * God forbade them to go to Asia.
 - * They wanted to go to Bithynia, but God told them no again.

- * Then God told them to go to Macedonia.
- * God communicated with them to get the work done.
- Notice how the brethren communicated with each other in Acts 8:14: “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,”
 - * The apostles “heard” that Samaria had received the word of God”. Someone had to tell them.
 - * They “sent Peter and John.” Peter and John had to be told to go.
 - * They communicated with each other to get the work done.
- **To Settle Disagreements**
 - This is perhaps where communication is the most essential but the most neglected.
 - Notice in Acts 15
 - * There was a problem in the church.
 - * Some of the Pharisees who became Christians thought that gentiles had to be circumcised.
 - * Saint Paul and Barnabas opposed this.
 - * The church at Antioch thought that Saint Paul and Barnabas should go to Jerusalem to talk with the apostles and elders about this matter.
 - * So they did.
 - * Notice Acts 15:6-7, “Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.”
 - * Finally, Saint Peter spoke and Saint James spoke. In both instances, God was the one who decided the issue: i) God decided the issue by showing to Peter that gentiles were to be saved, ii) God decided the issue through the inspired scriptures of the Old Testament.
 - * Notice that it was concluded in Acts 15:28, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary

things”. Thus, i) God’s word must be allowed to settle matters, and ii) but even in so settling these matters, Saint Paul still had many years of trouble from those who would not let go of the idea that one needed to be circumcised to be saved.

3. The Prerequisites to Christian Communication

- Clearly, the most important element is love.
 - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 give us the keys to Christian communication, “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.” When we communicate, do we practice these things?
 - Also, as we read in Romans 12:9-17, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.”
- Don’t make assumptions.
 - Do not make gossip the basis for your communication.
 - * God commands that we should not be talebearers. Leviticus 19:16 says, “You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.”
 - * Proverbs 11:13 says, “A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.”
 - * Romans 1:30 calls such people, “backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents.”

- * In Psalm 15:3, we read, “He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend.”
- Do not assume you know what the other is thinking.
 - * Many times we think we know what the other is getting at, even in innocent conversation, and we end up being wrong.
 - * How much more should we be willing to listen to others when it comes to important matters.
 - * Proverbs 15:28 says, “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.”
 - * Proverbs 18:13 says, “He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.”
- Stay pure in speech.
 - * Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”
 - * Colossians 3:8 says, “But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.”
- Control the anger.
 - * When disagreements occur, it is normal to get frustrated and angry.
 - * As Christians, we must make sure that we control those emotions.
 - * Notice what Saint Paul says in Ephesians 4:26, “Be angry, and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.”
 - * Proverbs 29:22 says, “An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression.”
 - * Keep the arms down.
 - * Keep the voice calm.

4. The Work of Communication

- There is a right time and a wrong time to communicate. As Christians we must recognize that.
 - We must use wisdom in choosing the proper time to communicate with people.

- Matthew 10:16 says, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”
- Luke 16:8 says, “So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.”
- In communicating, we should be quick to hear.
 - James 1:19 says, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”
 - Proverbs 15:28 says, “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.”
- In communicating we should be slow to speak.
 - James 1:19
 - Proverbs 21:23 says, “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue Keeps his soul from troubles.”
- In communicating we should speak calmly.
 - Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.”
 - Proverbs 25:15 says, “By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, And a gentle tongue breaks a bone.”
- In communicating we should speak appropriately without distortion of the truth.
 - Proverbs 15:2 says, “The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, But the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.”
 - Proverbs 25:11 says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver.”
- In communicating we should be patient.
 - Proverbs 25:15
 - Ephesians 4:2 says, “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.”

5. Conclusion

- We all have a responsibility to communicate with each other to maintain unity within the body of Christ. The three key elements we must understand in Christian communication are
 - The Need for Communication
 - The Prerequisites to Communication
 - The Work of Communication

The Spirit of Encouragement

1. Introduction

- Encouragement in service is vital for a healthy and fruitful service. We all need encouragement! The servant can really thrive in their service if properly encouraged, or they may not achieve their full Christian potential if they are not properly encouraged.
- Christian encouragement builds the spirituality of the servant, whereas discouragement and negative talk bring them down and makes them unproductive and stagnant.
- We can be a great spiritual stumbling block to others if we do not encourage them in their service.
- The person who is full of encouragement is full of the Holy Spirit. The person who finds it difficult and even impossible to encourage others is greatly lacking in their spiritual life and is in spiritual decline.
- We must encourage one another in service! This is the only way that service can spiritually grow so that all can be of one mind, one heart, and one spirit.

2. Barnabas - The Son of Encouragement

- A great example of a servant who encourages others in the Bible is Barnabas.
- Barnabas was a great leader in the early Christian church. His Jewish name was Joseph but he was such an inspiration that the apostles gave him the nickname, Barnabas, meaning “Son of Encouragement.”
- He is first mentioned in the Bible, in the book of Acts, for his outstanding example of generosity when he sold a field that he owned and then took the money to the apostles to distribute to those in need (Acts 4:32-37).
- In Acts 9:27, Barnabas is seen encouraging Saint Paul. Saint Paul, who was originally Saul of Tarsus, had made a name for himself persecuting and killing Christians. After his radical conversion experience, St. Paul went right to work preaching that Jesus was the Son of God but many Christians were understandably suspicious of his

motives. However, Barnabas befriended him and even took him to the apostles in Jerusalem for an introduction.

- Next, we read of Barnabas encouraging new believers in Antioch (Acts 11:22-26). He was described as a good man, confident in the Holy Spirit. Many people came to belief with his help. During this time, Barnabas went to find St. Paul and brought him back to Antioch, where they worked together.
- Later, Barnabas stood up to St. Paul in defense of a young disciple, John Mark, who did not meet St. Paul's expectations on an earlier missionary journey. Here, St. Paul parted with John Mark, taking Silas on his journeys, and it was Barnabas who took John Mark under his wing. His objective was encouraging and building a future leader in the church.
- As we read about Barnabas, we see a man who had a close walk with God.
 - He was willing to give his personal wealth to help the less fortunate.
 - He was confident enough in the Holy Spirit leading that he trusted and befriended the repentant persecutor of Christians Saul.
 - He went out of his way to help new believers in their walk with Christ.
 - He was strong enough to stand up to the dynamic St. Paul, knowing his place was that of an encourager.
- Barnabas fulfilled God's purpose for him as an encourager.

3. Characteristics of an Encouraging Person

- (a) **The Cup is Always Half Full** - An encouraging person always has a positive disposition on service and always sees the cup as half full instead of half empty at all times, especially in difficult or uncertain times. The encouraging person always has an optimistic disposition and view on service. The discouraging person is always negative and sees the service as failing or not meeting their unreasonable and hypocritical standards. The discouraging person always points to the negatives and the weaknesses in others.
- St. Paul himself was also a great example of an encouraging person, especially later in his ministry. He always opened and closed his Epistles on a positive note. He always mentioned people by name and how useful they were in his ministry, and he

often cited their service. He was especially encouraging of a young Timothy, where he told him to hold on to his traditions, reminding him of his strong faith.

- St. Paul talks specifically about encouragement in Ephesians 4:29, where he says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”
- (b) **Always Optimistic and Supportive of New Services and Ideas** - Another great sign of an encouraging person is their creativity in starting new and ambitious services, or expanding existing services for growth and fruitfulness in service. The encouraging servant always thinks big, and plans services that may seem impossible, whereas the discouraging person loves the status quo and to go backwards. The encouraging person is always seeking to attain a higher level in their service, to do things that they have not done before. They love hearing ambitious and creative ideas from others.
- (c) **Always Seeks and is Eager to Give Words of Encouragement to Others** - The encouraging servant finds joy in uplifting and comforting others. He finds joy and spiritual satisfaction in lifting others to a higher spiritual level by his encouraging words. The encouraging servant loves seeing spiritual success in service, whereas the discouraging servant is content with and may even desire failure in other’s service.
- (d) **Spiritual Confidence and Security** - The encouraging servant does not fall into the trap of pride, sinful anger, the satanic attack of creating a lack of self-esteem and inferiority complex, envy, or jealousy. These are the great sins that lead to discouragement. It is impossible to be in one of these states and encourage others. The encouraging person has the confidence of the Holy Spirit, as did Barnabas. The Apostle John says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14). The encouraging person is also emotionally and mentally stable. Those who are emotionally unstable find themselves in constant depression and unable to encourage anyone. St. Paul says, “In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Ephesians 3:12).
- (e) **Encouragement is a Measure of our Spiritual Level** - Summed up, encouragement is a measuring stick of our spiritual level and relationship with God. The more we encourage, the higher our spiritual level and love for Christ. The love of Jesus Christ shines through us in how we treat and encourage others.

Sins are Forgiven: A Meditation on Mark 2:1-12

Gospel Reading - 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!'

Today the Gospel tells us about a paralytic man who Jesus healed after the man was brought by four of his friends through a roof of a house. There are 6 great spiritual elements in this story.

- **The Paralysis and The Stretcher** - When the paralytic man was brought to Jesus on the stretcher (bed), Jesus knew right away that the paralysis was due to his sin. This teaches us that sin is a paralysis. Sin paralyzes us and makes us slaves. Sometimes rather than coming to Jesus and seeking the forgiveness of our sins and freedom from the bondage of sin, we stay in our paralyzed state and stay on the stretcher.

Rather than seek forgiveness and a new way of life, we punish ourselves for our sins, that is, we stay on our bed - a symbol of self-punishment, as if the punishment of ourselves can atone for our sins. We feel that as long as we are suffering, then we are paying for our sins. Our thinking is that this self-induced suffering lessens our agony and guilt for our sins.

The one thing that we must realize is that no stretcher can atone for sins. It is only the Cross of Jesus that atones and cleanses. Not all of the world's stretchers or suffering can

wipe away a single sin. Only Jesus can do that. As we read in Romans 5:20, “Where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more.”

- **The Great Desire** - The paralytic wanted to be cured. He wanted to get off his stretcher and be forgiven for his sins. He had a great desire to be forgiven. This is where we often differ from the paralytic. We lack the desire to be forgiven, and we lack the desire for a new way of life, and a renewal of our spirituality.

The paralytic would have never allowed his four friends to bring him to Jesus if he did not want to be cured, to be forgiven for his sins, and to get off his stretcher. When Jesus told him “your sins are forgiven”, the man believed Jesus immediately. And when Jesus told him to “take up your bed and walk”, the man believed him immediately. He did not argue with Jesus or ridicule Him like the thief on the cross and the pharisees, who doubted the power of God. Rather he immediately rose to his feet.

How many of us doubt Jesus when He comes to us and offers us to “take up our bed and walk” from our sinful life, from our mountain of mistakes and errors, and our erroneous way of life.

- **The Great Faith** - The healing of the paralytic man came about not only because of the great desire to be forgiven but also because of the great faith of his friends and the faith of the paralytic himself. The Gospel says, “When Jesus saw their faith.” Whose faith? The faith of the four or the five? It is the faith of the five. For if the paralytic lacked faith, he would never have been there in the first place, for the love and forgiveness of God cannot be forced on anybody.

This also tells us about the importance of faith of others and those who pray and have faith on our behalf. Jesus does miracles for us based on the prayers and faith of others. Recall the mother of St. Augustine, how after she prayed 20 years for him, Jesus turned his life around. How about the prayers and faith of our parents. They are praying for us right now.

One question that we must always ask of ourselves is how strong is our faith? We are all experts at giving lessons on faith, guiding others on faith, and preaching about faith. We are all scholars on faith! But the moment our faith is tested by God, our faith crumbles, we cave in, and become very weak spiritually. When we go through hardships, suffering, or pain, we must remember the great words of St. Paul, “For I consider, that the sufferings

of the present time, are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

- **The Great Friends** - This story also tells a great deal about friendship. The paralytic truly had four great friends who cared about him. They risked their lives for him. They tore the roof of a house for him. They risked financial loss for him. They were diligent and persistent. They never gave up. How many of us have friends like that? Are we that kind of friend to others?

It is very difficult to find a friend today. The world's definition of friendship is someone you can benefit from materially. Someone from which I can reap financial benefit, authority, worldly power, influence, or status. This is not the Bible's definition of friendship. These four men had nothing to gain and everything to lose from a material perspective. This is the Bible's definition of a friend: nothing to gain and everything to lose. The world's definition is just the opposite: nothing to lose and everything to gain. In Exodus 33:11 we read “God spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend.”

Remember the man at the pool of Bethesda? How many friends did he have? For 38 long years, nobody paid attention to him and no one would help him in the pool. When Jesus asked him if he wanted to be made well the paralytic responded “Sir I have no man to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up” (John 5:6). In other words, he had no friends!

What kind of friends are we to others? Do we seek friends and help them like the four friends in this Gospel, or are we users of others and make friends only when we need something? How many paralytics do we know today who might be healed through our help? People paralyzed by fear, guilt, discouragement, weakness, or frustration. People who need affection, encouragement, an understanding and listening ear, appreciation and recognition.

- **The Great Misery** - There are those who can never be satisfied or pleased. When the scribes and pharisees saw Jesus heal the paralytic and tell him that his sins were forgiven, they complained. They said, “Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7).

There are those who always choose to be miserable in life, always complaining about everything, never being content, never satisfied, never happy, always in doubt, always

negative about everything. Such people can never establish a meaningful relationship with God and will be a stumbling block to others in their spiritual life.

Recall what Jesus said in Matthew 11:16-19. “To what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: ‘We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’

And when Jesus cast out demons, the pharisees accused Him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. There are those who see every Godly thing as negative, and it is such people who can never accept the love, forgiveness, and mercy of God.

- **The Great God** - By Jesus saying to the paralytic “your sins are forgiven,” Jesus proves again that He alone is the great God of the universe, as He alone has the power to forgive sins.

As we read this story then, we learn about how sins paralyzes us, and we learn about getting off our stretcher and seeking forgiveness of our sins and seeking a new way. We learn about the great importance of faith and friendship, and we see once again the great power of God at work as He alone has the authority to forgive sins.

Crucifying The Ego

The ego plays a fundamental role in every aspect of our personality. For the servant, it is ever so critical to control and eventually crucify one's ego to achieve a true state of humility. Here, we discuss seven steps to crucifying the ego and allowing the Truth to set you free.

1. Never rely on your own wisdom or might or on human strength in any of your works. Otherwise, your mind will become dim and your insight blurred, thus blocking the way for grace to enter you and show you the way of God. You will thus be led astray from truth and fall into the enemy's trap. At the end, you will be enslaved to your own ego and to the desires of other people, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!" (Isaiah 5:21).
2. Beware of thinking highly of yourself. Never feel that without you the world would stop. For your self would seem great and grand in your own eyes. Know instead that God can use another to do the work better than you. He can make the weak mighty and the mighty weak, the wise foolish and the foolish wise. Everything good and useful in you is from God and not from you. If you do not hand it over to God and with conviction attribute it to Him, He will tear it away from you. If you boast of your intelligence or virtue, God will leave them to you as merely human gifts. They will then turn into corruption, loss, and damage.
3. Your ego might hate submitting to God. It might escape surrendering to Him. In the meantime, you would be making much of your own power attributing your intelligence, virtue, and success to yourself. In this case, God will deliver you to continual discipline; discipline after discipline, tribulation after tribulation, until you succumb and surrender in brokenness. But if you reject discipline and cannot stand tribulation, God will forsake you forever.
4. Take heed then and open your ears: Either count yourself as nothing in word and deed and make up your mind to surrender yourself to God with all your might and you will then gladly be released from your ego by the grace of God; or, you will be delivered to discipline until you are set free from your ego in spite of yourself. So if you wish to opt for

the easier way, take that of voluntary submission. Count yourself from now on as nothing, and follow the path of grace wherever the Spirit may wish to lead you.

5. Know for certain that submission to God and total surrender to His will and divine plan are a free gift of grace. It thus demands, besides prayer and supplication, a trusting faith to receive this gift. This should be coupled with a longing springing from one's heart that God may not deliver us to discipline for our folly, nor abandon us to our own wisdom. For this reason, we should have an extremely resolute will to renounce our own self at all times and in all works. This should not be done ostentatiously before people but within our conscience. Blessed is the man who can discover his own weakness and ignorance and confess them before God to the last day of his life.
6. If you fall under discipline, know for sure that this is a great profit, for God chastises the soul that has forgotten its weakness and has been puffed up by its talents and success. This is carried on until it realizes its weakness, especially when God does not provide in tribulation a way to escape. He besieges the soul from all sides and embitters it with inward and outward humiliation, whether by sin or by scandal, until it abhors itself, curses its own intelligence, and disowns its counsel. Finally, it surrenders itself to God, feeling crushed and lowly. At such a time, it becomes easy for man to hate himself. He even wishes to be hated by everybody. This is the way of true humility. It leads to total surrender to divine plan. It ends up with freeing one's soul from the tyranny of the ego, with its deception, its stubbornness, and its vanity.
7. If you wish to free your soul by the shortest and simplest way, sit down every day under the discipline of grace. Examine your thoughts, movements, intentions, purposes, words, and deeds in the light of God's word. It is then that you shall discover the corruption of the ego, its imposture, slyness, deception, vanity, and lack of chastity. If you persist in doing this regularly in contrition, you will manage to sever yourself from your false and devilish ego. You will then be able to overpower it bit by bit until you can deny it altogether, hate it, and break jail from its tyranny. You will at last discover the catastrophe into which your ego has led you for obeying it, finding peace in its shelter, boasting of it, and seeking its respect.

The moment you realize at the bottom of your heart that you are nothing and that God is everything, then the truth shall have set you free.

The Rich Young Ruler - Part I

The Gospel reading for the fourth Sunday of Hatoor is about the rich young ruler whom Jesus met on the road. The Gospel reading is Mark 10:17-31. This story is also found in Matthew 19:16-30 and Luke 18:18-30. Here in Part I, we focus on the meaning of the ten commandments.

Gospel Reading - 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. Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.” Then Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You.” 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. But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:17-31).

In this gospel reading, the rich young ruler asks, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” And Jesus replied, “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.” Jesus in effect here, was placing His Divine seal of approval on the ten commandments given to Moses in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:1-17).

St. Augustine once said, “Love God and do as you please.” Now St. Augustine’s statement is excellent, but it’s far too general. It’s like a football field without goalposts. “Love God and do as you please” sounds great, and it is great, but the truth of the matter is that love needs to be defined. The boundaries of love need to be established and this is exactly what the ten commandments do! They define love. They establish the boundaries of love!

The ten commandments help make love concrete. Each one of the commandments expresses love in its own way:

1. Love God by acknowledging the one true God as God - 1st commandment.
2. Love God by showing respect for Him - 2nd commandment.
3. Love God by spending time with Him on the Lord’s day - 3rd commandment.
4. Love your parents - 4th commandment.
5. Treat yourself and other people with reverence - 5th commandment.
6. Respect marriage and the gift of sexuality - 6th and 9th commandments.
7. Respect other people’s property - 7th and 10th commandments.
8. Always be honest - 8th commandment.

Jesus was asked one day (Matthew 22:34) which of the commandments was the greatest. And Jesus’s response was, “Love God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul. That is the first. The second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). Somebody figured out that we have 35 million laws in the books today to enforce the ten commandments. Jesus on the other hand reduced even the ten to two: love of God and love of neighbor. And these two boil down to one commandment: love!

Thus, we see that love is the greatest commandment! No one can enter heaven without it, for heaven is par excellence the place of love! Love shows reverence for God, self, and others. Love is at the very heart of every single commandment. Whether we read the ten commandments in Exodus or here in the Gospel of St. Mark, they are the same. It is the call from God to learn how to truly love!

Love acknowledges the one true God as God. Love shows respect. Love spends time with God on the Lord's day. Love honors parents. Love treats oneself and all people with reverence. Love respects marriage and the gift of sexuality. Love does not steal. On the contrary, love gives and gives again and again. Love does not kill, even if murder today is euphemistically referred to as "pro choice," love does not kill. Love does not commit adultery, lust does! Love does not covet, greed does! Love is always honest. As St. Paul says so beautifully, "Owe everyone nothing except love"! (Romans 13:8)

Ted Turner of CNN recently made up ten commandments of his own, which someone jokingly called "The Ted Commandments." Ted Turner calls them "ten voluntary initiatives." And in doing so, Ted Turner declared the ten commandments of the Bible to be obsolete. This is not new, really. Invariably, those who declare themselves against organized religion, for example, do exactly the same thing. They set themselves up as "gods" and write not only new commandments of their own, but also their own new "Bible" to suit their own tastes and their own sins. Ted Turner said, "Nobody pays attention to the ten commandments anymore because they're too old." Well, the law of gravity is even older, but we better not disregard it by jumping off the Empire State Building. We would be sorry we did!

A very important word in the ten commandments is the personal pronoun *thou*. God says, "Thou Shalt" and "Thou Shalt not." It is important to understand that God addresses each one of the commandments to us very personally with that personal pronoun *thou*.

God dignifies each one of the commandments with this personal *thou*. So God is not giving these commandments to a mass of humanity! He is addressing you and no one else in a very pointed and personal way - *thou shalt*, and *thou shalt not*. We need to realize this, otherwise the ten commandments may seem very cold and impersonal to us. And if they do seem impersonal, it is because we do not hear that personal pronoun *thou* addressed to us by God with each one of those commandments. Not only do we need to know the commandments, but more importantly, we must also know *personally* the Lord Jesus who stands behind these commandments. We need to fall in love with Him first, then keeping the commandments will be a joy and not a burden.

Someone once gave this speech at a commencement ceremony at Duke University a few years ago:

"We have actually convinced ourselves that slogans will save us: shoot up if you must, but use a clean needle. Enjoy sex whenever and with whom ever you wish, but use a condom. No!

The answer is No, No, No! And not because it isn't cool or smart or because you might end up in jail or dying in an AIDS ward, no because it is wrong! Because we have spent over 5000 years as a race of rational human beings trying to drag ourselves out of the primeval slime by searching for truth and moral absolutes. In its purest form, truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder, it is a howling reproach. What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not The Ten Suggestions!"

So the young man says in the Gospel reading today, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" And Jesus says to him, "But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).

Consider the following prayer: "We thank you Lord for the goal posts of life. Help us to hear Your loving thou in each of the commandments. Keep us united to You as the branch is united to the vine, that we may have the power to love You by keeping the commandments and to find life in them. And if we haven't kept the commandments, help us to repent like the prodigal son and return to You, the waiting Father, to experience the warm embrace of Your forgiveness and love."

Finally, we close here with this great verse from the Gospel of St. John: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. Then My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

Glory be to God forever. Amen!

The Rich Young Ruler - Part II

The Gospel reading for the fourth Sunday of Hatoor is about the rich young ruler whom Jesus met on the road. The Gospel reading is Mark 10:17-31. This story is also found in Matthew 19:16-30 and Luke 18:18-30. Here in Part II, we focus more on the problem of the rich young ruler and Jesus's proposed solution to his problem.

Gospel Reading - 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. Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You." 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. But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Mark 10:17-31).

1. **One Thing You Lack** - In this gospel reading, after the rich young ruler told Jesus that he kept the commandments, Jesus replied, "One thing you lack". Just "one thing" can make all the difference in the world. It often takes no more than one thing to alter the outcome of human events. For example, on the night of the Normandy invasion in World

War II, Hitler had taken a sleeping pill and left word not to be awakened. *One* sleeping pill to a large extent determined the outcome of World War II. Just “one thing” can make a difference in our spiritual life as well. It may make the difference between an abundant life and a futile life. This was certainly true about the rich young ruler who came to see Jesus in this gospel reading.

2. **Inner Discontent** - Though he was rich and a ruler, he was not thoroughly satisfied, and this is precisely why he approached Jesus. Christian psychologists believe that spiritual dissatisfaction with ones self is often a sign of spiritual growth. They suggest that such dissatisfaction is being urged by the Holy Spirit within to move us to a new level of spiritual growth. This means that we must not try to adjust ourselves to the present level but to heed the spurs within that would drive us upward. In other words, God will not be satisfied with our current state, but sometimes fills our hearts with a huge emptiness until we begin to seek what the rich young ruler in the gospel reading called “eternal life.”
3. **What Shall I Do?** - The rich young ruler asks Jesus, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” For the first time in his life, the young man heard someone speak to the deepest needs of his soul and then he asked, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Then Jesus responded to him by saying, “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.” Notice here that Jesus did not recite all of the ten commandments to the rich young ruler. Jesus only recited 6 of the ten commandments, the ones that have to do with love and respect of neighbor. However, Jesus did not recite the first four commandments that deal with the love of God, since the rich young ruler did not keep these commandments!

When the rich young ruler heard Jesus recite the commandments that deal with love of neighbor, he responded by saying, “All these I have kept from my youth.” With what pride he must of uttered these words! But when Jesus heard this, He said, “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.” Upon hearing these words, the young man became sad, for he was very rich. He left, never to walk with Jesus again!

4. **The Major Test** - Just “one thing” kept the young man away from God: his possessions! He boasted that he had kept all of the commandments. Then Jesus tested him. Jesus began with the first of all commandments: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”

This is where the young man's status collapsed. Though the young ruler claimed to have kept all of the commandments, the fact is that he didn't even keep the first commandment! The young ruler *did* have other gods before the true God. Tested at this point, the Gospel says, "But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." Now the young man understood that the way to the heart of God is through the surrender of all other loves to a first love for God. However, his love, like that of many, lay in material things. Just "one thing" stood in the way of his reach for the kingdom, but that "one thing" was enough to make him lose it!

5. **Sell All that You Have** - To solve the young man's spiritual problem, Jesus tells him, "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." It is important to understand here that this was a prescription for a particular person with a specific need. Jesus was *not* laying down poverty as either a requirement or an ideal for everyone. He was not condemning all possessions. For example, there is no record that Jesus ever told James and John to give away their fishing boat, or that He told Mary and Martha to sell their house in Bethany. Jesus was the Good Physician, and did not prescribe the same pill for every patient!

This young man had allowed his possessions to build a wall between him and God. Jesus, "who saw what was in man," realized this with a glance. And this is precisely why He said, "Go and sell whatever you have." The words of our Lord here are not only a prescription but they are more like a surgical operation proposed to the young man. For Jesus is not only the Good Physician, He is also the Good Surgeon! Jesus believed in drastic remedies when the trouble was deep-seated and acute. So He says, in effect, "If your wealth causes you to sin, cut it off." This young man was so shackled by his possessions that nothing less than surgery would suffice!

What is that "one thing" in our life that keeps us from God? Whatever it is, Jesus says that we should treat it as a cancer. Get rid of it immediately, no matter how painful the separation, and "come and follow Me."

To some, this "one thing" may be drugs, alcohol, sex, anger, violence, or dishonesty. Whatever it is, we better leave it alone before it eats into the fiber of our will power and becomes a fatal illness, killing our capacity to decide for ourselves. To some this "one thing" may be success. It destroys the finer strains of character, making them arrogant,

snobbish, and ungrateful. To some, this “one thing” may be money. It can narrow a person’s outlook in life and bring him to the point where he sees everything and everyone in terms of the dollar!

6. **Socratic Versus Platonic Ethics** - “One thing you lack” says Jesus. Why should Jesus condemn the young man for lacking “one thing” when he kept everything else? Socrates claimed that a person was morally acceptable if the evil points in his life were balanced by good points. In fact, many religions around the world adopt this view. Christianity does not operate this way! Plato, on the other hand, completely disagreed with Socrates. Plato taught that personality, like a chain, is only as strong as its weakest link. The ladder that lacks a rung or two is a useless thing, and a boat may sink if only one plank is rotten, though all others are sound and watertight. Christianity is very much Platonic and not at all Socratic. To obey the Lord 99% of the time where it is easy to do so is no great matter. The real test lies in obeying Him 100% of the time, which is the much harder task. One sin can ruin an otherwise moral life. This is precisely why the Apostle James says, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:10-11).

7. **The Closed Door** - “One thing you lack” says Jesus. Some of us have a certain room in our house that we do not want God to enter. We keep it walled up with concrete! For the young ruler, this room was his world of finance. He did not want Jesus to enter this room. Perhaps for us, this room may be occupied with this overpowering ambition to plow our way to success in our career no matter how much time it takes away from our spiritual life. For some, it may be an old sin that we refuse to confess. For some, it may be lust and pornography for which we are determined to give free rein no matter what happens and no matter what the cost. For some, it may be a bottomless hatred towards others which comes between us and God and robs us of our peace and spirituality. We tell ourselves that God can have everything, but not this one thing!

In other words, we make religion another one of the departments in life. We have the social department, the intellectual department, the recreational department, the department of politics, economics, business, science, and then we have the department of religion! It seems that the worst possible thing we could do today is to let the department of religion

intrude into the other departments. We hear it said, for example, that we should not mix religion with politics or business. Each one belongs to its own realm. This is precisely what the young ruler in the gospel reading today was trying to do. He thought that God belonged only in the temple. God had no business to be involved in the world of finance. But Jesus insisted that God belongs in *every* department of our life, that all the rooms in the house of our life must be open to Him! He keeps knocking on the one closed door. Christ says, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

8. **Come, Follow Me** - When the Lord met Andrew, Matthew, James and John, Peter and the other Apostles, He extended them an invitation and said "Follow Me." We read that the disciples "left everything and followed Jesus." This exact same invitation was extended by Jesus to the rich young ruler in today's Gospel reading. Jesus did not extend this type of invitation to everyone He met. There are many who requested to follow Christ after they were healed and Jesus just told them to "Go your way." Invitation to Apostleship was not for everyone. Thus, Jesus's invitation to the young man here is very special. The young man was invited to become an Apostle like Matthew, Peter, and John. What an invitation! However, the young man declined. If the young man had accepted Jesus's invitation, we would be honoring him today as a great apostle, but as it is, we don't know even know his name! "One thing" kept him from God - his love of possessions.

What is that "one thing" in our life? Is it some sin we refuse to let go? Is it some part of our life we refuse to surrender to God? Is it some love that we place above our love for Christ? Whatever it is, Christ's message to us is simple: Even one sin, as long as we do not forsake it and seek God's forgiveness, can keep us out of the kingdom of heaven! If we look at that rich young ruler in today's gospel reading and say, "that's me," we will then be made aware of that "one thing" we still lack and turn it over to Jesus to gain eternal life!

Glory be to God forever, Amen!

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him! Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us! But he answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:1-13).

In this parable Jesus is giving us a warning to be ready for His coming, to always be prepared to meet Him, for we never know when we will leave this life. He wants us to be ready for him and not be surprised or stunned when He calls for us. He doesn't want us to dread His coming for Jesus dreads to be dreaded and this why He warns so often to watch and be ready.

In so many places in the Bible, Jesus and St. Paul tell us to be ready and to be watchful. In many places in the Bible, it tells us that Jesus will come by surprise at an “hour we do not expect” (Matthew 24:42, 44) and St. Paul says that Jesus will come as a “thief in the night.” (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Despite Jesus's many, many warnings in the Bible on being watchful and being ready, most of us perhaps ignore this warning completely. What are the things that prevent us from being watchful and being ready to meet Jesus? What are the things in life that cause us to ignore these great and serious warnings of Jesus.

1. **Do Not Labor for the Food that Perishes** - One of the great reasons for not being ready to meet Jesus that that we often go through life “laboring for the food that perishes.” Jesus says in John, “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6:27).

A Christian traveler wrote about a recent trip he had taken to the pyramids of Egypt.

He spoke about his experience as follows: “We gathered around the tour leader in the pyramid. ‘Look around you,’ the tour leader said. ‘At one time, this room glittered with inconceivable treasures. The king’s entire life was spent piling up riches to fill his burial chamber.’ Silence fell over the group. I tried to run away from the myths of thousands of years and envision the treasures that once sparkled in the darkness around me. But all I could see was emptiness, bare walls, musty air, and hollow space. All the treasures had long been stolen or decayed. Everything gone. Standing there in the heart of the pyramid, I was struck with how futile life’s treasure hunts were. Not just the Pharaoh’s, but mine as well. I too was an accumulator of material things, spending so much time and energy piling up things: a kitchen full of dumb gadgets, closets stuffed with clothes, a den filled with unnecessary computer equipment and fancy electronic devices, a garage crammed with play things, and an attic filled with yesterday’s prize objects. My own little pyramid of treasures. Not as splendid as the king’s horde, but just as fragile and transient. How much better I thought to spend my time and energy on treasures that would last forever. The eternal treasures that come from giving, caring, forgiving, and ministering. When I climbed out of that pyramid, I had seen more than just one of the seven wonders of the world. I had a silent but convincing lesson on treasures. The kind that make a person rich, and the kind that leave a person poor!”

Because we do not really know what is truly valuable and important in life, we often find ourselves laboring rather pathetically for the trivial things in life, that is, for the food that perishes instead of for the food that endures to eternal life. One person expressed this so well in a poem which goes like this: “Things, things, things. Things that take our precious time. Things that hold us from the life sublime. Things that only gather dust. Things that rot, things that rust. Things that mold, things that creak. Things that harbor foul disease. Things that mock and defy, till at last we grimly die of things, things, things.”

St. Paul warns us in the Pauline Epistle Reading today to use our time wisely and to not waste our time on unimportant and trivial things, when he says, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15).

Someone once said, “Man is in love, and he loves what vanishes!” The Bible puts it this way. “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 and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:16-17).

Nine of the world's most successful financiers recently died as follows: three committed suicide, one was pardoned from prison so that he could die at home, one died abroad insolvent, one became insane, one was released from prison, one died a fugitive from justice, and one died bankrupt living the final years of his life on borrowed money. All of these men had been multi-millionaires. All of them indeed labored for the food that perishes and they perished right along with it! Not only does the food we labor for perish, but we perish along with it if it's not the right kind of food.

Isn't that also exactly what happened to those in the days of Noah, when in the Gospel of Matthew Christ compared the day of His coming to the day the flood came suddenly to destroy all who were outside the Ark, who were busy with the affairs and desires of the world.

Isn't that also exactly what happened in the parable of the rich fool in Luke Chapter 12, who spent his whole life stockpiling and accumulating his goods and possessions. He truly labored for the food that perishes. Isn't it interesting here how the word "fool" is used so often here to describe those who are not watchful or ready and those who do not use their time wisely.

There is all this focus in the world today on nourishing and pleasing the body, and nothing at all is ever mentioned on nourishing and pleasing the soul. And this is precisely why Isaiah the prophet said, "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2).

Now what is the food that does not perish? The answer is that it is the food that Christ gives us. The food that Christ says, "the Son of Man will give to you" (John 6:27). That is, the food is Christ Himself! Let us read carefully what Christ says about Himself in Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John (entire chapter). He says, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). And in John 6:48-50, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die" (John 6:48-50). So Christ tells us in these verses that He Himself is the food that does not perish, but endures onto eternal life. And He offers Himself to us in every Divine Liturgy through the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

2. **Our forgetfulness** - The second reason that we are not watchful and not ready to meet Christ is that we forget who we really are and where we came from. We read in Genesis

2:7 that God in fact made us out of the dust of the ground! We read, “And the Lord God made man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

How easily we forget that we are dust! We hide behind the masks of our possessions, our earthly powers and authority, or our intellectual smartness. We forget that we are going to die and we push aside our mortality. Forgetting that we are dust, we imagine ourselves to be more powerful and more capable than we really are. It is precisely this forgetting that we are dust that lies behind the greed, the selfishness, the injustice, the hatred, the anxiety, and the brutality that drives our common life. We also forget what God remembers! God never forgets that we are dust. As we read in Psalm 103:14, “For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” And because God remembers our dustiness, He surrounds our dust with His massive “steadfast love” (Psalm 103:11).

3. Our Spiritual life lacks Purpose, Aim, and Authenticity -

Another reason for not being ready that we do not have a spiritual focus and a spiritual goal. We wander through life aimlessly and recklessly, wasting our time and going with the flow and being followers of worldly fads and trends.

And our spiritual life lacks authenticity in that we feel that just being around church and spiritual people is enough for our salvation. That is, we try and borrow our spiritual life and relationship with God from others. We learn from the parable of the Virgins that we cannot borrow our relationship with Christ from other people. It must be genuine. We need our own authentic relationship with Christ. When the five foolish virgins tried to borrow oil from the five wise virgins, they could not, for a relationship with Christ cannot be borrowed.

For us to be watchful and ready, we must have a spiritual focus in our life. The following story comes from the early Christian hermits in the deserts of Egypt (the Desert Fathers):

“It seems that a young aspirant to holiness once came to visit the hermitage of an old holy man who was sitting in the doorway of his quarters at sunset. The old man’s dog stretched out across the threshold as the young spiritual seeker presented his problem to the holy man. ‘Why is it, Abba, that some who seek God come to the desert and are zealous in prayer but leave after a year or so, while others, like you, remain faithful to the quest for a lifetime of prayer?’ The old man smiled and replied. ‘Let me tell you a story:

One day I was sitting here quietly in the sun with my dog. Suddenly a large white rabbit ran across in front of us. Well, my dog jumped up, barking loudly, and took off after that big rabbit. He chased the rabbit over the hills with a passion. Soon, other dogs joined him, attracted by his barking. What a sight it was, as the pack of dogs ran barking across across the creeks, up stony embankments and through thickets and thorns! Gradually, however, one by one, the other dogs dropped out of the pursuit, discouraged by the course and frustrated by the chase. Only my dog continued to hotly pursue the white rabbit.

In that story, young man, is the answer to your question, said the old man.’ The young man sat in confused silence. Finally he said, ‘Abba, I don’t understand. What is the connection between the rabbit chase and the quest for holiness?’ ‘You fail to understand,’ answered the old hermit, ‘because you failed to ask the obvious question. Why didn’t the other dogs continue on the chase? And the answer to that question is that they had not seen the rabbit. For you see, unless you see your prey, the chase is just too difficult. You will lack all of the passion and determination necessary to perform all the hard work required to continue the chase!’”

One of the prime prerequisites in our spiritual growth in general is that we must “see the rabbit.” We must have a spiritual goal and focus. We must have a real experience of the Divine Mystery in some form, if we are to keep up the pursuit for holiness and to have focus in our spiritual life. Like the dogs in the hermits story we will drop out of the race if we only follow others - the saints and apostles who have “seen the rabbit”. Each one of us must “see the rabbit,” that is, we must develop a real and authentic relationship with Jesus, not just being followers or not jut by placing ourselves in the company of good people.

4. Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand (Matthew 4:17)

The fourth and final reason for not being ready is that we do not repent for our sins. When we do not repent, we cannot change our sinful ways. In order for us to be watchful and ready, we must repent daily!

According to a legend, God once said to His angels, “I want to play a game of hide-and-seek with humankind. Where you do think I should hide?” One angel suggested the deepest ocean, another the top of the highest mountain. Others the far side of the moon or a distant star. Finally, one angel came up with the answer that God accepted. He said, “Hide in the human heart. That’s the last place they will think of!”

Jesus says in Matthew 4:17, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” For the kingdom of God to become a reality for us we must first repent. Repentance is Godly sorrow for the sins we have committed. Godly sorrow is not like the worldly sorrow which leads to despair, depression, and even suicide. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, repentance leads to forgiveness, forgiveness leads to salvation, and salvation establishes the kingdom of God, the rule of God, in our hearts. Where there is no repentance, no Godly sorrow for our sins, the kingdom of God will never come. For we cannot have the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil ruling in the same heart.

Repentance is not merely a negative battling against sin and evil; it is also and primarily a positive progress toward God. Repentance is preparing the human heart for God to enter. For God came to establish residence not in the moon or the stars but in our heart and mind. Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). Here is what St. Isaac the Syrian says about the kingdom of God within us: “Enter eagerly into the treasure house that is within you, and so you will see the things that are in heaven. The ladder that leads to the kingdom is hidden in your soul. Dive into yourself and there within yourself you will find the stairs by which to ascend.” The heavenly chamber of which St. Isaac speaks here is another name for the kingdom of God, the presence and rule of God in the human heart.

One way by which the kingdom of God becomes a reality in us is by doing God’s will. Jesus told us so in the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done!” Jesus is telling us here that the kingdom of God comes when we do His will. Kingdom of God and will of God are tied together. The one does not come without the other. One makes the other possible. “Thy kingdom come!” How? It comes when God’s will is done: “Thy will be done.”

When Christ comes to rule as King in our heart, He will govern our heart so that we may love only what He loves. He will govern our mind so that no unholy thought be allowed to take root within us. He will govern the books we read, the TV shows we watch, the companionships and the friendships we form, our work and the methods of our business, our money, the way in which we spend our leisure - all will be under the governance of His Kingdom. For He will not be King unless He is King of all!

We often put aside our repentance and confession and tell ourselves, there is always tomorrow. Tomorrow I will read the Bible, tomorrow I will go to church, tomorrow I will repent.

Jesus teaches us in this parable of the wise virgins that there comes a point in which it is just too late and too difficult to turn back to God. The foolish virgins just waited too long, “they slumbered and slept”, and thus they could not meet the Bridegroom. It becomes more difficult to turn to God when we get older, we get used to a certain way of life and it becomes impossible to change for the better at a certain point in our life, as King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes,

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, I have no pleasure in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Thus, we must be a continually state of awareness of our spiritual condition by repenting daily. The Desert Fathers of Egypt tell us this great story about St. Sisoie who lay dying when the Lord appeared to him. He pleaded with the Lord, “Give me time to repent, O Christ.” When his brethren standing around his bed heard this, they said, “You mean you have not repented yet?” And St. Sisoie replied, “Believe me brothers, I have not yet begun to repent.” The brethren standing around him interpreted this to mean that St. Sisoie had attained the uttermost perfection and holiness possible on this earth. Because holiness comes through sincere and daily repentance. For it is through repentance and confession that we are cleansed of our sins and made pure and perfect in the eyes of God.

We conclude here with this great quotation from Thomas à Kempis from his classic book “The Imitation of Christ”. à Kempis says,

“For a small income, a long journey is undertaken (that is, one is willing to take a long journey just to gain a small amount of money).

For everlasting life, many will scarce once lift a foot from the ground.

The most pitiful reward is sought after and fought for.

For a single bit of money, sometimes there is shameful contention.

For a vain matter and slight promise, people fear not to toil day and night.

But alas, for an unchangeable good, for an inestimable award, for the highest honor, and glory without end, they grudge even the least fatigue!”

We therefore become ready and watchful by developing an authentic relationship with Christ, repenting daily, reading the Bible, taking Communion, remembering who we are and where we came from, using our time wisely and making the most of our time, and not laboring for the food that perishes, but rather laboring for the food that endures onto eternal life.

Who is My Brother?: A Meditation on Mark 3:22-34

Gospel Reading - And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons." So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house. "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"— because they said, "He has an unclean spirit." Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers" (Mark 3:22-34).

In the gospel reading today, we read the Jesus as He was sitting with the scribes pharisees, and the multitude, and the multitude said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers."

Jesus, of course, is pointing to the sinners, the rejected, the downtrodden, the outcasts, the aged, the tired, and the despised. These were Jesus's friends. These were his mother and brothers.

Jesus loved being with sinners. They were his past-time and his utmost joy. Jesus loved being in the company of sinners. They were his purpose for coming into the world, as He says "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

In Jesus calling the multitude his mother and his brothers, He is setting a great example for us to follow. How many of us really imitate Christ and call everyone our mother and brothers. How many of us reach out to the rejected and the despised and treat them as our mother and

brother.

The world today calls someone a brother when he has something it wants from him: people in authority, those who have influence, those who have money, those with power - these are my brothers. The world teaches us to be attracted to those who are pretty, those who are funny, those who are powerful and influential, those who are rich, and those who can help you in some worldly way.

Isn't it funny that people like that were never the brothers of Jesus.

The brothers of Jesus were people like

1. Zacchaeus - he was one of the most rejected people, and Jesus called out to him Zacchaeus, make haste, come down for I must stay at your house today.
2. Mary Magdalene - one of the worst sinners, who had 7 demons
3. The sinner woman who wiped the feet of Jesus with the hair of her head, as the pharisees and scribes murmured, If this man were a prophet, he would of known in what manner she was touching him.
4. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus - an extremely poor family in the town of Bethany.
5. The man at the pool of Bethesda - who waited 38 years for someone to throw him into the pool
6. The adulteress woman who was going to be stoned to death until Jesus said let those who have no sin cast the first stone.
7. The Samaritan woman who has 5 husbands and was living with a person who was not her husband.
8. The wounded man in the parable of the Good Samaritan
9. Lazarus in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus

Are these types of people are brothers and mother? Do we call a person a brother who is rejected, despised, or an outcast. How often do we seek out such a person? How often do we befriend such a person?

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we read about a priest and a levite who were walking and probably on their way to the temple to worship. They see a man wounded in the ditch, and they walk by and completely ignore him as if he wasn't there. Then we see a Samaritan, who supposedly has no dealings with Jews, who helps the wounded man (a Jew) and takes care of him. In this parable, we see that the priest and the levite, who are Jews, are guilty here of a sin common to all of us. They are guilty of the *sin of omission*, that is, the sin of doing nothing. They saw the wounded man lying in the ditch "half dead" (Luke 10:30) and they walked away. They did nothing!

Recall the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). In this parable, there was a very rich man. A poor man named Lazarus sat outside the gate of the rich man's house, and he was a "beggar, full of sores" (Luke 16:20). Everyday, the rich man would walk right by Lazarus, not even noticing him! Even the dogs noticed and cared for Lazarus since we read that "the dogs came and licked his sores" (Luke 16:21). So Jesus tells us here that the rich man's treatment of Lazarus was not even at the level of a dog! Finally, in this parable, we read that Lazarus died and went to heaven, and the rich man went to hell. Why did the rich man end up in hell? What did he do wrong? Was he cruel to Lazarus? No he wasn't. Did he verbally or physically abuse Lazarus? No he didn't. Did he humiliate or insult Lazarus? No he didn't. He didn't even notice him and but that's precisely the point. He did nothing! And that was the sin that condemned him to hell!

How great would it be if we could always see the image of God in our neighbor. Someone once said "If we were able to see God's image in our neighbor, do you think weapons and generals would be needed?" If only the rich man could see the image of God in Lazarus who was sitting on his doorstep, then he might have helped him.

We want to close here with on the following note:

Jesus talks about his second coming and the final judgment in Matthew 25:1-46. Specifically, in Matthew 25:41-44, Jesus speaks very strongly about condemning certain people on the last day when they appear before His judgment. Here Jesus says some very powerful words. He says, "Depart from me you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Why does Jesus say these terrible words? Jesus Himself tells us why. He says, "I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me" (Matthew 25:43). Here we see how Jesus condemns those who

forget their real mother and brothers. The good that we could of done for others, but we did not. It is for this reason among many others that we repeatedly say in the Divine Liturgy “Lord have mercy”.

What a staggering thing it is in Jesus’s great discourse here on the last judgment in Matthew 25:1-46 that there is no mention of the so-called great sins: adultery, fornication, murder, stealing, blasphemy, etc... There is no mention whatsoever of these. But rather Jesus speaks of those who *neglected* something and thus did nothing about it. Again, we recite these strong words. “I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me”.

Is this not perhaps the most subtle kind of murder (the sin of omission) in which we overlook people who are in need and are dying, not just for food, but for a word of encouragement, friendship, comfort, or a helping hand. Mother Theresa once said, “The biggest disease today is not AIDS, cancer, leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for, and deserted by everybody. The greatest evil today is the lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference toward one’s neighbor who lives at the roadside assaulted by exploitation, corruption, poverty, and disease.”

Jesus wants us to pay attention here to our real mother and brothers. So on this feast of St. Mary, let us humble ourselves like the Virgin Mary and pay attention to our real mother and brothers because that’s the only we will get to heaven.

Keep Watch: A Meditation on Matthew 24:3-35

- **Gospel Reading** - The gospel reading today is Matthew 24:3-35. In this Gospel reading, Jesus talks about the end of the world and His second coming. The Gospel reading last Sunday is identical to this one, but was read from the Gospel chapter 13 of the Gospel according to St. Mark. So we the same same Gospel readings in the last two weeks that talk about the the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus.
- The church in all its wisdom puts these readings about the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus at the end of the Coptic church year. We will celebrate the new Coptic year this Friday September 11.
- When we read these Gospels one should not be caught up as to exactly when the end of the world will come and so on. We get so wrapped up in predicting the end of the world.
- Rather the theme and the focus in these readings that Christ is trying to teach us to “keep watch.” Jesus mentions this several times in today’s Gospel reading and especially in the Matins Gospel reading where Jesus uses the word 5 times in 5 verses. He says, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. 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. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”
- Thus the main theme in the Gospel readings the past two weeks is to “keep watch” and pay close attention to our spiritual life. The only thing that is relevant in the second coming of Jesus for us is the day we die for in that day our world ends and our eternal fate is determined. Thus, the end of the world that Jesus refers to in these readings is personal. It is the end of our life that marks the end of the world and Jesus’s second coming for us. So Jesus wants us to be ready for this day for we do not know when the time is. Jesus comes like a thief in the night and at a time that we do not expect.
- The reason that Jesus says “watch” so many times in these verses and elsewhere in the Bible is because He knows how easy it is in life to lose focus and not watch. Jesus knows

how easy it is to sleep and not be watchful in our spiritual life.

- What are some of the things that prevent us from being watchful?
- **Parable of the rich Farmer** - One of the great obstacles in being watchful is that we spend too much time working and making money, accumulating, wealth, possessions, and things. We become materialistic and get caught up in fashions, fads, and fame. Recall the parable of the rich farmer in Luke 12:13-31. In this parable, we have a farmer who spends his whole life accumulating wealth and made big plans for building bigger barns so he could make more and retire comfortably. But Jesus called this man a “fool”. He told him “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be?” Life is not about making money, accumulating wealth, and retiring comfortably. When this becomes our goal, we lose sight of our spiritual life and we lose our spiritual purpose and focus, and then when we least expect it, Jesus comes calling for our soul. Jesus said in Luke 12:15, , “for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” Jesus also says in John, “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6:27).

- **The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins** - Another great example that Jesus gives us about not being watchful in the Bible is found in the parable of of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. In this parable, 5 virgins were wise and 5 were foolish. The 5 wise virgins went to heaven, and for the five foolish, we read that the “door was shut.”

And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

This parable tells that that we can be in church all of our life, we can be servants, deacons, come to church early and everything, and still not be watchful. Moreover, we learn from the parable of the Virgins that we cannot borrow our relationship with Christ from other people. It must be genuine. We need our own authentic relationship with Christ. When the five foolish virgins tried to borrow oil from the five wise virgins, they could not, for a relationship with Christ cannot be borrowed. We feel that just being around church and spiritual people is enough for our salvation and we try and borrow our spiritual life and

relationship with God from others. This is not sufficient for our salvation. We need to be watchful!

- **Majoring on Minors** - One of the great hindrances of being watchful in our life is that we spend too much time majoring on minors. That is we spend too much time occupying our minds with minor little things that don't matter in life. Because we do not really know what is truly valuable and important in life, we often find ourselves laboring rather pathetically for the trivial things in life. We pursue useless hobbies that occupy our time, we spend too much time talking, cooking, shopping, watching television, leisure, pleasure, decorating the house, looking fashionable, reading useless things, or getting wrapped up in too many activities.

St. Paul warns us to not major on minors and to use our time wisely and to not waste our time on unimportant and trivial things, when he says, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15).

Someone once said, "Man is in love, and he loves what vanishes!" The Bible puts it this way. "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 and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:16-17).

- **How can we be watchful?** - Being watchful requires a battle. It is not easy to be watchful. It is spiritual warfare. It's a struggle. St. Paul gives us the recipe of being watchful and for spiritual readiness in Ephesians 6:14-18, where in these verses St. Paul talks about the watchful person as a soldier who has put on his spiritual armor, because being watchful is indeed a fight, a fight with Satan. St. Paul says, "Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."

One of the questions we have to ask ourselves is "how much of God do we want?" Do we want one penny's worth or do we want the free riches of God. If we were to go into a bank and the bank teller gives us the keys to the safe which contains a million dollars and tells

us to take anything we want and we go in and come out with only 1 cent, whose fault would that be? Whose fault is it when we take such small portions of the free riches of God?

So as we begin the new year, let us be watchful in our spiritual life and to totally submit our life to God. As St. Paul says so beautifully in Philippians 4:19, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Making Disciples: Luke 5:1-11

Gospel Reading - So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. But Simon answered and said to Him, Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net. And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus's knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord! For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men. So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

- **Discipleship** - Today's gospel reading is all about discipleship. Jesus teaches us here how to be His disciples. Jesus tells us here through Peter that discipleship involves a way of life, that is, a way of life with Jesus in the center.
- **They Stayed up all night** - In this story, we read about how Peter and the other disciples stayed up all night and caught no fish. The fish is a symbol of those who follow Jesus. Jesus tells them to go out into the deep, for they were in shallow water. The shallow water here represents living a shallow way of life and a shallow relationship with Christ, and the staying up all night represents that life without Christ is a life of emptiness, frustration, lack of productivity and no progress. The deep water here represents the depth of our spiritual life with Christ. When a person develops depth in their relationship with Christ, that is, a real and personal relationship with Him, things change. They become fruitful, joyful, and productive.
- **Peter Falls Down at Jesus's Knees** - When we read this story, why does Peter fall to the knees of Christ after seeing all those fish? You would of thought that he would

be happy and rejoicing, but he wasn't. For you see, when Peter saw all those fish, he immediately realized that Christ was teaching him about discipleship and trying to make him into a disciple. Peter suddenly recognized Christ's purpose for him. Christ wanted Peter to turn his life over to Him. "Turn to Me and Live," says the Lord in the book of Isaiah.

- **The Elements of Discipleship** - As we see in this story, discipleship requires five basic elements: humility, repentance, faith, submission, and giving glory to God. The moment Peter saw those fish, he immediately recognized that he lacked these five attributes, so he fell at Jesus's knees in repentance, submitting his life to Christ, giving God the glory and not feeling worthy to be associated with Christ. It was precisely at this point that Christ reassured him of his discipleship and told him "From now on you will catch men." And then we read that these men submitted their lives to Christ, "So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him."
- **Peter is Moved by Christ's Acceptance** - Peter was moved by Jesus's acceptance of him because he recognized that he was so unworthy to walk with Christ, he felt he was too sinful, too faithless, and too bad to walk with Christ. Jesus's treatment of Peter in this story and throughout the entire Bible really exemplifies the great truth found in the Gospel of St. John. "For God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him", (John 3:17).
- **How Jesus Deals with us in Difficult Times** - This story also teaches a lot about how Jesus deals with us in times of difficulty and adversity.
- **The Disciples were Frustrated** - There is no doubt that Peter and the other disciples were frustrated, defeated, worried, anxious, and upset about not catching any fish. Fishing was the way they earned their living. Their whole livelihood depended on it. They were so frustrated that they came to shore. As soon as Jesus told them to go to the deep, Peter impatiently complained that they were up all night and caught nothing.
- **We are Often Impatient with God** - When we are in difficult times, in times of suffering or loss, we often lose our faith in God, and we often are too impatient with God to let Him do his work, as Peter was. We try and do things our way and never give God the chance to do His will. We crowd God out of our situation, trying to use our limited knowledge and logic to understand our situation. This is why we worry so much and often

make a mess out of everything when we go through difficulties, troubles, or suffering in life.

- **Overcoming our Troubles** - We can only overcome our troubles and difficulties in life if we *see meaning* in them. Someone once said, “To live is to suffer; to survive is to find meaning in suffering. We Christians start out with the premise that there is always meaning in suffering because God loves and cares for us; if a cross falls on our shoulders, it falls there only because God has permitted it. And He permits it only because of the good He knows can come out of it. He uses trouble to make us more patient, more understanding, more faithful, more holy. We cannot always see or understand His purpose. But we believe it and we live and walk and die by this faith that there is meaning in all that happens to us once we commit our life to Jesus our Lord.”
- **A Nugget of Gold Awaits Us** - There is meaning in suffering when we remember that every defeating situation has within it a potential victory. The Almighty God buries at the heart of every difficulty a nugget of gold. God has a sense of humor. He likes to play games. You know what He does? When He has a wonderful possibility for us, He doesn't just hand to us easily, because that will make us soft. Rather He buries it at the heart of a great difficulty and He hands us this difficulty. So instead of complaining that God doesn't love us, we should thank Him for this great difficulty because we know that He has buried a bright possibility at the heart of the difficulty.

So when a difficulty faces us, instead of being depressed by it, we should say, I wonder what God is trying to say to me through this difficulty? I wonder what little nugget of gold He has hidden for me within this difficulty? By His grace I am going to find it!
- **Suffering for God's Glory** - God sometimes allows difficulty and suffering in our life because He wants us to glorify Him in our suffering. God wants the rest of the world to witness and see His true children. When we go through hardships, suffering, or pain, we must remember these great words of St. Paul, “For I consider, that the sufferings of the present time, are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).
- **Dealing with Anxiety, Worry, and Stress** - Peter and the rest of the disciples were greatly anxious and worried when they did not catch any fish. In times of anxiety, worry, and distress, we must always remember these comforting words of St. Paul, “Have no

anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7).

- **Is St. Paul Realistic?** So St. Paul says here, “Have no anxiety about anything.” When we hear these words, we feel like saying to St. Paul, Come on now St. Paul, be realistic. Who can live like that? How can someone afflicted with a malignancy or a serious illness not be anxious? How can someone who is trying to make it through school not be anxious? How can someone with a demanding job not be anxious? How can someone trying to deal with peer pressure not be anxious? How can someone who just lost their job not be anxious? How can we not be anxious when we live in the age of anxiety?
- **St. Paul Was in Prison When He Wrote These Words** - Yet, St. Paul says, “Have no anxiety about anything.” So we again talk to St. Paul and say, “St. Paul, really, what kind of advice is that?” Maybe St. Paul was writing to people of some other world, some other planet, or some other life, but certainly not this one. But the fact is, he was not! When St. Paul wrote these words, he himself was having a pretty rough time of it. You see, St. Paul wrote these words while he was sitting in a prison cell in Rome! So when St. Paul wrote these words, he wasn’t sitting on a sofa in front of a comfortable fireplace. St. Paul was no armchair philosopher. He was a realist, who was truly acquainted with life!
- **For He Cares for You** - Yet St. Paul says, “Have no anxiety about anything.” But the main thing here is that St. Paul does *not* stop with these words. He goes on to give us the secret of how to overcome anxiety, as he says, “Have no anxiety about anything, *but* in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6-7). So St. Paul says here that we should let our requests, our needs, our fears, be made known to God. Bring them to God says St. Paul, always, “in everything”. St. Paul tells us here that we can talk to God about absolutely anything that is troubling us. We can do this in the absolute knowledge and trust that “He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).
- **Hezekiah** - In the Old Testament, there is a beautiful example from the life of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:14. Hezekiah received a very disturbing letter from his enemy. It was the kind of letter that would cause a person much anxiety. We read, “And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up into the house

of the Lord and spread it before the Lord” (2 Kings 19:14). So whatever our invading anxiety is, we can always do as Hezekiah did, spread it before the Lord in prayer.

- In John 14:1, Jesus says, “Let not your hearts be troubled.” Then Jesus goes on to give us the secret of a trouble-free heart. He says, “Believe in God, believe also in Me.” So we should trust God completely and spread it all out before Him in prayer.
- **Bonhoeffer** - There is a beautiful story about the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was in prison during the second world war in Hitler’s Germany. He was separated from his family until the time of his execution. He certainly had a reason for much anxiety. But through Christ, he had learned to overcome his anxiety, and he wrote in his diary these beautiful words: “From the moment we wake until we fall asleep, we must commend our loved ones wholly and unreservedly to God, and leave them in His hands, transforming our anxiety for them into prayers on their behalf.”
- **Prescription for Anxiety** - “In nothing be anxious,” says St. Paul, “but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” And this is St. Paul’s prescription for anxiety: take it to the Lord in prayer. And one spiritual writer says about this verse, “Tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer.”
- **Closing** - As we close then, we learn about what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus: we need to have faith and let God do His work in our life, to let God be glorified in our life, to submit our life to Jesus through repentance and humility, and learn how to deal with our sufferings, hardships, and anxieties through faith, prayer, supplications, and thanksgiving.
- Glory be to God forever, Amen!

The Parable of the Sower: Luke 8:4-15

The Gospel reading for the first two Sundays of Hatoor (yesterday and next Sunday) is the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:4-15 and Matthew 13:1-9). Yesterday's Gospel reading was in Luke 8:4-15 and next week's is in Matthew 13:1-9.

Gospel Reading (Luke 8:4-15) - And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: "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 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!" Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?" And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.' "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience."

- In today's Gospel reading, Jesus compares the truth, which is His word, to a seed. The word of God is the seed: His parables, His healings, His miracles, and Jesus Himself who was cast as a seed into the ground and buried to be raised to new life.
- **The Soils** - The emphasis in this parable is not on the seed or the sower but rather on the soil which is the final determining factor as to whether or not the seed bears fruit. Jesus tells us that there are basically four types of soil from which seeds can grow. Therefore, it is perhaps more appropriate to call this parable the Parable of the Soils. We read that the seed falls on four types of soil, and three out of four reject it. If we have experienced

any kind of crop failure in our life, it is perhaps because God's word is preached but we don't accept it.

Let us briefly examine the four types of soil that Jesus talks about in this parable.

1. **The Seeds by the Wayside** - We have all heard of hardening of the arteries, but a far more deadly disease is the hardening of the heart toward God. Hardening of the arteries stops the flow of blood causing physical death, while a hardening of the heart prevents us from receiving the Bread of Life causing the death of the soul.

- Nothing stops the word of God but a closed heart! It stops it completely, it doesn't penetrate it at all. It is of these hearts that Jesus said, "Neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31).
- But when we hear this, we object, saying "this cannot be true of me. There is no way that my heart is hard." We should think again!
- How are Hearts Hardened? - First, some are hardened by pride. We sometimes think that we have the answer to every question. We think that because we have grown older, that we are wiser and smarter. This is perhaps why Jesus urges us to be like little children.
- Secondly, since we were born into Christianity, we take the truths of our faith for granted. Our church beliefs make no impression on us any more. We just take them for granted never pondering what they really mean or imply.
- Thirdly, the heart can also become hardened to the word of God through lack of cultivation. Just as no water hardens the soil, so no prayer, no church, no sacraments, no relationship with Christ, hardens the soul.
- If only once - just once - the word of God could get through, what a transformation it would bring. If only we could accept the seed, what hope, faith, love, and power it would bring. But we remain hard.

2. **Some Fell on Rock**

- These are precisely the people who admire the word of God: "What a lovely liturgy," "What a great verse," "What a moving Bible passage," or "What a great Bible study,"

and then that's the end of it. They "receive it with joy," but that's as far as it goes because they have "no roots in themselves."

- As strange as it seems, one of the ways of rejecting the word of God is by admiring it. Let us illustrate this point. A church father once told a make-believe story about a flock of geese that milled around in a filthy barnyard imprisoned by a high wooden fence. One day a preaching goose stepped onto an old crate and began to preach. He criticized the geese for being satisfied to live in that filthy barnyard when God had given them wings with which to fly into the sky. He spoke of the goodness of God in giving the geese wings. He urged them to use their wings to fly out of the barnyard to better surroundings. This pleased the geese. They nodded their heads in approval and commented on what a great preacher the goose was. They marveled at what he had said and applauded his eloquence. All this they did. But one thing they never did. They did not use their wings to leave the barnyard. They went right back to their old ways.
- We can apply this story to ourselves. When we attend a liturgy or read a nice verse in the Bible, or attend a nice Bible study, we are deeply moved. But then what? Most of us go back to our old ways. We hear the truth and admire it, but we do not accept it. And so we continue to live with our hatreds, prejudices, our pride, our envy, and our wars.

3. Some Fell Among Thorns

- This is probably the saddest part of this parable. The soil that could of produced greatness produces a jungle. A soil that produces weeds has great potential. It must be good soil, otherwise weeds would not grow there. Good soil has so much potential that weeds can actually burst through asphalt and concrete. But as Jesus says, the thorns grow quick and fast, and they soon choke the seed.
- There are a lot of good people represented here in this type of soil. They receive the word of God and they really want to serve God, but they become involved in so many other interests that God is gradually choked out. It is not that the things that we are busy with that are necessarily bad, they actually may be good things, but they drain our energies and turn our hearts away from Christ. A real-estate salesman once said, "My prayers don't even reach the ceiling before I'm thinking about that real estate deal that's hanging over me."

- So many activities that are good clutter up our lives that they become the enemy of Christ. Jesus poses a question to each one of us: what thorns are we permitting to grow in our own life that choke out our loyalty to God?

4. Some Fell on Good Soil

- The good soil represents those of us who receive the word of God and it becomes a permanent part of us. We keep it in our heart and bring forth fruit with patience. It grows and slowly takes possession of our desires, our emotions, our thoughts and our actions. Little by little, our lives become fruitful and God-like.
- We must admit that there are times when we are any one of the three poor types of soil or perhaps we are a strange combination of all of them. The point that Jesus is making here is that our soil can always be improved. Hard soil can be plowed; rocks and thorns can be removed. By care and cultivation, our hearts can become fertile and productive, like the “good soil” that produces a hundredfold.

5. He Who Has Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear

- One of the key ways to improve our soil is to improve our hearing. We need to become sensitive to God’s voice as a sleeping mother is to a cry of her infant.
- Listening is a great virtue, really. We pay the highest respect to someone when we sincerely listen to them.
- In our culture, we have the habit of talking too much and listening too little. We go to social gatherings and everyone is talking at the same time and no one is listening. A church father once said that we always have the wrong switch on: the switch of the mouth is always open and the switch of the ears is always closed.
- A woman once went to a social gathering and wanted to test how well her friends listened to her, so as soon as she got to the gathering, she told her friends, “I just shot my husband today.” And then her friends said, “very nice, good for you dear.” They were not listening to anything she said.
- We have to learn to listen to the word of God, and to each other. We have to listen to the guidance from our parents, our teachers, our spiritual fathers, and the elders.
- At the Transfiguration of Jesus, we read “While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying,

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” Here we see the importance that God places on being a good hearer and listener.

- We must examine ourselves and see what kind of soil we have and how our hearing is related to that soil. May we always be hearers to the word of God and have the good soil that Christ is looking for. We close here with this great verse from the Gospels: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:23).

Come and See

Gospel Reading - Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” And Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And He said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (John 1:44-52).

We read here that after Philip the Apostle met Jesus, he then found Nathanael and said, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” And Nathanael responded by saying, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip’s reply was quick, as he said, “Come and see.” In this gospel reading, we wish to concentrate on these words: “Come and see.”

Jesus has always been telling us to “come and see.” When Thomas said that he would not believe because he had not seen the resurrected Christ, Jesus appeared to him and invited him to come and see and even touch His wounds. Thomas came and saw and believed. He was never the same again. When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Jesus charged him not to reveal publicly the mystery of who He was. He wanted people to believe in Him not because they heard it second-hand from others. He wanted people to come to Him personally, first-hand, to see Him, listen to Him, follow Him, and discover by an intensely personal experience who He is.

Many of us have faith, but it is a second-hand faith that we have inherited from our families. We need to make it a first-hand, personal faith of our own, like Job’s faith when he said, “I had learned of You O Lord by the hearing of the ear; but now I see You with my own eyes” (Job 42:5). This can happen only if we come to Jesus personally, commit our life to Him, and see

for ourselves what miracles He can work in our lives, what understanding He can give us, what power, what love, what grace, what forgiveness, what peace, what joy!

“Come and see” says Philip. Come and see what a change Jesus can make in our life. He will destroy the old, sinful nature to allow the image of God in us to shine forth in all its attractive splendor. He will help us achieve our great potential of becoming “partakers of divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). He will take away our guilt. He will help carry our burdens. He will raise us when we fall. He will comfort us in our affliction. He will strengthen us in our weakness.

“Come and see” says Philip. Come and see how He can change your tastes in life. A modestly paid newspaper reporter turned to magazine writing and became an immediate success. With a soaring income, her mode of living changed radically. No more scrimping, she spent on a lavish scale. Then came the stock market crash. Her investments evaporated. Even worse, her spirits hit rock bottom. Friends tried to get her to rebound, but she did not respond. “Come on now, snap out of it,” said a friend. “You were poor before and it wasn’t so awful.” “But it was different then,” moaned the writer. “Now I have expensive tastes.”

After we come to Christ, our sense of taste improves so drastically that we can never be satisfied any more with the cheap and sordid - not after we have tasted life with Christ! “Taste and see that the Lord is good,” says the Psalmist (Psalm 34:8).

“Come and see” says Philip. Come and see what great things God can do in our life. Come and see what purpose and meaning He can add to your life. Come and see what a great plan He has for your life. Come and see what love you will find in Him. Come and see the promises He has made to you. Come and see what a great victory He has won for you through His death and resurrection. Come and see how eager He is to give you the kingdom. Come and see what a great future He has prepared for you. Come and open the door to let Him come to your heart. He wants to have dinner with you as He did with Zacchaeus. He wants to establish a close personal, intimate relationship with you.

“Come and see.” A well known agnostic one day approached a farmer who had a simple and radiant Christian faith. “Tell me what your faith means to you and why you are a Christian,” asked the agnostic. The farmer refused saying, “You could demolish my arguments in an instant. I’m not clever enough to argue with you.” The agnostic said gently, “I don’t want to argue with you; I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you.” The farmer did. When he had finished, there were tears in the great agnostic’s eyes. Then he said, “I would give my right

hand if only I could believe that.” It was no clever argument that touched the agnostic’s heart, just the personal experience of a simple farmer who came to Jesus and saw. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” “Come and see” and “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

A Scientist’s Confession - A brilliant scientist said once to his class, “Before giving my lecture, I want to tell you something. I am a Christian. I was brought up in a Christian home with my brother, and the two of us were the closest pals. We were both at the university together. My father and mother were deeply religious. My brother and I had no time for religion. We thought that religion was only for old people, but we were scientists and we thought we had found our way through by what we were pleased to call scientific methods. Then my brother was killed. My father and mother had resources, and with their resources they could meet that shattering loss. But I had no one. I had no resources at all. One night, broken-hearted and with all my proud science in ruined uselessness at my feet, I knelt down. I did not know how to pray. I had scorned prayer, but I put out my hand and I found that it was grasped. I knew that Someone was coming to my help and somehow I knew it was Christ. I have been a Christian ever since and no one, nothing, will ever take Christ away from me any more.”

“Come and see” and “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

Lukewarmness in Service - Part I

1. Introduction

- What is lukewarmness? A dictionary definition of this word is “not enthusiastic.” In spiritual terms, Jesus defines lukewarmness as “neither cold nor hot” (Revelation 3:15-16).
- According to Jesus in the Bible, the spiritual state of lukewarmness is the most dangerous and the worst possible spiritual state to be in.
- When Jesus spoke to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, His strongest words and His greatest condemnation from the seven churches was to the lukewarm church of Laodicea. We read, “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 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. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:14-19).
- In this passage, Jesus reveals why He hates lukewarmness more than anything else, namely because it is a state of hypocrisy. That is, the lukewarm person projects an image of religious behavior externally but internally they are not religious at all. Put another way, externally they are hot, but internally they are cold, and hence overall lukewarm.
- Jesus hates hypocrisy, as we see how He spoke and dealt with the Pharisees who were perfect models of hypocrisy.
- Note here that Jesus says “I will vomit you out of My mouth.” For Jesus to vomit something, it must be in His mouth first. Being in the mouth of Jesus is a symbol

of a person who is in the church and a servant in the church, who is supposed to be with and in Jesus. Thus, to be lukewarm, by definition, you must be a person in the church who is supposed to be spiritually active and is one who shows outer signs of this activity, but internally this person is far from Jesus. This is why Jesus vomits this person, or expels this person, signifying that this person is really living apart from Christ and far from Christ.

- Jesus also says that the lukewarm person here lives in a state of delusion and blindness. Outwardly the lukewarm person projects an image of being spiritually “rich, wealthy, and have need of nothing” but internally they are “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”
- Thus, first and foremost, lukewarmness is a total and complete state of hypocrisy. Secondly, it is a state of delusion and blindness. St. Paul says of the lukewarm person, “They have a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5). That is, the lukewarm person is outwardly religious but internally denies the power of God. They are empty within.
- As we noted earlier, lukewarmness is the most dangerous and worst spiritual condition for the servant. In the subsequent discussion, we will first study some attributes and signs of a lukewarm servant and then discuss the cure and solution to lukewarmness.

2. Attributes and Signs of Lukewarmness in Service

(a) Lukewarmness is a Gradual Loss of the Christian Virtues

- Lukewarmness may be understood as a general breakdown of the theological virtues. Much like sin, it is a special cause for sadness. Christians fall into lukewarmness because of culpable neglect. They lose their peace and joy. The image of Christ is beclouded in their mind and heart: He is neither seen nor heard.
- The lukewarm person loses their friendship with Christ, and loses their service for Christ. Everything having to do with service and spirituality is reduced to “doing things” rather than “loving someone.”
- The soul is left with an emptiness towards God. It tries to fill that void with things that ultimately cannot satisfy. The entire life of piety becomes tainted with dejection.

- Lukewarmness is a grave sickness of the soul which can strike at any stage of one's interior life. We say that a tepid soul has "fallen away." It has grown weary of the interior struggle. It has lost Christ from view. Tepidity always entails a crisis of faith, hope and love. The afflicted person sees Christ as in indifferent figure. The soul is loathe to make the same selfless affirmations of earlier times. It increasingly becomes satisfied with less and less devotion.
- One of the church fathers says "lukewarmness is a kind of sadness which makes a person sluggish in the performance of spiritual exercises on account of the effort they require." That is, a lukewarm person becomes lazy in their spiritual life.

(b) **Carelessness**

- Lukewarmness derives from a prolonged carelessness towards a person's spiritual life. This condition is always preceded by a series of small infidelities. When these offenses are allowed to accumulate, they gradually sour the soul's relationship with God.
- This carelessness is normally evident in little things, such as a lack of contrition for personal sins and the absence of a tangible spiritual struggle in one's dealings with God and neighbor.
- The life of prayer loses its focus and the soul just muddles along. The person abandons the battlefield of sanctity for the easy life.
- The lukewarm person develops a fear of "overdoing it" and develops an anxiety by apparent lost freedoms in their life.
- The struggle for sanctity becomes downgraded to a struggle just to avoid the big and serious sins in life (adultery, murder, blasphemy, drunkenness, etc...)
- The soul becomes weakened as it increasingly tolerates and rationalizes the small and day-to-day sins in life.
- When the soul falls into lukewarmness, its vision of Christ becomes blurred. The soul loses its former clarity of purpose and the person's spiritual life becomes an ongoing nuisance, something "that has to be done." Service is emptied of its true content and becomes hollow. Sooner or later, it is abandoned. The service becomes dead works, a boring waste of time that drives the soul from its former union with God.
- The lukewarm person does his service out of a sense of duty or guilt. As a result,

they are lifeless in their service. Service becomes a job for them. The servant may even show a singular zeal in performing these works, but they leave a bitter aftertaste.

- What once was love of God deteriorates more and more into mere love of the law, just like the Pharisees. What once was love of truth is now merely an acknowledgment of the truth. What once was love for neighbor is now an indifference towards him.
- Lukewarmness also leads to carelessness in the service itself. The servant becomes unorganized and not careful with attendance, lesson preparation, spiritual activities, one-on-one service, their personal prayers, and church liturgy and doctrine. The servant, one way or another, finds himself doing less and less as they decline on the plane of lukewarmness.
- The lukewarm servant's carelessness leads to a great indifference in their service: indifference in the service itself, indifference towards whom they serve, and indifference towards their peers and fellow servants. The lukewarm servant really doesn't care if the service thrives or not, and doesn't care if it succeeds or fails. It's all the same to him or her! Their minimal effort in service is enough for them. They never serve beyond expectations but most often serve well below expectations.

The Parable of the Unjust Steward

Gospel Reading - “He also said to the disciples, There was a rich man who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’ And the steward said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.’ So, summoning his master’s debtors on by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He said ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness; for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations” (Luke 16:1-9).

The story of the dishonest steward is a mystery, begging questions that must be answered in order to get to the truth behind the character. Wise in worldly terms, spiritually he is a forgerer, thief, and embezzler.

Question One: What did the steward do to cause the problem?

He altered bills in which he reduced the debts of the clients by writing lower rates. Then when the owner of the goods fired him, the clients who reduced for themselves the rates would be indebted to him. So he would share with them the difference once he was thrown out.

Question Two: What is Christ’s aim in telling this parable?

Clearly, the aim is to say that the sons of light should have the same wisdom as the steward, but without theft and pilfering. Because this world is unrighteous, all its money is unrighteous. Man, therefore, must squander this money on the poor and needy so that all he has squandered may be deposited into a heavenly account. When he goes to heaven, he will find his account waiting for him; mercy and love from God, just as he has loved and had mercy on God’s poor on earth.

Question Three: What is Saint Luke's purpose in recording this parable?

The evangelist is telling the Pharisees and those like them who love and treasure money in this world that they will pay for it in the next. Soaking it up for themselves, they did not have mercy on the poor and needy. In hoarding it, they strove to become great so that the world would serve and fear them. There is here an evangelical lesson. All money unnecessary for basic needs should not be hoarded for this age, but rather, sent upwards, for a personal surplus in heaven.

After the end of the parable comes the ironic commentary of the master. He is the owner of this world, who is also called the rich land owner and by the steward, my master.

The Parable Verse by Verse:

1. "He also said to the disciples, There was a rich man who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. And he called him and said to him, What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward."

Christ here is still speaking amidst the multitude, and the scribes and Pharisees are listening, but Christ is especially directing these words to his disciples.

The rich man had a steward who used to deal with merchants. He sold them olive oil produced by his oil press and wheat from his fields. A truly rich man, his steward was legally certified and specialized in selling and collecting the profits. He had special rights in demanding debts, suing, and even shutting down businesses in the case of delinquency. Such a working relationship was usually in the form of a brokerage, but sometimes it was by salary. It appears that the steward favored the traders at the expense of the master, because he squandered the master's goods, and it was for this reason that the master dismissed him. The master summoned him immediately and ordered him to deliver the accounts of the stewardship along with all of the bills.

This will also happen to us when the Prince of this World, who is the devil, finds us unfaithful to him, because we waste the riches of his "unrighteous mammon." The riches of this world, whether few or many, belong to the unrighteous, regardless of whether they are gathered honestly or dishonestly. So when the Prince of this World finds us squandering his money over the children of the Heavenly King, he goes mad. In this world, he takes

out his wrath on the saintly children of God when they are generous toward the poor and helpless, and waste the money of “unrighteous mammon” on the works of which Christ has need on earth. Employees, traders or otherwise, they become extremely hateful to the Prince of this World. Whatever length of time they live, when they die, he will bid them good riddance with insults and perhaps persecution and illness. This is what “Turn in the account of your stewardship” means to the Prince of this World. We turn in the account of his rotten stewardship and, God willing, approach heaven. There, we discover all the funds accumulated from our conversion of the “unrighteous mammon” of the Prince of this World to pure and holy savings, which are the gifts of God’s graces in heaven. It is a bold move, converting the impure money of this world into heavenly accounts.

When we are received in heaven we will be asked whether we have been dismissed by the Prince of this World. The one who has not been given a dismissal will not be received in heaven. The Prince of this World gives a notice of termination along with a certificate signifying lack of effectiveness in the world along with many other poor qualities to those who do not do his bidding on earth. Among them, he might list wasting time in prayer, going to church, throwing away the precious money of this world on people who are strangers in this world, such as beggars and the downtrodden, and maintaining strong relations with his number one enemy and master, the Owner of heaven and his Son.

2. “And the steward said to himself, “What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.” So, summoning his master’s debtors on by one, he said to the first, “How much do you owe my master?” He said “A hundred measures of oil.” And he said to him, Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then he said to another, “And how much do you owe?” He said, “A hundred measures of wheat.” He said to him, “Take your bill, and write eighty.””

The steward was told that he was losing his position and was ordered to put the books and bills in order. He wondered how he would survive, since work was already so hard to find. He said to himself, “I cannot dig or steal (though he was, in fact, a thief), nor can I beg,” so his thought led him to embezzlement. The first merchant owned one hundred measures of oil (8.6 gallons or 39 liters according to the historian Josephus, but archaeological discoveries have shown it to be about 20 liters.) So they sat together and

forged the bills, making them 50 measures, which in that time was 500 dinari after the discount, no small amount.

He called the wheat merchant and did the same thing with him. He owed one hundred measures of wheat, but he told him, “Take your bill and write eighty.” As opposed to the measure of the oil, this was a sack that carried about 48 gallons of wheat. According to Josephus, one sack sold for 25-30 dinari, meaning that one hundred measures sold for about 2,500 dinari. In the end, his discount resulted in him stealing 500 dinari from the original bill, also a significant sum.

The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness; for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

Since Christ is the one speaking here, clearly by “master”, he means the rich land owner. There is here a bit of obscurity. One man he ironically described as the “master.” In the other man, the dishonest steward, he found wisdom, albeit unrighteous and not in the interests of the masters. He managed to live by moving the unrighteous money, which he, along with the master’s clients, had embezzled. Thus, he made a living when he was welcomed by those same clients when his master dismissed him.

Christ was asking whether it is possible for the children of the light to have the wisdom of this man, funneling upward the unrighteous money of this world. “And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations.”

Summary

It is evident from the story and from the behavior of the dishonest steward that this way of dealing with unrighteous money was wise according to the children of this world. Christ is asking us to act in the same fashion, not as a dishonest steward, but as wise children of the light.

The plain interpretation is this:

The unjust and evil world is the master. We, whether we like it or not, have been forced to be stewards for this master. We work, buying and selling, working in his governmental offices and in his private companies in agriculture, construction, commerce, banks, manufacturing, exploring space, setting down on the moon, etc..., all the while gathering money in order to

give him what we have collected. For him, we accumulate knowledge, data, and inventions to hand over to him. The best we can do is sneak what we can from him - from this unrighteous money - yet doing so with complete honesty, in order to give it to the poor, downtrodden, sick, and disfigured, that when he finally dismisses us (i.e., death) and we ascend to heaven, he finds nothing left for himself.

In heaven, we will find that our fund have been transferred from the hands of the poor and needy into the hands of the angels above. The entire lot is deposited into funds of grace, wisdom, and spiritual awareness for unveiling the secrets of the kingdom of the great King of heaven.

So we are qualified to work with God who is rich in mercy. This is better by far.

Leading a Child to Christ - Part I

The single most important thing for any Christian is their personal relationship with Christ. Bringing a child to Christ is the most important aspect of our service.

How do we bring a child to Christ?

1. **God loves you** - The first step is that we must make it clear to the child whom we serve is that God loves them unconditionally. In 1 John 4:8 we read, “God is love.” We must be able to communicate to the child that God loves them. One of the best ways to do this is by being an *example to them*, that is, by loving the child ourselves. It is impossible for us to lead anyone to Christ if we don’t love them. We have to have the spirit of love to be good servants. In 1 Timothy 4:15, St. Paul tells Timothy how to be a good servant. He tells him, “give yourself entirely to them.” And he also says in 1 Timothy 5:1 to treat “younger men as brothers.”

Thus in order for children to understand God’s love, they must first see it through us. We have to love them, and this is the start of the process in leading a child to Christ. We show love by

- caring and asking about the child
 - always smiling at them, listening to them, and always trying to get to know them.
 - being there for them in time of need.
 - encouraging them
 - mentoring them (Examples: St. Paul and Timothy, St. Antony and St. Athanasius, Jesus and His disciples, Barnabas and St. Mark).
2. **You have sinned** - The second step in leading a child to Christ is to make the child understand that he/she is not perfect, and that nobody else is perfect either. We must make it clear to them that they and everybody else makes mistakes, and we must teach them that we are all sinners. In Romans 3:23, we read “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

- Teaching kids that we are all sinners early on encourages them to be humble and not to be full of pride or have a big ego. We have to convey to the kids that i) yes, cheating on a test will sometimes happen, ii) sometimes one can lie or steal, iii) sometimes we do not respect our parents.
 - We have to convey to them that sinning always put us in trouble. That is, sin is a troublesome state. St. Paul says in Romans 6:23, “for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
 - Though we all sin, we need to make it clear to the kids that God hates sin and does not accept sin. As a result, we must take our sins seriously and take responsibility of our sins. God knows everything we do. Things are not OK just because we did not get caught. We need to make it clear that our life is not going to be OK if we accept sin and are careless about our sins.
 - Although we may teach the kids about sin, responsibility, and how God views sin, kids will still sin and bad things may happen. How do we handle it? Recall St. Paul’s epistle to Philemon. Onesimus was a slave who stole from his master Philemon. St. Paul was a great mentor to both Onesimus and Philemon. St. Paul converted Onesimus to Christianity, and through St. Paul’s mentoring, guidance, and perseverance, Onesimus did not only become a good Christian, but he also became a great Bishop in the early church. We always have to be patient and persevere, and not get shook up if kids sin.
3. **God paid the price for our imperfection** - After teaching the kids that we are imperfect, we must teach them that it was God who paid the price for our imperfection. We teach them that God loves us so much that He paid the price for our sins. When somebody does bad things, somebody has to pay for them. God bought us at a great price. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, St. Paul says, “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.” In 1 John 4:14, we read, “The Father has sent His Son to be the savior of the world.” Thus, Christianity starts with bad news in sin, but it ends with good news in Christ’s sacrifice for us. He paid the price for our sins on the cross. Christianity begins with bad news and ends with good news.
4. **Ask God for forgiveness** - We must teach the kids that although we sin and Christ paid the price for our sins, we can ask God for forgiveness for our sins and they will be forgiven and completely forgotten. Forgiveness offers great hope to a child. If we only

tell a child about how bad a sin is and how much God hates it, and we don't offer them anything else, the child will think that God is mean, inflexible, and unkind. A child needs *hope*, and that hope is offered in the concept of forgiveness. We have to make it clear to the kids that when we repent and ask for God's forgiveness, God completely forgives sin. That is, that sin is completely annihilated and erased. We read in Micah 7:19, "He will cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea."

Leading a Child to Christ - Part II

We will focus on the basic needs of children. These needs are critical for a child's spiritual growth. The four fundamental needs of children are:

1. Love, acceptance, security
2. Choices and challenges
3. Praise, recognition, and encouragement
4. Responsibility and independence

1. **Love, acceptance, security** - Every child needs love, acceptance, and a sense of security from their parents, peers, and Sunday School servants. A child develops a sense of value, self worth, and a healthy self-esteem when they experience love, acceptance, and security.

- **Love** - A child learns to love by being loved. A child cannot be taught how to love others by reading a book or through a Sunday School lesson. Love must be experienced to be learned. Clearly, Christ demonstrated that we only learn how to love by being loved first, and in fact, He indeed loved us first. We read in 1 John 4:19 that, "We love because He first loved us."
- **Acceptance** - Every child needs generous measures of acceptance, that is, feeling unconditionally accepted, regardless of their behavior or appearance. If a child is made to feel that he or she must earn acceptance, then feelings of insecurity or unworthiness may result. This is what brings on low self-esteem. When a child does not feel accepted, he/she may start feeling rebellious and aggressive as a way of attracting attention, and this reflects the need to be loved and accepted. This should be a clear signal to the servant that a child needs acceptance. God accepted us unconditionally and we ought to do the same. We read in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This verse clearly describes God's unconditional acceptance of us. The child who feels loved and accepted by adults finds it easy to feel accepted by God.

- **Love never stops** - We should never give the child the impression that God will not love them if they behave badly. God’s love is free. God never withholds love in order to secure obedience. God loves so fully and faithfully that obedience to Him becomes the response of those who accept His love and grace.
- **Acceptance and Approval** Although we should always accept children regardless of their behavior, this does not mean that we approve of their behavior. Acceptance and approval are two different things. Acceptance means recognizing another person’s feelings without judging or condemning. Acceptance does not mean permitting that person to demonstrate unacceptable behavior.
- **Approval** - Children have a deep need of recognition and approval. To be noticed by an adult is of high value to a child. To be approved by peers creates a sense of belonging and an acceptance by the “group”. The Sunday School servant is responsible to see that this approval need is met on a continuing basis. The children who most need approval often present the greatest challenges to the servant.
- **How do we accept the child?**
 - * Understand the child
 - * Listen to them
 - * Observe them and be perceptive
 - * Talk and work with the child one-on-one
 - * Develop a one-on-one relationship with them
 - * Arrange a visit to their home: visitations
 - * Call them on the phone

2. **Choices and Challenges** - A child learns to assume responsibility by being given the opportunity to make choices. Children who are never allowed to make choices or not allowed to experience different ways of learning have difficulty in life when adjusting to a new situation. Not allowing children make choices hurts them badly when they grow up. When they grow up, they become confused about everything, and they are unable to make even the simplest decisions. They need others to make all the decisions for them.

- **Potential** - A child’s potential goes unused when we suppress their imagination. We become comfortable with as certain method or certain story, and then the child starts

being able to predict with great accuracy what is going to happen or be said next. This is a main reason that children become bored in Sunday School.

- **Motivation** - Allowing a child to make choices increases motivation, which results in better learning. For example, we can ask the kids which Bible stories they want to hear or which activities they want to do. We should always offer options on how an activity will be completed. We should not just have one thing in mind. For example, we could suggest a Bible quiz and ask them if they want it to be open Bible or closed Bible.
- **Creative** - We need to be creative with the children in our Sunday School class. We should plan activities requiring different skills. Once we have offered a choice, we must be willing to accept that choice. We must state the choices clearly so that the child understands and does not offer you something that is unacceptable.

3. **Praise, recognition, and encouragement** - Praise and recognition are crucial to a child's positive development and self-esteem. Every child needs to be recognized and praised. Although very crucial and important, this seems to be an area where we have all failed miserably. We have failed simply because we don't understand it. We do not understand the implications and consequences of offering praise and recognition, either to children or to adults. Servants should always focus on a child's positive behavior and deliberately look for his/her strengths. That is, we should focus on the things that the child does well. This is crucial for a child's well being. Thus our recognition should always be honest. When its honest, then that is when it's most effective. Criticism, ridicule, and sarcasm suppress a child's development by tearing down their self-image.

- **Christ's recognition of others** - Recall Christ's recognition of the centurion who had a sick servant. Christ said, "Assuredly I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel" (Matthew 8:10). Recall the woman who had the flow of blood for twelve years. Jesus said, "who touched My clothes?" (Mark 5:30). Recall The Parable of the Talents: the master recognizes and rewards the servants who invested their talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Recall that when Job was sick, his friends came to see him and gave him a magnificent compliment. They said, "Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have strengthened the feeble knees" (Job 4:4). Recall when Jesus restored Peter as an Apostle in John 21:15-19.

- **Honest praise** - Praise for an honest attempt must be part of the relationship with the child. We often express praise only when the final goal is achieved. We have to recognize and praise the child's efforts who tried, but did not complete a task. Whatever praise we give, it must be genuine. Children recognize insincerity very quickly. We should aim to give one honest compliment each Sunday to a child. Example are: "nice answer," "you're very good, you've been reading," or "I like your behavior, you're very polite."
- **Specific praise** - Praise must also be specific. We should avoid vague expressions of praise that leave the child unsure of what was done well.

4. **Independence and Responsibility** - People learn to be independent and responsible at a young age. Children need increased opportunities to gain independence and be given responsibilities in order to properly mature as an adult. What can we do to help kids be responsible?

- Assign the child to bring, organize, and distribute Agpeyas, Bibles, song books, etc...
- Assign a child to make copies
- Assign a child to bring markers for the board
- Assign a child to bring food or snacks
- Assign a child to organize things
- Assign a child to clean up

We as servants should give out duties to the kids and check up on them. We should assign the kids to be in charge of certain things, and we should rotate the responsibility in the class. This requires additional effort from the servant and so we have to take the extra time to try and teach kids to be responsible and independent. Teaching kids to be independent will reflect leadership qualities in the servant rather than the servant being viewed as an enforcer.

The Relationship of a Child with His Parents

Understanding the relationship between a child and his parents is a critical aspect of Sunday School service. We need to understand what kinds of issues and problems arise and how to help resolve them.

The Five Gaps

1. **Generation gap** - We must realize that there is at least a 25 year difference between a child and his parents. Thus, parents are not always going to understand what is going on in a child's life, what is "cool", and what is "not cool." Parents might not be excited by the things the child is excited by, such as sports, games, computers, etc... The child must be patient and not get frustrated by this, and at the same time the parent must make an extra effort to know what is going on in the child's life and try to understand and appreciate what the child is exposed to.
2. **Culture gap** - A child's parents have been primarily raised in a completely different culture with completely different surroundings, and a different environment. This cultural gap often creates a big barrier, because parents do not know how other people are raised and find it hard to judge and evaluate a different culture as well as judge the quality of the individuals from a different culture. Parents typically react in great fear because of the culture gap between them and their children. Parents are often confused and unable to get a good grasp of and understand other cultures. They feel lost, pressured, stressed, and sometimes out of control.
3. **Language gap** - Kids that are raised in the U.S. often speak only English, and often do not speak or understand Arabic. Moreover they often resent, despise, and are embarrassed by the Arabic language, especially around their friends and at school. Parents sometimes do not learn English at an appropriate level to communicate with their kids. As a result, kids will always be saying things that their parents don't understand and vice-versa. The language gap hurts communication in the family, and can create a great distance between a child and his parents.

4. **Religious gap** - Although the religion of a child and his parents is identical, there are gaps. The way religion was taught and practiced, along with the style of the discipline was very different for the parent as compared to the child. The kinds of things that parents were exposed to in their religious life is very different from that of the child. For example, “blind obedience” was a common way of doing things for the parent, with no discussion, explanation, or reasoning. Today, kids cannot practice religion this way. They always want to know why, they need explanations, reasoning, discussion, convincing statements, and good role models.
5. **Scientific gap** - Education and school systems are very different between child and parent. The U.S. is most advanced scientifically, and offers the child much more opportunities in education, than what was available for the parent. As a result, a child may know a lot of scientific facts, may be intellectually advanced, have a great knowledge about computers, etc... This may be intimidating to the parents who were not exposed to such things, even though they may be well educated.

Closing the Gaps

1. **Dialogue** - The parent and child, with help from the Sunday School servant, need to make a special effort to open dialogue between themselves. The Sunday School servant needs to constantly pray to God to give him, the parent, and the child wisdom to speak and do what is constructive and right. The child must realize that they need their parents and the parents must realize that they need their children. We must always encourage and strive for a friendship between parent and child. Exodus 33:11 says, “God spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend.” This is the model verse for dialogue between parent and child. It is this type of friendship that is critical in the relationship between a child and his parents.
2. **Honor your Father and Your Mother** - This is the 5th commandment laid down by God in Exodus 20:12. A child must honor their father and mother regardless of what they say, as long as it is said in the Lord. St. Paul, says in Ephesians 6:1, “Child obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” Ephesians 6:1-4 has some very nice verses on the relationship between parent and child. The relationship between parent and child can be destroyed when the child does not respect and honor his parents. This disrespect

easily comes from television, movies, school, etc... In Exodus 21:17 we read, “And he who curses his father and his mother shall surely be put to death.” The child should honor the sacrifices the parent makes for them and their hard work in giving the child a good life. In Ephesians 6:2, we read, “Honor your father and your mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

3. **Obedience** - Obedience is the key to God’s heart, and a child must be obedient to his parents. “Child obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1).
4. **Spiritual growth** - Spiritual growth of parent and child enables the fruits of the Holy Spirit to dictate the parent-child relationship. St. Paul says in Ephesians 6:4, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” St. Paul also says, “Love never fails.” (1 Corinthians 13:8). Spiritual growth enables the child and parent to endure difficult times, have patience, peace, love, gentleness, kindness, joy, faithfulness, goodness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Parents will be judged on how they raise their children. Recall the story of Eli and his sons. In 1 Samuel 3:13 we read, “For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.”

Parental Christian Upbringing of Children (Preschool - Grade 6)

- The parents have, by far, the most influence on the spiritual life of their children. It is the parents who set the tone for their children's spiritual and church life.
- There are two main elements to Christian upbringing of children:
 - parental care in the home
 - parental care outside of the home
- The home is, by far, main source of Christianity, religious training, and spirituality in the child's life. Our home should be the home of Christ and it should be a place that pleases Christ and gives Him comfort. How can parents build a strong Christian home for their children?
 1. **Pray and Read the Bible together** - It is absolutely essential that parents read the Bible and pray with their kids *daily*, starting at a very young age, say at 1.5 or 2 years old. Parents should make every effort to pray with their kids at least once a day, including in the morning, in the evening, and before meals. This is critical in a child's spiritual upbringing which builds the foundation of their spiritual life. Jesus says, that "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). So Jesus is "in our midst" when we read our Bible and pray with our children.
 2. **Watch spiritual videotapes** - When the child is young, it is important that they visualize the things that they pray and read the Bible about. This is why it is critical to supplement spiritual reading with spiritual videos on saints, and stories from the Bible. In addition, listening to spiritual songs and reciting spiritual songs with your children is an excellent spiritual activity. When the child is very young (5 - 10 years of age), animated (cartoons) Bible stories are a wonderful source of religious training. Many Christian stores (for example, Lifeway Christian Store on Capital Blvd) have an excellent and comprehensive set of animated Bible stories including stories about Adam and Eve, Moses, Noah, Samuel, Daniel, Joseph, David and Goliath, the Nativity, and so many more. This and other stores also have many

other spiritual tools, including Children's Bible's, coloring books, spiritual songs, Christian puzzles, etc...

Parents must really limit the amount of television that their kids watch. Cartoons and other shows are now quite violent, sexual on content, and in general, very destructive. Video games have also become quite violent. Parents should replace watching television and playing video games by watching spiritual videos as discussed above.

3. **Be Loving** - Parents should be loving to their children and they should *show it* and *say it*. Parents must be careful not to constantly criticize and yell at their children. Parents should deal with problems in a loving way, limit their criticisms, criticize only in a loving and constructive fashion, and tell their children that they love them on a *regular basis*. Children, especially at a young age, deeply need this kind of reassurance and comfort. It gives them a healthy self-esteem when they are told that they are smart, well-behaved, appreciated, cared for, and loved.
4. **Spend time with your child** - Parents have to spend quality time every day with their children, including reading with them and doing various activities with them. Reading with your child stimulates their mind and builds up them intellectually as well as spiritually. In addition to spiritual books, parents should read other types of books to their children, including children's developmental books, simple stories from children's books, science, history, math, etc... to intellectually stimulate them and to engage their curiosity. Parents also must spend quality time with their children doing activities at home, such as doing puzzles, playing games, etc...
5. **Take an interest in your child's life** - Parents must take an interest in their child's life and know what they are doing day to day. Parents must take an interest in their kid's school, know what they are studying and learning, take initiative in helping them with their homework, learn who their friends are and get to know them, take an interest in their activities and participate in them as much as possible.
6. **Be a good Christian role model at home** - Kids imitate their parents and they watch them very carefully. So parents have to watch themselves and be good role models by leading strong and God fearing Christian lives. The two parents must work on having a strong Christian marriage and be good to one another. Parents must be honest, use good language at all times, and treat others in the home in a respectful, loving, and Christian way.

- Outside the home, parents also bear a great responsibility in the Christian upbringing of their children. Here are the parent's responsibilities outside the home.
 1. **Church** - It is the parents responsibility to take their children every week to church, have them attend Sunday School, and take Communion. These three things are very important. It is not good to be "too busy" to go to church, or "be too tired" or "too lay" to go to church on any given Sunday. Parents must make every effort to bring their kids to church every week, attend church with them, and take Communion with them.
 2. **Spend time with your kids outside the home** - On weekends and other occasions, parents must make a special effort to do activities with their kids outside the home, such as go to the park, go to the zoo, play sports, go shopping, etc...
 3. **Be a good Christian role model outside the home** - Parents must be good Christians outside the home as well as inside the home. They have to be honest in their work, have good relations with others at church and in their workplace, have good relations with their relatives and the clergy.

The Structure of a Sunday School Lesson

There are six critical areas that we need to emphasize in our Sunday School lessons, and we should try and emphasize these points in as many lessons as possible.

1. **Love of God** - This is the single most important message that we could give in any Sunday School lesson: God loves us. The Gospel of St. John and the first epistle of St. John are excellent sources from the Bible that talk magnificently about God's love. In John 3:16, we read "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." Also, in 1 John 4:19 we read, "We love Him because He first loved us." In 1 John 4:7-8, we read "God is love." The take home message in every Sunday School lesson is that God, that is Christ, loves us deeply and cares for us. As St. Peter says in 1 Peter 5:7, "for He cares for you."
2. **Christ** - When giving a Sunday School lesson, we should never talk about God in the abstract. God must be made real in Christ. For Christ is God. Christ is God in the flesh. Christ is what we can see, comprehend, and envision. He is something real that can be touched and loved. We should mention the name of Jesus in every lesson several times, and always refer to Christ when talking about God.

The mention of the word Christ is what uplifts and exalts an individual spiritually. It is the mention of Christ that enables us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The mention of Christ brings love and peace to the heart. Christ is the answer to spiritual elevation. A good example of a life totally immersed in Christ is that of St. Paul. We read, in Philippians 2:21, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." And in Galatians 2:20, we read, "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."

We also note the indwelling of Christ in people of the Old Testament. The life of Joseph, for example, was in complete parallel to the life of Christ. Joseph was sold as a slave. Christ was sold for 30 pieces of silver. Joseph was imprisoned for 2 years in the house of Pharaoh. Jesus was numbered with the transgressors. Joseph came to find his lost

brothers. Jesus came to find his lost sheep. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers. Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples. Joseph was sent by his father Jacob to find his brothers. Jesus was sent by God the Father to find the lost sheep. Joseph was rejected by his own. Jesus was rejected by His own. Joseph saves Israel from famine. Jesus saves the world from eternal condemnation.

3. **Relationship with Christ** - We must emphasize establishing a true and real relationship with Christ. We do this by i) keeping the commandments, ii) keeping the sacraments (confession and repentance, communion) , iii) prayer, and iv) reading the Bible.
4. **Forgiveness** - It is important to emphasize the importance of forgiveness and repentance, and the notion of God's love and unconditional acceptance of us as sinners. There are many nice stories in the Bible illustrating God's unconditional acceptance of us as sinners. Examples include i) Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus was so moved by Christ's acceptance of him that he immediately offered to give half of his good to the poor and to restore fourfold from anyone he defrauded. ii) Samaritan woman (John 4) - She was so moved by Jesus's acceptance of her that she ran back to her people to preach Christ. iii) The sinful woman (Luke 7:36-38). The sinful woman was so moved by Jesus's acceptance of her that she wept and washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, and she kissed His feet and anointed them with fragrant oil.

These first four points are intrinsically positive aspects of the Christian life. They are viewed as positive aspects of Christianity regardless of one's spiritual level. We should always focus on the positive aspects of Christianity to build up the faith.

5. **Repentance and Confession** - This can never be viewed as a positive aspect of Christianity unless one feels that love of Christ and the person of Christ in their life. We must first instill the love of Christ in one's life before they view repentance as a positive experience. Repentance is a positive experience for those who believe Christ loves them, as we saw in Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, and the sinful woman.
6. **Consequences of Sin** - This is viewed as positive only when one knows that Christ loves them. It is important to discuss consequences of sin, and the notion of heaven and hell in the Sunday School class. The kids must know that there is a judgment, and that Christ's love and forgiveness is not to be mocked (Matthew 25). We do not want the kids to ever get the impression that Christ is so loving that they can just keep on sinning and sinning,

and everything will be OK. They must be told that this behavior and attitude is a mockery of Christ's love for them. One cannot suit Christ's love to their needs. It is only when a person understands Christ's love and feels Christ's love that they can understand what mockery of Christ's love is, and thus view the consequences of sin in an appropriate way.

Serving Sunday School Kids Outside of the Church

1. Introduction

- The single most important goal in our Sunday School service is to bring the Sunday School kids closer to Christ, so that they can develop a lifelong deep and intimate relationship with Him.
- This goal in service cannot be achieved by seeing the kids once a week in Sunday School. We must also serve them outside of the Church.
- In particular, it is critical that servants develop a one-on-one personal relationship with each child in their class. Such a relationship requires time and it simply cannot be accomplished by seeing the child once a week in Sunday School.
- Developing such a relationship requires
 - Phone calls at home
 - Visitations
 - Retreats
 - Outings and other activities outside of church

2. Phone calls at home

- Calling the kids at home is a great way of initiating a relationship with them.
- When one of our Sunday School kids does not come to church, we should call them at home and check up on them. We should tell them that we missed them and we would like to see them. Some things we can talk about to initiate a relationship on the phone include
 - School - for kids from 1st - 9th grade, this topic will be most dominant
 - Work
 - Important things in their life - ask about something important that is going on in their life (getting their license, starting college, honors or achievements, hobbies or school activities, etc...)

- Social things - Ask about how they spend their free time, ask about trips or vacations they might of took, people they may have visited, relatives that they have visited or seen recently, etc...
- Never make them feel bad or guilty for not coming to church. Avoid lecturing or scolding them. Never start off the phone call by telling them that they should come to church, etc...
- Always make the child feel that you care about them. Take an interest in the child's life.
- Don't make the phone call too short. It won't be effective. Always try to have at least a short conversation when you call a kid at home.
- Always end the phone call on a positive note, telling them that you miss them and would like to see them soon.

3. Visitations

- Visitations are probably the most important and deepest element of Sunday School service. It is the foundational element of one on one service to children.
- We should make it our goal to visit each child in the class once per year.
- Arrange visitations with the parents early, and let the child know that you want to visit them. This usually makes the parents and the child excited.
- In a visitation, try and sit with the child and his/her parents together, or if the child requests, sit alone with the child.
- Start casual conversations with the child and his/her family, by asking about work, school, important events in their life, their hobbies, their interests, their talents, etc... Try to make the child and family feel very relaxed.
- Don't preach or lecture or give a lesson at a visitation. Make the child and the family feel that you care about them and want to be their friend.
- Make it your goal to become the child's friend. Speak with them face to face as a friend. We read in the Bible, "God spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11).
- Develop the type of friendship with the child that they seek your mentorship and guidance in life.

- Always talk on the child's level and never make them feel that you are better than them, more sophisticated than them, or more knowledgeable than them.
- After initial casual conversation, turn to spiritual topics, and talk about the importance of prayer, reading the Bible, going to church, taking communion, confession, and attending Sunday School.
- Try and bring with you a spiritual gift to give to the child, such as a Bible, Icon, Agpeya, etc...
- Read a small passage from the Bible and briefly discuss it.
- End the visitation by prayer.

4. Retreats

- Spiritual retreats are vital in the spiritual upbringing of children. Often the fondest memories for a child are events at retreats.
- Retreats often have a deep and perhaps the deepest impact on a child's life.
- Thus, it should be our goal to have at least two retreats a year for the class. Kids in 3rd grade or older can spend the night at the retreat house. Younger kids can have a spiritual day at the church.
- Make the retreats creative by having lessons as well as fun activities for the kids. Try and get to know the kids personally at the retreats by participating in the activities and spending time with them and talking with them on their level.
- Try and create a familial atmosphere at a retreat, by being a father or mother figure for them, and a true role model.
- Let the kids enjoy some flexibility as long as it is within the retreat rules.

5. Outings

- Outing include taking your Sunday School kids to a park, picnic, museum, zoo, etc...
- At such outings, try and get to know them and socialize with them. Take an interest in their life. Be casual and relaxed. Not every conversation needs to be centered or focused on Church.
- Again, try to find out the hobbies and interests of the child, what their talents are, how they like to spend their time, etc...

6. Conclusion

- Developing a relationship with your Sunday School kids means that you must become their trusted friend, mentor, and counselor.
- Always be a good ambassador for Christ anywhere you go outside of Church, so that the child sees how you live your life outside of church. Try to make any phone call, visitation, or outing a spiritual one by your conduct, attitude, and speech.
- Always seek to glorify God in your service and never lose focus on what the mission is: bring the kids closer to Jesus Christ.
- Always give God the credit for the fruits in service. Never take credit for any good thing.
- Never let the kids become dependent on you. Do not be the center of the child's spiritual life, but rather only an instrument for accomplishing God's work. Always make God the center of the child's spiritual life.
- Pray for all your Sunday School kids.

Making Decisions in Life: The Story of Lot

1. Introduction

- The examples of the lives of several men and women in the Bible can provide us with valuable lessons on living. For example, from Abraham, we learn the value of faith in God. From Joseph, we see the workings of God's providential care. From Job, we learn the importance of patience and faith in God under trials and tribulations.
- From Lot, the nephew of Abraham, we can also glean valuable lessons in i) decision making, ii) the importance of seeking God's will in our decision making, and iii) the consequences of our decisions in life.
- The story of Lot is recorded in the Book of Genesis, Chapters 12, 13, 14, and 19. St. Peter also mentions Lot in his second Epistle (2 Peter 2:7-8).

2. Who is Lot?

- In the book of Genesis, Lot is introduced to us as the nephew of Abraham who sojourned with him (Genesis 12:5, 13:1).
- Lot was a man who, like his uncle Abraham, became quite wealthy (Genesis 13:2-5). Because of the combined wealth of Abraham and Lot, they were forced to separate since the land they shared could not accommodate both of them (Genesis 13:6-9).

3. Lot's Choice

- Given the opportunity to choose where he could go, Lot made a choice which on the surface was a good one, since the land he saw was "well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord" (Genesis 13:10). Lot judged things in a worldly way, in which his choice was based on seeing the external. Lot's choice was based on the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Rather than being humble and yielding to his much elder and humble uncle Abraham to make a choice where to live, Lot chooses over Abraham out of greed and according to the ways of the world.

- Though Lot's choice of where to live looked great from the outside, it results in much sorrow and hardship for Lot! When we make decisions based on "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," they are always the wrong decisions and such decisions can never be God's will. This was precisely the problem with Lot. He was not seeking God's will in making the decision where to live. Lot sought his own will and he paid a very heavy price for it.
- As a result of Lot's choice, Lot suffered
 - War (Genesis 14:11)
 - Kidnapping (Genesis 14:12)
 - Oppression and torment by the citizens of Sodom (2 Peter 2:7-8).
 - Loss of all his material wealth (Genesis 19:15-16, 24-25).
 - The death of his wife (Genesis 19:17, 26).
 - The death of his two married daughters and his sons-in-law (Genesis 19:14).
 - The shame of incest with his daughters (Genesis 19:30-36).
- All of these things happened despite the fact that Lot himself was a righteous person (2 Peter 2:7-8). Though Lot was always righteous, there was a time in his life that his relationship with God was not as strong as it should be, in that Lot did not follow God's will and Lot's spiritual life was not strong.
- Our decisions in life are greatly affected by our relationship with God. If our relationship with God is strong, we will seek to follow God's will in making decisions. If our relationship with God is weak, we will follow our own will and the ways of the world in making decisions, and such decisions can have devastating effects on our lives, as they did with Lot.

4. Our Spiritual Life is Greatly Compromised When Our Relationship with Christ is Weak

- As we see with Lot, he compromised many things in his spiritual life to win the support of others.
 - First, he was willing to give up his virgin daughters to the men who were knocking on the door in order to be safe (Genesis 19:8).

- Second, Lot compromised his spiritual life in that he mingled with the bad company of Sodom to the point that he became one of the leaders, as Lot sat “at the gate of Sodom” (Genesis 19:1).
- Third, as a result of Lot’s compromised spiritual life, his sons-in-law thought that he was joking when Lot told them to get out of Sodom (Genesis 19:14).
- Fourth, when the angels literally dragged Lot out of Sodom, he was so attached to the world and that city that Lot begged the angels that he flee to a city close to Sodom rather than go to the mountains (Genesis 19:17-20).
- Fifth, Lot’s wife did not look back at the city of Sodom out of curiosity. She looked back because she was attached to that place, to the things of the world. Her attachment to the world cost her her life, as she became a pillar of salt the moment she turned back to look (Genesis 19:26).

5. Our Choices

- The story of Lot should impress us with the importance of making proper choices in our lives. In view of what happened to Lot, we will now consider i) some of the choices that greatly affect our lives, ii) some suggestions on how to make the right decisions in life, and iii) what to do when we realize we have made wrong decisions.

- **What Choices Do We Make That Greatly Affect Our Lives?**

- **Following Jesus** - The one that will affect our life more than any other is *the choice to follow Jesus*. This choice will determine our place in eternity and it will have a bearing on *every* choice we make. For as a follower of Christ, we will be concerned with doing His will, not our own.
- **Choosing your Spouse** - This is the next most important decision in life. This decision will, to a great extent, determine our happiness in life. The choice of our spouse can either be heaven on earth or hell on earth depending on whether we follow God's will in this most important area. The choice of our spouse will have a permanent bearing on our children and their emotional well-being. Divorce is never a solution in the Orthodox Church, and once a married couple have children, there is no way to reverse the choice they have made as to who is the mother and father of their children!
- **Choosing your Career** - The choice we make in career can have a lasting effect on our marriage, family, and our service to God. One needs to be practical and realistic and follow God's will in choosing a career. One's choice of a career is important from a practical viewpoint since, for example, the job market can change drastically.
- **Choosing your Friends** - Having close and Godly friends can be a wonderful blessing (Proverbs 17:17). The right friends can have a very positive impact on our life, and encourage and uplift our spiritual life. On the other hand, the wrong friends can be a curse for the righteous (Proverbs 12:16, 1 Corinthians 15:33). As we saw in the life of Lot, Lot chose the wrong friends and his spiritual life was compromised and suffered greatly, and so did Lot.
- **Choosing Where You Will Live** - It was in this choice that Lot made a huge mistake. Lot followed the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" in choosing where to live. We must never do this. The choice of where we live can make a huge impact on our own spiritual life, our children's spiritual life, our spouse's spiritual life, and our family life in general. We *cannot* afford to not follow God's will in this area.

6. How Can We More Likely Make the Right Choice?

- Pray unceasingly to know and follow God's will, and ask God for wisdom (James

1:5-8).

- Seek Christian and Godly advice from others, such as parents, elders, priests, spiritual counselors and church servants, and mature friends.
- Consult the wisdom found in the Bible, especially a book like Proverbs.
- Whatever you do, do it for the Lord's sake (Psalm 37:5-6, 23-26, James 4:15).

7. What Should We Do When We Realize Our Choice was Wrong?

- Heed the word of God like Lot finally did when he fled Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Do what is right without reservation. Recall Lot's wife had reservations about leaving Sodom and Gomorrah and it cost her her life.
- Do what Saint Peter did after he denied Christ: i) confess and repent if there is sin in the choice made and ii) resolve to serve the Lord.
- Do what Saint Paul did after persecuting the church: i) accept the forgiveness that Jesus provides, and ii) determine to live for the Lord the rest of your life to the best of your ability.
- The *wrong* thing to do is to continue in the wrong choice we have made because of pride or some other reason.

8. Conclusion

- The story of Lot should serve to teach us that making the proper decision is very important, and to warn us not to make our choices according to our own will. The choices we make are based on a partnership with Jesus in following His will, since only He knows what is best for our life and salvation.
- We should "remember Lot" the next time we are faced with an important decision: i) we should make that decision based on the will of God and not our own, and ii) our eternal destiny and that of those we love might rest upon our choices.

The Work God Blesses

1. Introduction

- Every man and woman has a work assigned to them by God. This becomes their purpose, their reason for being on the earth, their calling, their destiny. Abraham had an assignment for his life, as did Joseph. Moses was called to perform a specific life-task. David had a destiny. So did Daniel, Jeremiah, and all the prophets. Esther was raised up “for such a time as this.” John the Baptist fulfilled a definite role, as did Peter and John. Paul had a purpose, a reason for being.
- Only a few of these people realized what their work was. Most of them were like you and me: we only come into an awareness of our purpose slowly. Everything seems ordinary and mundane; we feel like there is nothing special about us, no calling we could possibly fulfill. Moses is a striking example. The first forty years of his life were spent learning how to be a prince of Egypt. The next forty years of his life were spent in the desert, unlearning everything he had been taught. It seemed like a huge waste of a life. When God sent him back to Egypt at the age of eighty, Moses still did not understand or appreciate the full extent of what God was calling him to do. Neither did the Hebrews. But now we understand that God had a purpose for him all along.
- Or look at Joseph. At an early age he senses God’s call on his life for something special. But things do not go the way he expects them to go (things seldom do). His brothers first seek to kill him, but then settle for selling him to the slave-traders. His situation improves for awhile, but then he is framed for something he did not do and gets thrown into the dungeon. As the years slipped away Joseph must have believed he’d made a mistake when he thought he heard from God. But when we see the final result everything makes perfect sense. God used those experiences to shape and mold his character, and to prepare him for the work he was called to do.
- And consider Noah. In Genesis 9:1 we see that God blessed Noah and his sons. The blessing of the Lord means divine favor and approval. How do you feel when someone else gets blessed? Are you happy for them? Envious? Frustrated? All we see is

the end result - but we do not see all the labor, the sweat, the tears, the pain, the struggle, the misunderstanding, the confusion, the dark nights, all the things that person has endured in order to have the blessing of the Lord. we are not saying the blessing is something we can earn through self-effort; but the blessing of the Lord is the benefit of fulfilling the work He has called us to do.

- Here, we will focus on the life of Noah, learn the universal principles behind the work that God blesses, and apply those principles to our lives as well. They are not complicated principles, but very, very simple. We pray they will encourage and strengthen all of us to persevere in whatever situation the Lord has placed us.

2. A Heritage of Walking with God

- The story of Noah begins over four hundred years before he was born. The Scriptures tell us that Noah's great-great grandfather was Enoch. We know Enoch was a man who walked with God and suddenly disappeared, for God took him. Exactly what that means we can only speculate, but this much is clear: Enoch had a close relationship with the Lord.
- Enoch was also a prophet. Jude 14, in the New Testament, records one of his prophecies of a future judgment. But a little closer to his own time, Enoch perceived that the Lord was about to execute judgment on the earth. So when Enoch had a son he named him "Methuselah." You remember Methuselah is the oldest person in the Bible, living to the ripe old age of 969. The name "Methuselah" has prophetic significance. Most Bible reference books give the meaning as "dart man" or "man of the spear". A less frequently found definition is of Chaldean origin and means something a little more intriguing: "at his death, the sending forth." The sending forth of what?
- Perhaps that makes no sense to us - until we use the chronology provided to us in Genesis 5. All the generations of Noah are given to us with the exact time frames in which they lived and died. Enoch had a son named Methuselah, Methuselah had a son named Lamech, and Lamech had a son named Noah. When we do the calculations from Enoch to Noah, we find that Noah finished building the ark the same year his grandfather Methuselah died, just in time for the "sending forth" of a great flood - exactly 969 years after Enoch said that it would come.
- So this judgment had been building for nearly a millennium. Enoch knew it was coming. Certainly Methuselah knew. Presumably Lamech knew. But none of them

were called to build the ark. That work was reserved for Noah. And even then, he was five hundred years old before God revealed His purpose for Noah. Think about it: Noah walked with God for five hundred years before God gave him the plans for building the ark. If the man is not right then the plans are not right; but after five hundred years of relationship-building, the Lord finally said, “Now I can trust you to do the work I have called you to do. The survival of all life on earth depends on it.” What an awesome responsibility!

3. The Lord Blesses Us to be a Blessing

- That brings us to the first principle: the work that God blesses is bigger than us. The ark was not Noah’s private little retreat. It was not his personal little ministry, his private little vision. Of course, Noah and his family were beneficiaries of the work, but the purpose of the ark was to preserve all living things. Otherwise, Noah would have built a much smaller vessel.
- When the Lord gives us a work to do it will be bigger than ourselves. The size of a person’s heart may be judged by the size of their work. By size we do not mean numerical or financial strength. We mean this: is the work larger than the person working? Is it fulfilling a purpose far greater than the people involved? Is the work we do glorifying God our ourselves?
- The work that God blesses is not merely for our own personal benefit, but for the benefit of the Body of Christ, for the Kingdom of God. Our vision must carry us beyond ourselves; our vision must survive us. The only vision that is bigger than ourselves is Christ. If our vision is Christ then we are building upon an eternal foundation, and the Lord will bless that labor. Noah carried the Messiah in his loins - the ark was meant to preserve not just physical life, but a spiritual lineage. Thus, it was bigger than Noah, and the Lord blessed the work.

4. The Lord Blesses What We Cannot Do on Our Own

- The second principle is closely related to the first, and it is this: the work that God blesses is beyond our ability to do on our own. In other words, if I can do it all by myself, then I do not need the blessing of the Lord. I can simply call upon my natural talent, experience, and skill to do what needs to be done. Now, work done in this

manner may or may not be successful, but irregardless, it is MY work; it is not the Lord's work, and it does not enjoy the blessing of the Lord.

- The Lord delights to place us in impossible situations. Noah was no shipbuilder. Yet God calls him to do the very thing he cannot do and gives him specific and detailed plans for doing it. The sheer size and scope of the work is astounding. First, Noah is to build a boat. Not just a little fishing boat, but a floating fortress with three levels in it. The Living Bible gives the dimensions as 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Nothing this large had ever been constructed. The project would take one hundred years to complete. But the most amazing thing about this huge boat is that it was built on dry land. The Bible says Noah had faith (Hebrews 11:7)!
- But building the ark was only part of the work. After the ark was complete, there was the issue of bringing every sort of animal and bird into the boat. In the movies you see the animals streaming towards the ark of their own accord while Noah looks on in amazement. Perhaps that is the way it happened. Yet the Scripture says that the Lord told Noah to go get them and bring them into the ark (Genesis 6:19). He had to go and gather them. How does one go about gathering one male and one female of every kind of animal in the world? And with some species God said to get seven pairs!
- Then there is the matter of food. The Lord told Noah to gather samples of every kind of food that is eaten (Genesis 6:21). The food was for feeding his family and all the animals, but it was also for future planting. Today we have fruits, vegetables, nuts, and grains because Noah somehow managed to find them all and store them in the ark. Now we ask: is it humanly possible to do all the things Noah did? Can someone with no experience build a boat that large? Can an ordinary person gather together every kind of beast, bird, and bug? Can anyone gather together every kind of food in the world, and store it? The Bible says, "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Genesis 6:22). When God asks us to do the impossible, we can ask for, and expect to receive, the blessing of the Lord on our work. He will show us what to do, and He will enable us to do it.

5. The Lord Blesses Obedience, Not Originality or Individuality

- The third and final principle is this: the work that God blesses is originated by God Himself. This is one of the most important lessons we can learn. We spend many

years creating and executing our own plans, asking the Lord to bless them. One day we finally come to understand that instead of always trying to get the Lord to bless what we want to do, it was much simpler to find out what the Lord wanted to bless, and simply do that. Instead of trying to get God to come down to my level and do what I wanted, it was far better to come onto the Lord's ground and do what He wanted. Great synergy and blessing is released when we simply cooperate with what God has already purposed to do. Heaven backs us up with tremendous power and authority. Instead of trying to make something happen, we should simply flow in a current that already exists. The Lord will deny no request that is in agreement with what He Himself has originated.

- Noah could expect the blessing of the Lord on his work because he was simply carrying out what the Lord had already determined to do. It is so much easier this way. Often the greatest hindrance to the best is the good. The greatest hindrance to Isaac is Ishmael. There are many good things we can create, many good things we can do. But only one thing is needed (Luke 10:42). We have to discover the "one thing," and we only discover it when we are seated at the feet of Jesus. When we are only motivated by what Jesus wants, not what we want and not what we think we need, then we are on the path of continual and perpetual blessing.
- Noah walked with God, and Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8,9). It took five hundred years of walking with God, but Noah found grace, and that made it all worthwhile. Let us learn to do nothing apart from this amazing grace. It is better to wait five hundred years for grace than to work for five minutes without it. What is grace? Grace is simply Jesus living in me, doing what I cannot do. It does not matter if "what I cannot do" is save myself, overcome sin, love my neighbor, or build an ark. I am insufficient; but His Grace (Jesus) is sufficient. His Grace (Jesus) is more than enough. His Grace (Jesus) is Infinite Supply! But "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).
- Be encouraged. The Lord has a purpose for you, and a destiny for you to fulfill. But things will not always go the way you think they should. That is because the Lord calls you to something bigger than yourself, something beyond your ability, something you cannot originate or perpetuate without Him. It takes time. Noah walked with God for five hundred years and spent one hundred years building the ark. Abraham was one hundred years old before he finally saw God's promise come true. Moses

spent forty years in Egypt, then forty years in the desert, before God sent him to Pharaoh. Jesus prepared thirty years for an earthly ministry of three and a half years. Let us focus on being, not doing. And when it is time for you to do something you can be confident that your labor of love will be the work that God blesses.

God Blesses Our Time in Service

1. Introduction

- What does the word “blessing” mean? The word blessing means to consecrate, to sanctify, to invoke divine care for, to praise, to glorify, to confer happiness upon.
- When we serve God from our heart with love, God repays us with both seen and unseen blessings in our life. He blesses us with good health, the fruit of the Spirit, mental and spiritual balance, a good spouse, Godly children, a good family, good friends, a good job, a good church, and many other things.
- The fundamental element in blessing is based on giving: when a servant freely, lovingly, and sacrificially gives their time, talents, energy, and money to serve and support others. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35).
- The servant is really then, above everything else, a giver: one who always seeks to freely give to others.

2. We Receive Blessings When we Build a Relationship with Christ

- When we strive to make Christ our number one aim in life, we receive blessings, as promised by Christ in the beatitudes. The beatitudes are the only place in the New Testament where Christ explicitly talks about how we receive blessings as a direct result of a relationship with Him.
- Jesus says in Matthew 5:1-11, “And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 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. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

- Thus, blessings are received for those who keep the beatitudes. Therefore, one first receives blessings in life when they make their relationship with Christ the number one aim in their life.

3. We Receive Blessings When We Serve and Give Our Time to Others

- Blessings are also received when we serve and give our time to others, but we must give our time in service in a certain way to really receive these blessings. The key to receiving blessings in serving others is that we must give 1) sacrificially, 2) joyfully, 3) voluntarily, 4) persistently, and 5) ourselves. When we follow 1) - 5) God blesses our time in service.
- A great example of 1) - 5) is demonstrated in the New Testament i) by the example of the churches of Macedonia (2 Corinthians 8:1-5) and ii) by the example of Christ Himself (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- We now take a closer look at the example of the Macedonians.

(a) They Gave Sacrificially

- The Macedonians were in the midst of great affliction (2 Corinthians 8:2).
- They were experiencing poverty themselves (2 Corinthians 8:2).
- Yet they gave ‘beyond their ability’ (2 Corinthians 8:3).
- This they were not expected to do (2 Corinthians 8:12-13).
- Main point: The best giving (serving) comes from those who cannot afford it (Luke 21:1-4).
- God is moved when we sacrifice. Recall Abraham’s sacrificial giving of Isaac, which really moved God.

(b) They Gave Joyfully

- Somehow they had discovered the joy of giving (2 Corinthians 8:2).
- Perhaps they took to heart the teaching of a) the Lord relating to the blessedness of giving in Acts 20:35, and b) St. James to the value of persecution (James 1:2-4).
- In any case, this is the kind of giving that God loves (2 Corinthians 9:7).

- Main point: The best giving (serving) comes from those who give cheerfully.

(c) They Gave Voluntarily

- They were ‘freely willing’ (2 Corinthians 8:3)
- This is the kind of giving God requires today: a) we cannot command people to give against their will (2 Corinthians 8:8), and b) we can only command how it is to be done to help needy people abroad (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).
- Giving must come from ‘a willing mind’ (2 Corinthians 8:12).
- Giving must never be done ‘begrudgingly’ or because you ‘have to’ (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- Otherwise, you might as well not give at all.
- Main point: The best giving comes from those who give freely.

(d) They Gave Persistently

- As St. Paul says, ‘imploring us with much urgency’ (2 Corinthians 8:4).
- They wouldn’t take ‘no’ for an answer (or for an easy way out!).
- With the Philippians, their giving to St. Paul persisted throughout his life (Philippians 4:10-18).
- Main point: The best giving comes from those who persist.

(e) They Gave Themselves

- Perhaps this explains how they were able to give as they did!
- They gave themselves ‘first to the Lord’ (2 Corinthians 8:5): a) when a person does this, they do not worry about ‘the cost of giving’, and b) for they have the promise of Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34.
- Giving themselves first to the Lord, it is natural they would give ‘then to us (others)’: a) for such is a mark of true discipleship (John 13:34-35), and b) and it is a mark of true love for God (1 John 4:20-21).
- Main point: The best giving comes from those who give themselves to God.

4. Reasons for Giving

• God Blesses the Giver

- It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).
- The Lord blesses those who give (Psalms 41:1-3; Proverbs 19:17).

- The grace of God is at work in those who give (2 Corinthians 8:1-2,6-7; 9:8,14)
- Main Point: Giving blesses the giver more than the recipient!

- **God Loves a Cheerful Giver**

- As St. Paul reminded the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- A cheerful giver therefore need not worry (Matthew 6:30-33).
- For God watches over those who love Him and whom He loves (Luke 12:6-7).
- Main Point: Giving cheerfully makes one a recipient of God’s care and love!

- **God Provides Seed for the Sower**

- Those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:6).
- Not for personal consumption (2 Corinthians 9:8-9), a) but to have ‘all sufficiency in all things’, b) but to have ‘an abundance for every good work’, and c) as confirmed by a quote from Psalms (Psalms 112:5-9).
- To multiply the seed for even more good (2 Corinthians 9:10-11), a) to ‘increase the fruits of your righteousness’ and b) to be ‘enriched for all liberality’.
- Main point: Giving liberally will be blessed to give even more liberally!

- **God is Praised and Glorified by Giving**

- Thanksgiving is offered by those whose needs are supplied (2 Corinthians 9:11-12).
- Glory is given to God for His grace in the lives of the givers (2 Corinthians 9:13-15).
- Main point: Giving liberally will lead to God being praised liberally!

- **Brotherly Love is Increased by Giving**

- By brethren who witness God’s grace in the givers (2 Corinthians 9:14).
- Causing them to love and long for their brethren (Philippians 1:3-8).
- Main point: Giving liberally will strengthen the bonds of brotherly love!

5. How God Turns our Service Time and Our Giving into Blessings

- Firstly, to believe in and realize God’s blessings in our service requires faith. One must have faith that our genuine service will be turned into God’s blessings.

- Secondly, God's blessings are a mystery and a miracle in our life. Sometimes the blessings are visibly seen and sometimes not. Most times they are not seen.
- God turns our service time into spiritual energy that allows us to get more things done and get them done more efficiently than had we not served. Through God's blessings from our service, we become mentally sharper, more balanced mentally and spiritually, more efficient, more organized, have more energy and zeal for our responsibilities and our work, and find greater purpose in everything we do. Moreover, God eases our path in life and makes things go more smoothly as a result of His blessings from our service. To believe all this requires and demands faith.
- God allows us to do the impossible and enables us to transcend time in getting things done as a result of His blessings in our service. An example of this is Noah. How could Noah gather all of the living creatures by himself? This is totally impossible. God told him "From every living thing you shall bring two of every kind into the ark" (Genesis 6:19). When we serve God, God works with us and enables us to do the impossible. God enables us to transcend time and complete things in a miraculous and perfect way.
- God's blessings are not always immediate. Sometimes, they come later in life. God blesses our children, he protects them and makes them His God fearing servants. God protects us from harm, preserves our sanity and mental well being, and smooths our ways in our work, school, home, marriage, church, and in our life.

How to Read the Bible

1. The Bible is different from all other books. Other books, like science books, technical books, fictional and non-fictional books are written by people. The Bible was written by people under God's divine inspiration.
2. The Bible reveals and introduces God to man and tries to prepare us inwardly to receive Him. This can be seen from John 14:23, where Jesus says, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."
3. There are two ways of reading the Bible:
 - **Intellectual** - Man puts himself and his mind in control of the text, trying to subject its meaning to his own understanding. We should avoid reading the Bible in this way at all costs, as it will never lead to spiritual growth.
 - **Spiritual** - Man puts the text on a level above himself and tries to bring his mind into submission to its meaning. This is the way we should read the Bible, with humility, awe, and submission.

4. **Spiritual Understanding and Intellectual Memorization**

- The Bible is to be understood, *not* investigated.
- We need a spiritual understanding of the Bible. Spiritual understanding centers on the acceptance of a divine truth. When one accepts the Bible as a divine truth, they attain the fullness of God in their understanding. This is precisely what St. Paul says in Ephesians 3:19, "to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."
- **Intellectual memorization** is the exact opposite of spiritual understanding. It is based on mastery and possession of the text. It is an investigative and academic reading of the Bible, which results in no spiritual growth. It is an arrogant way to read the Bible. We should avoid intellectual memorization at all costs.

5. **Spiritual understanding** is granted to us by the Holy Spirit. As we read in John 14:26, “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, who the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

6. **Understanding the Gospels**

- There is no way to understand the Gospels intellectually, for the Gospels are spiritual. The Gospels must be obeyed and lived through the Spirit before they can be understood.
- God’s faithfulness in fulfilling His promises to us results in spiritual experience. That is, one of the great ways of understanding the Gospels is to see and recognize how God has been faithful to His promises in our experiences in life. This recognition results in a spiritual experience that leads to a better understanding of the Gospels.
- Sincere and humble acceptance of obedience to God is the true way to the knowledge of God. Thus, we understand the Gospels by being humble and obedient to the words contained in the Gospels.
- The greatest commandment by which we may experience God is that we leave everything and follow Christ. Of course not all of us can do this, and this is not needed for a deep understanding of the Gospels. We can understand the Gospels through secret acts of sacrifice, giving alms, giving time and energy to the church, and church service.

7. **Academic Meditation and Practical Meditation**

- Academic meditation, which is similar to intellectual memorization, is the product of ideas resulting from study and research leading to logical deduction. A person who reads the Bible this way will not grow spiritually.
- Practical meditation comes through inspiration from the Gospels and is supplemented from the Holy Spirit.
- Academic meditation on the Bible stimulates the mind but leaves the spirit unmoved. Thus, we should avoid academic meditation when reading the Bible. Jesus comments on this in Mark 7:6, when He criticizes the pharisees saying, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.”

8. **Reading With and Without Practical Application** - Our reading of the Bible will be useless unless we obey the commandments and the Bible becomes the law of life for us. In Matthew 7:26-27, Jesus says, “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house in 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.” The power of the Bible is dependent entirely on one’s practical experience of it, the aid of the Holy Spirit, and a sincere obedience to the Gospels. A good example in the Bible of a man who was given the gift of prophecy and one who knew God, but lived an unclean and perverse life far from God is Balaam (Numbers 24:15-16). Thus, Balaam is an example of a person who knew the word of God but did not live it.
9. **Take Heed How You Hear** - Before we read the Bible or hear the word of God, we must look within ourselves to see where the word of God will come to rest in us. A good example of this is the parable of the sower in Luke 8:12-18. This parable tells us that there are four types of listeners to the Gospel: i) we can hear the Gospel and let it go by the wayside, ii) we can hear the Gospel, and through temptation, what we hear falls away (rocky ground), iii) we can hear the Gospel and get choked up with the cares of this life (thorny ground), iv) or we can hear the Gospel and keep every single word we hear with a noble and good heart, bearing fruit with patience (good ground).
10. **Forgetting the Word of God is a Psychological Deception** - St. James says in James 1:23-24, “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.” The analogy here to reading the Bible is this. When we read the Bible, we might believe every word we read and are moved by these words even to the point of tears. But once we put the Bible down, we forget everything and do not retain a single word we have read, as if we have looked in a mirror, went away, and then forgot ourselves.
11. **The Uncircumcised Ear** - The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Gospel, but only the circumcised ear can hear His voice. The circumcised ear is the ear that is submissive, and an ear that is ready to listen. St. Stephen talks about this in Acts 7:51 right before he was stoned to death, when he said to those who were about to stone him, “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do you.” Thus, an uncircumcised ear is the one which lacks submission and one

that has a heart too far from God to hear His voice. Jesus also talks about this in Matthew 13:13-15, as He makes a reference to Isaiah 6:9. A great example of a circumcised ear and an ear ready to listen is that of Samuel. In 1 Samuel 3:10, when God calls out to Samuel, Samuel answers by saying, “Speak Lord, for Your servant hears.”

12. **The Voice of the Son of God Calls us and Invites us to Read the Bible** - Jesus says in Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” Thus, Jesus gives us a open invitation to read the Bible and “dine with Him, and he with Me.”
13. **Doing Honor to the Reading and Hearing of the Gospel** - The person who is alive to God and does not allow the word of God to slip away from him or be forgotten does honor to reading the Bible. In respect, reverence, and fear this person makes the Bible as a crown over his head and sets it over his whole life.

Introduction to the Bible

1. The Bible is regarded by the Church as the most important and most accurate spiritual book. It is our main source for spiritual reading and learning.
2. The Bible is different from all other books. Other books, like science books, technical books, fictional and non-fictional books are written by people. The Bible was written by people with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
3. The Bible consists of two Testaments: The Old Testament and the New Testament. These are the main two divisions of the Bible. The Old Testament is the period before Christ was born, and the New Testament covers the period of Christ's birth and after.
4. The Bible covers a period of 5500 years from the creation of Adam to the resurrection of Jesus. We are now 2000 years beyond the resurrection, so we are now 7500 years after the creation of Adam.
5. The Old Testament consists of 39 books and the New Testament consists of 27 books. The "Apocrypha" includes 7 more books and 2 additions that are to be included in the Old Testament. The Apocrypha is not included in New King James versions of the Bible. Only the 39 books of the Old Testament appear in the New King James version. The books of the Apocrypha are Tobit, I and II Macabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, Baruch, and Judith. The additions are the additions to the book of Daniel (The Song of the three Young Men, Susanna), and the additions to the book of Esther. The Coptic Church refers to the "Apocrypha" as the Canonical Books, since the word Apocrypha means false books.
6. The books of the Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. These books appear in this order in the Old Testament. Lamentations was written by Jeremiah.
7. The 12 Minor Prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. These are the last 12 books of the Old Testament, and appear in that order.

The Old Testament

1. **Genesis** - Contains the stories of the creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.
2. **Exodus** - Contains the stories of Moses, the Israelites leaving Egypt and going into the promised land, the crossing of the Red Sea, the plagues, the ten commandments, and the building of the tabernacle.
3. **Leviticus** - This book contains the laws of sacrifices, laws of worship, laws on what is clean and unclean, laws of priesthood, and laws of governance.
4. **Numbers** - This book mainly gives an account of the numbering of the people in Israel, and a census of the people. It also talks about some of the laws covered in Leviticus. It gives the story of Balaam.
5. **Deuteronomy** - The theme of this book is the “second law”. It is a book that talks about the clarification and the renewal of the covenant God made to his people. It gives the ten commandments for the second time. At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses turns over the leadership of the Israelites to Joshua.

The five books of Moses are thus Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These five books are called the Pentateuch, which is a Greek word meaning five containers or five books.

6. **Joshua** - Joshua was Moses’s successor as leader of the Israelites. This book gives the stories of Joshua, the crossing of the Jordan, the falling of Jericho, the story of Rahab, and the capture of Ai.
7. **Judges** - Talks about the 12 Judges of Israel, contains the story of Gideon, Samson, and Deborah.
8. **Ruth** - Great book about marriage and relationships between children and their parents and parents-in-law.
9. **First Samuel** - contains the stories of Samuel, Saul, and David. It ends with Saul’s death. Contains stories of David and Goliath, David and Jonathan, and David and Abigail.

10. **Second Samuel** - Contains stories about David as king of Israel. It talks about David and Bathsheba, David and Nathan, David's sons, the birth of Solomon.
11. **First Kings** - David's son, Solomon, becomes king. The book contains stories about Solomon. Solomon is the wisest man to ever live. It contains stories about Elijah, Elijah raising the widows son, and the contest on Mount Carmel.
12. **Second Kings** - Contains stories about Elisha, including Elisha and the Shunammite woman, the story of Naaman, the story of Hezekiah, Hezekiah consults Isaiah, and Jerusalem conquered by Nebuchadnezzar.
13. **First Chronicles** - This book gives genealogies and lists of families. It also gives stories of the life of David.
14. **Second Chronicles** - Gives stories about the reign of Solomon.
15. **Ezra** - Rebuilding of the temple lead by Ezra.
16. **Nehemiah** - Nehemiah helps rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
17. **Esther** - Story of Esther, Haman, and Mordecai.
18. **Job** - Story of Job. He was wealthy, lost all, and regained twice as much as what he had before.
19. **Psalms** - 150 Psalms, mostly written by David. The Psalms are poetic songs talking about repentance, God's love, God's justice, God's mercy, and prophecies about Jesus. Psalm 50 is a Psalm of repentance read at the beginning of every hour in the Agpeya. The book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible.
20. **Proverbs** - A book of wise spiritual saying written by Solomon. A book of guidance and advice for the young and the old.
21. **Ecclesiastes** - A book aiming to understand the reason and meaning for human existence and the good that man can find in life. Chapter 3 is a well known chapter on "Everything Has Its Time."
22. **Song of Solomon** - A book of poetic songs of love for the Lord.

23. **Isaiah** - Contains the stories of Isaiah, Lucifer (Satan) (Chapter 14), many prophecies concerning the birth and crucifixion of Jesus (Chapters 49 and 53).
24. **Jeremiah** - This book contains stories about Jeremiah the priest. It also talks about rewards for following in God's ways and the punishment for sin. The sins of the people are revealed and they are urged to repent. Contains the story of Jeremiah at the potters wheel.
25. **Lamentations** - This book contains laments following Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians. The lamenting is also a call to repentance for committed sins.
26. **Ezekiel** - This books talks about Israel's sins, God's judgment, justice and restoration of Israel. Ezekiel also has the powerful verse on the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary (Ezekiel 44:2).
27. **Daniel** - Contains stories about Daniel, Daniel in the kings house with his friends, Daniel in the lions den, and Daniel interpreting dreams. This book also contains many prophecies regarding the second coming of Christ.
28. **Hosea** - Hosea was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ and the life of Hosea.
29. **Joel** - Joel was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ.
30. **Amos** - Amos was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ.
31. **Obadiah** - Obadiah was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ.
32. **Jonah** - Jonah was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ. The book also gives the story about Jonah being in the belly of the whale for three days.
33. **Micah** - Micah was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ.

34. **Nahum** - Nahum was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ.
35. **Habakkuk** - Habakkuk was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ.
36. **Zephaniah** - Zephaniah was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ.
37. **Haggai** - Haggai was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ.
38. **Zechariah** - Zechariah was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ.
39. **Malachi** - Malachi was one of the twelve minor prophets. The book gives about prophecies about Christ.

The New Testament

- The New Testament contains 27 books: 4 Gospels, the book of Acts, the 14 Epistles of St. Paul, The Epistle of St. James, the 2 Epistles of St. Peter, the 3 Epistles of St. John, the Epistle of St. Jude, and the book of Revelation.
 - The Epistle of St. James, the 2 Epistles of St. Peter, the 3 Epistles of St. John, and the Epistle of St. Jude are called the Catholic (Universal) Epistles since they were written to all churches.
 - The two Epistles of St. Paul to Timothy and the Epistle of St. Paul to Titus are called the pastoral epistles since they focus on service and ministry.
1. **Matthew** - This is one of the four Gospels. Matthew was a tax collector who became a disciple of Jesus. This Gospel records the birth of Christ, John the Baptist baptizing, Satan's temptation of Jesus, the beatitudes, the sermon on the mount, a record of the twelve disciples, several parables, the transfiguration, many miracles, the last supper, the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. The twelve disciples were Simon who was called Peter and Andrew his brother, James and John the sons of Zebedee, Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, Lebbaeus whose surname was Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot who also betrayed Him (Matthew 10:1-4).
 2. **Mark** - Mark was not one of the 12 disciples but he was one of the 70 Apostles. This is the shortest of the four Gospels. This Gospel records miracles, parables, the last supper, the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.
 3. **Luke** - Luke was not one of the 12 disciples but he was one of the 70 Apostles. Luke records many parables, the birth of Christ, the birth of John the Baptist, John the Baptist baptizing, Satan's temptation of Jesus, Jesus appoints 70 other apostles, the last supper, the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.
 4. **John** - John was one of the twelve disciples. This Gospel records many things that the other Gospels do not. It records the personal encounters between Jesus and Nicodemus,

the Samaritan woman, the man at the pool of Bethesda, the man born blind, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. It also records many miracles, the last supper, the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.

5. **Acts** - The book of Acts records the Acts and missionary work of the Apostles, mainly the Apostles Peter and Paul. It records the ascension of Christ, the day of Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit), Peter's sermon in which 3000 were converted to the faith, and the birth of the church.
6. **Romans** - This is St. Paul's Epistle (letter) to the church in Rome. The Epistle talks about faith, salvation, God's plan for the Jews and Gentiles, our life in Christ: freedom from sin and death through baptism, and Christian life in the church and in the world.
7. **First Corinthians** - This is St. Paul's first Epistle (letter) to the church in Corinth. Corinth is a city in Greece. This Epistle talks about church unity, purity, immorality, marriage, spiritual gifts and talents, and the resurrection.
8. **Second Corinthians** - This is St. Paul's second Epistle to the church in Corinth. The Epistle talks about reconciliation with God, giving, the life and duties of a servant of Christ.
9. **Galatians** - This is St. Paul's Epistle to the church in Galatia, which was a Roman province in Asia Minor. The Epistle talks about the true and false teachings of Christ, and how to live the true teachings of Christ. This Epistle contains the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit.
10. **Ephesians** - This is St. Paul's Epistle to the church in Ephesus, which is a city in Turkey. St. Paul talks about how to live as a Christian, the work of the Holy Spirit in our life, the blessings of Christ to the Church, our response to God's grace, and spiritual warfare: battling Satan and sin.
11. **Philippians** - This is St. Paul's Epistle to the church in Philippi, which is a city in Greece. St. Paul talks about humility, suffering for Christ, giving all for Christ, being joyful, and how to deal with anxiety.
12. **Colossians** - This is St. Paul's Epistle to the church in Colosse, which was in Asia Minor near Ephesus (Turkey). This Epistle talks about doing God's will in our life, false spirituality, sacrificing for Christ, and the Christian home.

13. **First Thessalonians** - This is St. Paul's first Epistle to the church in Thessalonica, which is a city in Greece. The epistle talks about purity, holiness, and eternal life.
14. **Second Thessalonians** - This is St. Paul's second Epistle to the church in Thessalonica. This Epistle talks about holding firm onto the faith, preserving and holding on to our traditions, false traditions and true traditions.
15. **First Timothy** - This is St. Paul's first Epistle to Timothy. It is one of the three pastoral Epistles. This Epistle talks about service and ministry, being a good servant of Jesus Christ, qualifications of deacons and church servants, and honoring the elders.
16. **Second Timothy** - This is St. Paul's second Epistle to Timothy. It talks about being strong in the faith, how to overcome difficulties in service, and spreading the Gospel.
17. **Titus** - This is St. Paul's Epistle to Titus. It is the third pastoral Epistle. He talks about the qualities of a successful church, dissensions in the church, and church elders.
18. **Philemon** - This is St. Paul's Epistle to Philemon. It is a personal letter asking Philemon to take Onesimus back. This Epistle teaches us a lot about love, forgiveness, and unity.
19. **Hebrews** - This is St. Paul's Epistle to Christians in Palestine who were on the point of giving up their Christian faith and returning to their Jewish beliefs. The Epistle talks about faith, hope, and how to make progress in our spiritual life.
20. **James** - This is the Epistle of St. James. The writer is James, the son of Alphaeus, one of the twelve disciples. The Epistle talks about overcoming trials and tribulations, faith and deeds, the tongue, being patient, humility, pride, and being judgemental.
21. **First Peter** - This is the first Epistle of St. Peter. He talks about being submissive to Christ, submission in marriage, submission to government, and Christ's suffering.
22. **Second Peter** - This is the second Epistle of St. Peter. He talks about false teachings, spiritual growth through faith, and God's promises.
23. **First John** - This is the first Epistle of St. John. He talks about love of God, love of each other, knowing God through love, and being children of God.
24. **Second John** - This is the second Epistle of St. John. He talks about deceivers and those against Christ, and he talks about how to live according to Christ's commandments.

25. **Third John** - This is the third Epistle of St. John. He talks about genuine leadership and false leadership.
26. **Jude** - This is the Epistle of Jude. He talks about faith, unbelievers and those who do not walk in the faith, and maintaining our relationship with Christ.
27. **Revelation** - This is the book of the Revelation of John. The book talks about the second coming of Christ, the judgment, heaven, and hell.

Descriptions of Christ from the Old Testament

The following are descriptions of Christ in the Old Testament given chronologically in time.

1. Abraham saw His reflection in Melchizedek, King of Salem (Genesis 14:18-19,22).
2. Jacob called Him Shiloh (Genesis 49:10).
3. To Moses, He was the Passover Lamb and the Lifted-up One (Exodus 12:21, 15:2).
4. To Joshua, He was the Captain of Our Salvation (Joshua 5:13-15).
5. Ruth saw Him as Family Redeemer (Ruth 2:11-12, 3:11, 4:6).
6. Samuel portrayed Him as Family Restorer.
7. David called Him Lion of Judah and good Shepherd (Revelation 5:5).
8. To Solomon, He was the Beloved (Song of Solomon, 2:8,16).
9. Ezra and Nehemiah pictured Him as the Restorer (Ezra 6:5).
10. To Esther, He was our Advocate.
11. Job said He was my Redeemer (Job 19:25).
12. Isaiah described Him as a Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:5,7).

13. Jeremiah saw Him at the potter's wheel (Jeremiah 18:1-3,5-6).
14. Daniel called Him the Prince and the Smiting Stone (Daniel 2:34-35, 8:25, 9:25).
15. Hosea likened Him to a Bridegroom redeeming a fallen wife (Hosea 3:14-16).
16. To Joel, He was the Restorer (Joel 2:19,25).
17. Amos saw Him as a Heavenly Husbandman (Amos 5:16-17).
18. To Obadiah, He was the Savior (Obadiah 1:17-21).
19. Jonah saw Him as our Resurrection and Salvation (Jonah 2:6,9).
20. Micah called Him a Witness (Micah 1:2).
21. To Nahum, He was a stronghold in a day of trouble (Nahum 1:7).
22. Habakkuk described Him as God of my Salvation (Habakkuk 3:13,18-19).
23. To Zephaniah, He was a Jealous Lord (Zephaniah 1:18, 3:8).
24. Haggai said He was the Desire of all Nations (Haggai 2:7).
25. Zechariah called Him the Righteous Branch (Zechariah 3:8, 6:12-13).
26. Malachi declared Him the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2).
27. And John the Baptist said, "Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:19).

Timeline of the Bible

- As Sunday School servants, it is very important to know the timeline of events in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament.
- The Bible covers a period of 5500 years from the creation of Adam to the birth of Jesus. We are now 2000 years beyond the birth of Christ, so we are now 7500 years after the creation of Adam.
- The Old Testament covers a period of approximately 5500 years.
- The New Testament alone covers a period of about 100 years. Jesus was 33 when He died, and the Apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation in approximately 95 AD.
- We note that BC stands for “Before Christ” and AD stands for “Anno Domini”, which is a latin phrase meaning “The Year of the Lord”, which denotes the year of the birth of Christ.

Date	Event
5500 BC	Creation of Adam as calculated by the Orthodox Church
3000 BC	Noah is born
2400 BC	The Flood
2247 BC	The Tower of Babel
2050 BC	Abraham
1950 BC	Isaac
1900 BC	Jacob, who was renamed Israel
1800 BC	Joseph in Egypt
1800 BC	The Israelites entered Egypt where they remained for over 400 years in slavery
1500 BC	Job
1400 BC	Moses and the Exodus
1360 BC	Joshua and entry into the promised land
1200 BC	Period of the Judges
1150 BC	Ruth
1100 BC	Samuel
1050 BC	Saul
1015 BC	David
975 BC	Solomon
935 BC	Division of Israel into 2 kingdoms: Israel and Judah
850 BC	Elijah and Elisha
750 BC	Amos, Micah, Hosea, Jonah
740 BC	Isaiah
721 BC	The fall of Israel to the Assyrians
625 BC	Jeremiah, Nahum
620 BC	Zephaniah, Habakkuk
595 BC	Ezekiel
586 BC	The fall of Judah to the Babylonians, Babylonian exile
580 BC	Daniel, Obadiah
536 BC	King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews in Babylon to return to Jerusalem
500 BC	Zechariah, Haggai
480 BC	Esther
460 BC	Ezra
450 BC	Nehemiah
400 BC	Malachi, Joel
0 AD	Jesus is born
30 AD	Jesus starts His ministry at age 30
33 AD	Jesus is crucified at age 33 and resurrected from the dead
66 AD	Saint Paul writes his last epistle (2nd Timothy) before his martyrdom
95 AD	Book of Revelation is written

- The books of the 12 minor prophets were written between 750 BC - 400 BC. The 12 minor prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
- The books of the major prophets were written between 850 BC - 580 BC. The books of the major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

- The period before Abraham is known as primeval (primitive or early development) history, and the period of Abraham is known as the period of the patriarchs. In particular, the four patriarchs are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, which is a period covering about 250 years. Thus, the period before the 11th chapter of Genesis is known as primeval Biblical history, and the period after the 11th chapter of Genesis is “modern” Biblical history.

The Ancient Egyptians

- When did the ancient Egyptians inhabit Egypt? It had to be after the flood, in about 2400 BC.
- Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. These sons had many children, and they became scattered throughout the earth, in the period of 2400 BC - 2200 BC. Chapters 10 and 11 of Genesis give the details on this.
- The children of Ham went to Egypt. We read in Genesis 10:6, “The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan.” Thus, the ancient Egyptians and the Pharaohs are descendants of Ham.
- We also read in Genesis 11:1, “Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.” This was at the time right after the flood. After the tower of Babel, different languages arose and people were scattered all over the earth.
- Abraham was a descendent of Shem. Abraham was the son of Terah, who was a direct descendant of Shem (Genesis 11:31).
- The pyramids of Egypt were built in the period 2300 BC - 1800 BC, which was the period in which the descendants of Ham went to Egypt. The pyramids were still being built at the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The pyramids were already completed at the time of Joseph and Moses.
- People started inhabiting North America approximately 4500 years ago (2500 BC), which is consistent with the migration of peoples after the flood, discussed in the 10th and 11th chapters of Genesis.

The Book of Ezra - Part I

Historical Background:

The events in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah occurred around 538 B.C. This is the time period of the Persian empire, considered to be one of the most impressive empires in the history of the world. Persia at this time totally dominated the Middle East and was considered the supreme super-power. The basic stories contained in Ezra and Nehemiah concern the rebuilding of Jerusalem by the Jews after the city had been completely destroyed by the Babylonian king, King Nebuchadnezzar. After the destruction of the city, the Jews were exiled to Babylon where they became servants for the Babylonians. Their exile ended when the Babylonians fell to the Persians. The king of Persia at that time was King Cyrus, who was a supreme political leader. It was King Cyrus who agreed to free the Jews from exile so that Jerusalem could be rebuilt. This historical account is given in the last chapter of II Chronicles, which incidently coincides with the first chapter of Ezra.

It was Ezra and Nehemiah, two spiritually mature leaders, that led the people to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. In particular, Ezra concentrates on rebuilding the temple for God, and Nehemiah concentrates on rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah give detailed accounts of this rebuilding process. More importantly, the books characterize their personalities, their leadership, their relationship with God, and their relationship with each other. I would like to elaborate more on some of these points today.

Chapter 1 - The return

Here, we see the might of King Cyrus, and that he was indeed an impressive power. We immediately see that Cyrus is permitting the Jewish exiles to return home to Jerusalem. Moreover, we see that (1:1) Cyrus has the intentions of fulfilling the prophecies by Jeremiah and Isaiah that Jerusalem be restored, " that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished". Thus, whether Cyrus knew it or not he was in accordance with the will of God for the restoration of Jerusalem. He does say "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has *charged* me to build him a house in Jerusalem". Hence,

God had brought Cyrus to pre-eminence for the very purpose of the salvation of his people.

We note here that the restoration of the people from exile, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the glorious future for the people were indeed the fulfillment of prophecy as given in Jeremiah 29:10, and in various parts of I Isaiah and II Isaiah. Thus we see how Gods plan for his people is starting to unfold.

We must be careful here in reading Ezra. We must not think that the return of the Jews from exile is not Gods final act for them. It is just the beginning. As we will see in later chapters, life was very hard for the returned community. Thus, upon return, the people must have the need to show continued obedience to God.

Chapter 2 - Who's who

In this chapter, we have the names of all the people that returned to Jerusalem from exile. This same list occurs in the book of Nehemiah (7:6-73). Not all of the people that were in exile returned right away. Some stayed behind and eventually came later with Ezra (Chapter 7).

We see here in verses 64-70 that the community was by no means impoverished. They owned much, and "offered freely for the house of God, to erect in its place". God blesses the people who seek him. Ezra makes it clear here that fulfillment of prophecy and the enjoyment of Gods blessing are provisional, and need to be fed by whole-hearted obedience.

Chapter 3 - Mixed Feelings

In this chapter, we read that the people "gathered as one man to Jerusalem". Here the people were obeying the law of God as discussed in Exodus (23:16). The alter of the temple is rebuilt.

This gathering signifies two things:

- 1) It signifies their unity as a people. Their gathering together from all parts of the land

was a necessary counter-balance to living in small groups. We see here that each individual belonged to a much larger body, expressing both unity and faith in worship together. This is very much like how Christians behave today, united together to worship Christ in Church.

2) We see that the worshiping God superseded anything else. The people hadn't even had enough time to build houses or to settle in, yet they observed the feasts, prayed and offered sacrifices . We see that their priority was to worship.

Is this our priority today. In the midst of our turmoil and tribulations, do we take time to pray and worship ?

Also, the restoration of the temple is begun. We read that the people were singing and praising the Lord. This is because they had once again reconciled with God, and thus were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 4 - Flaming darts

In this chapter, we learn that the exiles had enemies. Enemies which opposed the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. The enemies tried various ploys to stop the exiles from rebuilding.

1) First, they approached Zerubbabel himself trying to convince him that they were similar to the exiles, and that they had a desire to help. Zerubbabel, of course, knew better. Zerubbabel's resistance came through spiritual insight provided by God. In a similar way, St. Paul in Romans 12:2 warns Christians to avoid conforming to the world's standards and ways of thinking.

2) When a confrontation with Zerubbabel failed, the adversaries tried to discourage the exiles from building and attempted to frustrate them. When this ploy did not work, the exiles adversaries then wrote a letter to Artaxerxes, who was then the king of Persia. This was the first of two letters regarding this matter. The commander of the adversaries was Rehum, who wrote the letter.

In his letter, Rehum tries to convince the king that he and his people are loyal to him and that the exiles are a rebellious people. Jerusalem was historically a rebellious city. Moreover, he tries to convince the king that if the city is rebuilt, that the exiles will be disobedient to him. Rehum says "they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the kings treasury will be diminished." Also, "The result will be that you will have no dominion over the region beyond the river".

The king takes the bait. He is obviously troubled by the possibility of lost revenue, and even more so of the potential for Judah to become larger and more powerful. Thus, the king orders that the building of the temple be stopped.

Chapter 5

This chapter begins with the prophets Haggai and Zechariah preaching to the exiles about the prophecies. They insist to the people to continue building. Two elements come from the preaching of the prophets: They are rebuke and promise.

The rebuke mainly comes from Haggai, who deplores the peoples own concern for their own comfort than for the House of God. Thus Haggai implies that there was more to the abandonment of work on the temple than external opposition alone. The exiles had become complacent, and there was a decline and lack of determination for doing God's will.

Zechariah's preaching focuses on the glorious future that awaits Judah. "The Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem" (Zech 1:17). He pictures the city enjoying prosperity and peace.

This preaching of Haggai and Zechariah prompted the exiles into action and the continuation of the temple. We note here that these prophets did not simply accuse while remaining detached. Rather we find them alongside the builders helping them.

The insistence of Haggai and Zechariah to continue building is a very important point. They had a fear that the people would become like the surrounding nations and they would cease to be people of God. We teach the same thing in Church today. We counsel people

against becoming indistinguishable with the rest of the world, but rather to be distinguishable and to serve as witnesses to Christ our Lord.

Tattenai, who was the governor of the region saw the exiles continue to build, and he questioned them. They answered him confidently "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago".

We see here that in the statement of the exiles, they provide an explanation and understanding of their exile and return. This has two elements, confession and love.

1) They acknowledge that they were exiled by Nebuchadnezzar because they had been disobedient to God, and they blame themselves for it. They recognize they are guilty, and express here a confession, thus enabling themselves to get closer to God.

2) The exiles' words also testify to a recovered belief that they are the special objects of God's love. They show their determination in building the temple by citing the decrees of Cyrus and what Nebuchadnezzar had done.

Upon hearing this letter, king Darius said to Tattenai: "let them continue rebuilding the temple".

In these first five chapters of Ezra, we see the kind of adversity that the people of God went through. Throughout the history of the world, God has continually been seeking the obedience and love of man through various ways. In Ezra, it is the rebuilding of the temple, and of course his highest act came when he took on flesh and blood in becoming Christ.

How can we relate the troubles of the exiles' with the kind of troubles we have today. We, like the exiles have experienced troubles, and may have expressed doubt about God's goodness at some point in our lives.

Let me read you the following story:

A Pastor was walking one day with a man who expressed doubt about God's goodness. "I

don't know what I shall do with all my worries and troubles he said," and at that moment, the pastor noticed a cow looking over a stone wall. And he said to the man, "You know why that cow is looking over the wall" ? and the man said no. Then the pastor said, "I'll tell you why, because she can't see through the wall. And that's exactly what you must do with your wall of trouble, look over and above it."

Thus, we should look over and above our wall of trouble to see what possible meaning God has for us in it. For it is only when we see meaning in our troubles that we can overcome them.

We Christians always start with the premise that there is always meaning in suffering because of the fact that God loves each and everyone of us very personally, so much that he died for us.

God only permits trouble because he knows the good that can come from it. God uses trouble then in order to make us more patient, more understanding, more obedient, more faithful, more holy. We cannot always see or understand this, when we are in the midst of trouble.

But we live and walk and die by the faith that there is meaning to everything that happens to us once we commit our life to Jesus as Lord.

There is meaning in suffering when we remember that every defeating situation has in it a potential victory. As one spiritual writer says "God buries at the heart of every difficulty, a nugget of Gold". Some one once said, "you know God has a sense of humor. He likes to play games with us. You know what he does. When he has a wonderful possibility for you, he doesn't hand over to you easily, because that would make you soft. He buries it at the heart of a great difficulty and then he hands you the difficulty. So instead of complaining that God does not love you, you should thank him for the difficulty because you know that he has buried a bright possibility at the very heart of that difficulty."

So when a difficulty faces us, instead of being depressed and being overwhelmed by it, we should say I wonder what God is trying to say to me through this difficulty. I wonder what little nugget of gold he has in it hidden for me ? By his grace I'm going to find it.

An example of this kind of attitude toward trouble is Clem Levine, one of the greatest pitchers of all time. When he was about 12 years old, Clem was already dreaming of becoming a big league pitcher, nothing less was going to satisfy him. At age 14, he broke his index finger. An index finger is very important to a ball player and Clem was broken hearted, he thought it was the end of his baseball future. But a coach whom Clem knew encouraged him. "Clem", he said, "When life hands you something real tough, the thing to do is to pray about it , and ask the Lord to show you what he has in it for you". "What could he possibly have in it for me", Clem wanted to know. How can I use a crooked finger ? I want to be a pitcher." Well said the coach, let's see what we can do with you. He studied Clem's hand and taught him to hold the ball a little differently. It took effort, it took time, it took patience, it took perseverance, but before long with his crooked finger, Clem developed the kind of pitch that would go straight and suddenly just before it got to the plate it would give a twist and sail around the plate right past the bewildered batter. And Clem Levine did become a big league pitcher, famous for his "jug-handle curve", and he never ceased to thank God for his jug handle finger.

This is how God works with people who are spiritually astute. He puts difficulties before them. And the difficulties have in them bright and shining pearls of great price. As a great spiritual writer once wrote "Mishaps are like knives, they either serve us or cut us as we grasp them either by the blade or by the handle".

The Book of Ezra - Part II

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Chapter 6

(verses 1-13)

This chapter begins with the decree given by king Cyrus is found and its contents are stated. We see here how much the king supported the rebuilding of Jerusalem. He orders that the gold and silver vessels be returned and even offers to cover the cost of rebuilding.

After Darius reads the decree of Cyrus, he immediately issues his own decree. The effect of his decree is to confirm the decree of Cyrus and apply them to this current situation. Cyrus's decree is about 18 years prior to Darius's.

In this Chapter, we the intentions and the character of king Darius become clear. We first notice that Darius's reply to Tattenai is very strong in that he says that building is to be resumed "without delay", and that the adversaries of the exiles would help with the costs. More

over, they are to supply the exiles with bulls, rams sheep for burnt offerings, and salt wine or oil for the priests. As he says "let them be given to them day by day without fail". Failure to comply with this decree would be costly. He promises that he will severely punish any one who opposes the rebuilding as he says "a beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he shall be impaled upon it, and his house shall be made a dunghill". This in effects means that who ever opposes the rebuilding will be killed, and his name erased from the history books.

Thus, we see that Darius was of very strong character who had complete control of his people. Moreover, he was ruthless and determined. As a result of the adversaries stopping the rebuilding, he imposed a severe punishment on them. In this way, he was similar to Cyrus.

The irony here, is that Darius himself was not a man of God, but his interests completely coincided with those of God. He, of course did not know this. Little did he know that the dwelling of God's name in Jerusalem was of a significance that would completely outlast him. Little did he know or possibly understand that God one day would take on flesh and blood and sacrifice himself in Jerusalem, and initiate an empire which has no end.

verses (13-22)

Here we read that after receiving the decree of Darius, Tattenai "did with all diligence what Darius the king had ordered".

In these verses, we read that the exiles finally completed the building of the Temple. More importantly, we further read that they prayed and thanked God for his gift. They celebrated and dedicated the temple to God. Moreover, they observed the Passover feast, and offered sacrifices to God. This was a joyous occasion for the exiles.

The celebration of the exiles can be characterized as follows:

1) The dedication - The exiles know who their God is. They know that he alone is responsible for their freedom and return to Jerusalem. Thus, the dedication resembles this recognition. The dedication was also a sign of faith that greater things were in store for them.

The joy of the exiles was solemn. It remained in touch with the cause of their sufferings

(i.e. lack of obedience and straying from God). The sacrifices they offered took the form of a sin offering. It was an act of repentance asking for forgiveness from God.

Their celebration thus looks forward and backwards. They recognize their past as that of being sinful, for which they repent. They see their future as that of having a reconciled and loving relationship with God. Therefore, it's never too late to repent. By God's love and grace, he does forgive sin if we confess and come to him.

2) The Passover celebration - The Passover celebration indicates an exclusiveness about the exiles. By observing the Passover, they distinguish themselves from the others as being God's people. It is through them that God's salvation will be continued. This is not to say that no one else can belong to God, but rather, everyone who was willing to join the exiles and separate himself from the rest of the world would also become a child of God.

This is very similar to what the Church believes today. When we celebrate Christmas, we are celebrating the birth of Jesus. When we observe Good Friday, we are recognizing the Crucifixion and suffering of Jesus, and when we celebrate Easter, we are recognizing the resurrection. These recognitions indicate that we are witnesses of Jesus, and they distinguish us from others.

We see that the only qualification to for distinction is that we have a heartfelt commitment of mind and soul to the God who "was in Christ Jesus reconciling the world to himself". (2 Cor. 5:19).

Chapter 7 - Arrival of Ezra

In this chapter and the remaining chapters, we will be able to characterize the personality of Ezra. We first witness Ezra's departure from Babylon and his arrival in Jerusalem. We see that he didn't come to Jerusalem alone. Some of the other Jews decided to leave Babylon to join their brothers in Jerusalem.

The first 10 verses in this chapter immediately tell us about the personality of Ezra. We can characterize this as follows:

1) We see that Ezra is a true man of God, well versed on the laws of Moses, and very spiritually astute. This is indicated by the verse "he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses". Being called a scribe actually suggests that he was a priest. We read that he was a priest in verse 11. Moreover, we read that he was "skilled", implying that he was well trained in the laws, and effective in performing services for God.

2) Secondly, we see the desire that Ezra has to serve God. As we read that he had "set his heart to study the law of the Lord", and more importantly to obey and teach these laws. As we read in verse 10, "to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel". Thus, we see that Ezra not only studied God's laws, he also lived them. Further, it was important for him to teach the people so that they could also live them. Thus, Ezra was a model teacher for his people. He was a doer of the law, and this is why he was so well respected by his people and the Persian King as we see in verses 11-26.

Verses 11-26:

Here we see the respect king Darius has for Ezra. He appoints Ezra the leader for the people of Jerusalem. He gives Ezra complete responsibility of the people, and tells him to lead the people by the laws of God. Thus the purpose of Ezra's mission according to the king's decree is contained in verse 25 : "he was to appoint judges to judge on the basis of God's laws, and to ensure that all members of the community were conversant with them". Moreover, he was appointed to teach the people about God's laws. This main purpose of Ezra's task then is to educate the exiles on God's laws, and further to enforce them. This would hopefully build a more faithful community, thus taking a positive step toward God. Ezra himself must have thought that this is a marvelous thing that a pagan king instructs him to go lead a people according to God's laws. This certainly must have strengthened his belief that the mission he was to go on was planned entirely by God. Here we really see God at work. Our Faith really feeds on seeing God at work, and we can imagine that Ezra's faith was made much stronger by this. God continues to work in the same way today in our lives.

Chapter 8

This chapter gives a more detailed account of Ezra's journey from Babylon. Again this

chapter confirms that Ezra did not come alone. He was accompanied by fellow Jews. In this chapter, Ezra is speaking in first person.

(verses 21-36)

More light is shed on Ezra's personality as we read about his journey. We see more of Ezra's faith and holiness as he proclaims a fast, so that they could have a safe trip. Verses 21-23 contain several terms which speak of proper devotion to God. We read that the people were to "humble" themselves and "seek" God. And when they had "fasted" and "prayed", he had "listened". Here, Ezra's spiritual maturity really comes out. He is fully aware that God, though full of love and always making the first move, does not dispense favors carelessly, but rather seeks to build and bless the people who know him and his ways.

Ezra demonstrates this to his people by refusing to accept soldiers and horsemen from the king. He has refused to accept help from the king, feeling that if he did, he would give a bad impression about God to the king. He wanted to show the king and his people that he had complete faith in God, and God's guidance alone is sufficient for their journey. Ezra's confidence was in part based on Artaxerxes decree, "the hand of the Lord my God was upon me". Ezra knew that God was talking to him through the king, and now he wanted to prove that indeed "the hand of our God is for good upon all that seek him". In verse 31, we read that "the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way".

Ezra's final preparation before departure is to make proper arrangements for the care and transport for the gifts for God which the king has made. He chooses twelve priests. Because these gifts belong to God, Ezra chooses holy people to take care of them. Holy things must be handled by Holy people.

We see that Ezra took great time to prepare the gifts and sacrifices, so that they could properly worship once they arrived. What makes the Jews restoration so remarkable is not simple that they should return, but that kings should supply their needs in relation to worship. It is this that makes the "new exodus" so evidently an act of God's salvation.

When Ezra's people arrived in Jerusalem, it was right that they should offer sacrifices, not because the king said they should, or even as an act of thanksgiving, but because they were reconstituted as the people of God, and therefore must worship.

The Epistle of St. James

References

1. Father Tadros Malaty - Bible Study of St. James
2. Orthodox Study Bible
3. William Barclay - The Daily Study Bible Series

Historical Background

- This Epistle is one of the seven Catholic Epistles. The others are the two Epistles of St. Peter, the three Epistles of St. John, and the Epistle of St. Jude.
- Author: St. James, “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:1)
 - He was one of the twelve disciples.
 - Also known as James the just, James the less, James the brother of Jesus, James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3).
 - The writer of this Epistle is *not* James the brother of John. The brothers James and John were sons of Zebedee. The writer of the Epistle of St. James is the son of Alphaeus. Thus, two of the twelve disciples are named James.
 - He was the first Bishop of Jerusalem where he presided over the Jerusalem Council (Acts 12:17, 21:17, 15:13).
 - Christ appeared to St. James after His resurrection (1 Cor 15:7).
 - He was martyred
- The Epistle was written 55-60 A.D.
- Recipients of the Epistle: “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” (1:1). Thus the epistle is not addressed to a particular church or geographical region.

- Setting: The people St. James addresses are experiencing various trials: persecution, deception (Chapter 1), economic injustice and poverty (Chapters 1, 2 and 5), apostasy (Chapters 1 and 5) and divisions in the Church (Chapters 3 and 4).
 - In response to these trials, people are tempted by a) depression over being snubbed and persecuted by the Jews (Chapters 1 and 5), b) anger at having their good will being taken advantage of (Chapters 1), c) bitterness over being so poor when godless Jews were so rich (Chapter 2), and d) impatience over the delay in the return of Christ (Chapter 5).
 - They are plagued most by the sin of hypocrisy - the split between profession and practice, between faith and works which is manifested in distrust, dissension and quarrels.
- Theme: Harmony of faith and works.

Chapter 1

- This chapter addresses faith (1:2-18) and works (1:19-27).
- Trials and endurance (1:2-5).
 - Trials take place by God's permission. The issue is not trials per se, but our response to them. St. James discusses our role and God's role in trials.
 - Properly received, trials reveal where our hearts are.
 - They help increase faith (1:3).
 - The godly reaction to trials is joy, patience and perseverance (1:3-4).
- The importance of wisdom in trials (1:5-11). Wisdom is a gift given to those who ask God in faith (1:5-6).
- St. James talks about the poor and the rich, and talks about the worthlessness of riches. Note the reverse of the order of the world (1:8-11).
- Temptations - part of life's trials.

- We are to rejoice in temptations (1:12).
- Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He himself tempt anyone (1:13).
- Temptation originates in our own sinful passions (1:14).
- Warning against deception - every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights (1:17). This verse is said in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.
- God provides salvation of His own will (1:19).
- Being doers not just hearers of the word (1:19-27). An important aspect of works.
 - For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was (1:23).
 - Verses 1:26-27 give three examples of the relationship between faith and works: (1) mastery over speech, (2) ministry to the needy, (3) moral purity in thought and deed.

Chapter 2

- The law of love - do not judge others and do not show partiality to others.
- The rich and the poor - unjustly judging others is an example of a fainthearted faith being manifested in unjust works (2:1-5).
- God does not show partiality to anyone. Do not show partiality to anyone (2:5-9).
- The true standard of judgment is perfect faith manifested in perfect works (2:8-13).
- Faith that Works (2:14-20).
 - The faith that saves is a complete faith.
 - Thus, also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (2:17).
 - But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (2:20).

- The faith of Abraham is living and active (2:21-26).

Chapter 3

- This chapter talks about taming the tongue.
- This chapter is an example of a breakdown of faith and works.
- What we say reveals what we are: If we can control what we say, we can control what we do. Not controlling what we say is an example of lack of faith, and results in lack of works (3:1-12).
- Verses 3:1-12 is the Catholic Epistle reading for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son during lent.
- St. James warns against hypocrisy in teaching and counseling - He warns of the development of a self-centered faith and he notes that self-centered faith will manifest itself in self-centered works, and in this case, we will be helping others in an “unhelpful” manner (3:13-18).
- He mentions that a wisdom that is self-seeking does not descend from above, but it is earthly, sensual, and demonic (3:15).
- He mentions that the wisdom that’s from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy (3:17).

Chapter 4

- This chapter talks about quarrels in the church, criticizing others, and arrogance.
- Quarrels in the church are yet another example of a breakdown of faith and works (4:1-10).

- Wars and fights in the Church are an example of the result of faith without works. Such disputes come from desires or passions which bring disruption in the body of Christ. These passions are divisive (4:1), self-centered (4:3), of this world (4:4), energized by Satan (4:7), and therefore at enmity with God (4:4).
- God does not answer prayers for our selfish desires (4:3).
- How do we conquer pleasure seeking?
 - Stop praying for self-centered pleasures (4:2-3).
 - Renounce the world and build a relationship with God (4:4).
 - Yield to the Holy Spirit who dwells in us through Chrismation (4:5).
 - Be humble and recognize that God resists the proud (4:6).
 - Resist Satan and submit to God (4:7).
 - Approach God in worship (4:8-9).
- St. James warns of criticizing others (4:11-12).
 - Belittling criticism of others is another way pride is revealed in our speech. It is a lack of faith united with evil works, an offense both to the person criticized and to God.
 - St. James again talks about the sin of judging others as he did in Chapter 2.
- Being overconfident (4:13-17).
 - True faith a) depends completely on God and b) seeks ways to do good works.
 - Don't make plans for your life, for you don't know what will happen tomorrow (4:13-14).
 - Leave everything according to God's will (4:15).
 - Therefore to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin (4:17).

Chapter 5

- This chapter discusses the injustice and corruption caused by riches, the topic of suffering, and healing.
- Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten (5:2).
- Your Gold and silver are corroded (5:3).
- Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you have kept back by fraud (5:4).
- The terrible fate of the unjust rich is that their wealth will condemn them (5:1-6).
- Encouragement to the oppressed (5:7-12).
 - Be patient (5:7-8, 1:3-4).
 - Do not grumble against one another (5:9, 4:11)
 - Persevere as did Job - The faithful prophets and saints are examples for us in how to practice suffering and patience (5:10-11).
 - But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes”, and your “No,” “No”, lest you fall into judgment (5:12). These are the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:34-37.
- The work of faith: Healing (5:13-20).
 - Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let him pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (5:14, Mark 6:13, 16:18). Important verse for the Sacrament of healing of the sick.
 - The prayer of faith will save the sick (5:15).
 - Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed (5:16, 1 John 1:8-10). Important verse for the Sacrament of Confession.
 - Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins (5:19-20). This verse describes the work of faith in restoring one who has strayed from the faith.

St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

- St. Paul wrote this epistle between 61-63 A.D., while under house arrest in Rome.
- St. Paul wrote 4 epistles while in prison. These are Philemon, Philippians, Ephesians, and Colossians.
- The city of Philippi was named after King Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. After the Romans captured this city, it became part of the Roman province of Macedonia.
- St. Paul visited Philippi three times, once on his second missionary journey (50 - 51 A.D.) and twice on his third missionary journey (57 - 58 A.D.).
- The theme of the epistle is “Our dynamic heavenly and joyful life in Christ.” Salvation is a dynamic, ongoing experience which is not only personal, but also shared among believers. St. Paul urges the believers in Philippi toward continued unity, humility, generosity, and joy in Christ.
- The epistle has 4 chapters, which are very spiritually rich.

Features of the Epistle

1. St. Paul's mind was absorbed in the heavenly joy. He reveals our dynamic heavenly and joyful life in Christ. Joy is a characteristic term for this epistle.
 - Christ is our life and death is a profit (1:21): here on earth, we practice the joyful life since Christ is our life. Death is a profit and a gain since we would see Christ face to face when we depart from this world.
 - Our desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better (1:23).
 - We press towards the goal for the prize for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (3:14).
 - Our citizenship is in heaven (3:20). He conceived his whole life as a glorification of Christ. If by dying he glorifies Christ, this is “gain” in so far as the glorification of Christ is the purpose of St. Paul's existence.

- We wait for Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to His glorious body (3:21).
 - St. Paul considers the joy of his people and their crowns as his own joy and crown (4:1).
 - He considers his ministry as a call of joy: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice!” (4:4).
 - We count all things as rubbish that we may gain Christ (3:8), for He is our satisfaction and treasure.
 - St. Paul repeats the expression “The day of Christ (1:6, 10) as a joyful day!
2. Unity through humility (2:1-4).
 3. The Incarnation Song of St. Paul (2:5-11). Here St. Paul describes the humility of Christ in the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. It is a summary of the life of Christ and the process of salvation.
 4. He declares his trust in God’s work: “I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly” (2:24). He was sure that God will release him from jail.
 5. St. Paul was proud of God’s work with the statesmen, for their corruption and wickedness was severe (1:16, 2:21).
 6. Sanctification of emotions: Not only does St. Paul lift up our minds to see that our bodies will be glorified and become in the likeness of the risen body of Jesus Christ, but he directly incites us not to destroy our emotions, but rather sanctify them (1:17, 1:8, 2:26-27, 2:1-2).
 7. Cooperation between Divine grace and man’s will. It is God’s pleasure to work in us, to strengthen and sanctify our wills and to help us work, if we submit to Him. He says, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (2:12-13). St. Paul also wants us to struggle unceasingly “for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:13-14).
 8. Not only did St. Paul diligently practice the joyful life in Christ, but he also became a source of joy for those who suffer. He was like a drink offering being poured out for the sacrifice of their faith (2:17-18).
 9. St. Paul refers to the importance of tradition (4:9).

10. St. Paul tells us how to deal with anxiety and the pressures of this life (4:6-8).
11. He calls us to be saints (1:1).
12. St. Paul lived to intercede for others. Even in prison, he prayed for his friends (1:3-4).

1. **Chapter 1: Life in Christ** - Christ is our life. He is the Heavenly Bread, the Way, the Heavenly Groom, the Savior, our Educator, our Treasure, our Light, our Joy, and our Satisfaction. Signs that we are living our life in Christ include a saintly view of others, holy and saintly emotions (1:7-8), growth in love (1:9), knowledge (1:10), good deeds (1:10), and righteousness (1:11). We become absorbed in salvation (1:12-26), and rejoice in suffering (1:27-30).
2. **Chapter 2: The Divine Price for Life in Christ** - Christ showed us the way by humility. He “emptied Himself” (2:5-11). We must also empty ourselves. The cross is the way to glorify Christ. We must carry our cross.
3. **Chapter 3: The Cost of the Life in Christ**

Negative Costs	Positive Costs
Beware of literal worship	Worship in the Spirit
Have no confidence in the flesh (3:3-4)	Hope in the glorious body
Consider everything as rubbish	Christ is our satisfaction
Forget the past	Look towards the future
The world’s glory is a shame	Our citizenship in heaven

4. **Features of the Life in Christ** - Supernatural unity (4:1-3), unceasing joy (4:4). The word joy or rejoice occurs in this epistle 16 times. Gentleness (4:5), waiting for the last advent of Christ (4:5), freedom from worry and anxiety (4:6-7), growing in virtues (4:8-9), being content (4:10-12), being strong in Christ (4:13), and sharing in other’s sufferings and needs (4:14-19).

Great Verses

1. “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (1:21).
2. “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (1:23).

3. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (2:3-4).
4. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father: (2:5-11).
5. "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (2:12-13).
6. "Do all things without complaining and disputing" (2:14).
7. "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (3:7).
8. "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (3:8).
9. "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me" (3:12).
10. "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" (3:13-14).
11. "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (3:20).
12. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (4:4).
13. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (4:6).

14. “and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (4:7).
15. “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (4:8).
16. “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (4:11).
17. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (4:13).

Commentary on the First Book of Samuel

1. Samuel was the last Judge of Israel. He is also a prophet of God.
2. The name Samuel means “Name of God.”
3. Outline of book: Chapters 1-7 focus on the life of Samuel, prophet and judge. Chapters 8-15 focus on King Saul. Chapters 16-31 focus on the life of David.
4. Chapter 1 talks about the birth of Samuel. Samuel was the son of Hannah. Samuel was the fruit of Hannah’s prayers and faith, for she was old when Samuel was born.
5. Elkanah was the husband of Hannah. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Elkanah loved Hannah more, and Peninnah was jealous of Hannah. Peninnah would provoke Hannah because she had no children (1 Samuel 1:6).
6. Hannah had promised the Lord that if she had a male child that she would dedicate the child to Him (1 Samuel 1:11). Her prayers were answered and she had Samuel (1 Samuel 1:20).
7. Hannah offered Samuel to the Lord after he had been weaned. After he had been weaned, she offered sacrifices and dedicated Samuel to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:24).
8. Samuel began his service to the Lord as a young boy. He was 12 years old. We read “Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation” (1 Samuel 3:1).
9. Eli lived in Shiloh, where Hannah and Samuel would go to worship. Eli had two wicked sons, who were priests. They were corrupt and did not know the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12). What a big difference between Samuel and the two sons of Eli. Eli was too lenient in his upbringing of his sons.
10. God told Samuel to warn Eli of his leniency toward his son’s upbringing (1 Samuel 3:13). Eli’s personality was weak and he told nothing to his sons after Samuel’s warning. Samuel hid nothing from Eli, and we read that “So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground” (1 Samuel 3:19).

11. Eli's two sons then died in a battle with the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:11). When Eli heard that his sons died and the Ark of God had been taken, he fell over his chair and died (1 Samuel 4:18).
12. In Chapters 5, 6, we read about the Philistines returning the Ark of God, and how Israel defeated the Philistines in battle.
13. In Chapter 8, Israel demands a king from Samuel. At this time, Samuel was old. He had two sons, Joel and Abjah. His sons did not walk in the ways of the Lord and neither of them were fit to be king (1 Samuel 8:1-2).
14. Samuel warned the people about the disadvantages of having a king (1 Samuel 8:11-17). The people still insisted on a king, and Samuel took their request to the Lord.
15. When Samuel took their request to the Lord, we read "So the Lord said to Samuel, 'Heed their voice, and make them a king'" (1 Samuel 8:22).
16. There was nothing wrong with wanting a king, but the Israelites were impatient and wanted a king immediately, while the Lord was preparing for them a different person, David. God showed the Israelites that impatience leads to mistakes in that Saul was chosen king in haste.
17. Samuel meets Saul in Zuph when Saul was looking for his father's lost donkeys. Saul wanted to return home, then Saul's servant told Saul that there was a man of God in Zuph who could help them (1 Samuel 9:5-7). Saul did not know anything about this "man of God." We see at the outset that Saul was not a holy man.
18. Saul was the most impressive man in all of Israel. We read that "There was not a taller and more handsome person in all of Israel than Saul (1 Samuel 9:1).
19. Samuel meets Saul and Saul was anointed king by Samuel (1 Samuel 10:1). At this point, Saul becomes king, and Samuel no longer is the judge of Israel. Samuel made a farewell speech to the people (Chapter 12).
20. Saul's first big mistake occurs in Chapter 13. There was a battle between Israel and the Philistines. The battle was fierce, and Israel was being surrounded. The people were in distress and scattered. They were going to lose the battle. Samuel has told Saul to wait seven days for him and he would meet Saul at the battlefield in Gilgal. When Saul saw that

his people were in distress and scattered, and Samuel had not come in the promised time (seven days), Saul took it upon himself to offer a burnt offering to the Lord, something which he had no authority to do. He was not a priest or a prophet, and performed clerical duties that he was not qualified or authorized to perform. We see here that Saul was a very impatient person. When Samuel came late, he told Saul “What have you done?” (1 Samuel 13:11). Here we see that Saul does not respect the clerical order because he does not fear God, nor is he a person after God’s heart. Saul is selfish and only after his own personal desires. Samuel tells him, “you have done foolishly” (1 Samuel 13:13) and “But now your kingdom shall not continue” (1 Samuel 13:14), and “The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14).

21. When Samuel questioned Saul about his mistake, Saul did not repent, but rather made excuses. Saul did not condemn himself for his actions and this is why God did not allow him to remain as king (1 Samuel 13:11).
22. Saul’s impatience also comes out in Chapter 14, when he hastily attacked his enemy which almost resulted in his son’s (Jonathan) death. He was victorious in his battle and took credit for the victory instead of giving credit to God. As a result of taking human credit for the victory, Saul commanded that his people fast all day. This made them very hungry and distressed (1 Samuel 14:24). The people became weak and out of exhaustion, they raided the spoils of the Philistines and ate the cattle with blood (1 Samuel 14:33). So Saul facilitated the sin of eating unclean animals by the people through his impatience.
23. In Chapter 15, Saul makes another great mistake and it is in this Chapter that God rejects Saul. Saul was told by God to attack the Amalekites and wipe out everyone. Saul did not fully obey God’s command. He did attack them, but he spared the king and the best of the cattle. We read, “But everything that was worthless, they destroyed (1 Samuel 15:9). Saul did this because he was selfish. Saul destroyed everything that was worthless because it would be of no value to him. He wanted to keep the cattle for himself to eat. Saul was again disobedient to God’s command.
24. When Samuel rebuked Saul for not being obedient to God in his battle with the Amalekites, Saul made up more excuses, and he shifted the blame on his own people (1 Samuel 15:21). Saul also lied to Samuel about why he spared the best cattle He told Samuel that he was going to offer sacrifices to the Lord (1 Samuel 15:15), which is not true. He was going to

keep the best cattle for himself. Notice in this verse, Saul says to Samuel “the Lord, your God”, and not “the Lord my God.” Saul never acknowledges God as his God. Saul speaks and acts in a completely worldly way.

25. Samuel tells Saul that he has been now rejected by God as king in 1 Samuel 15:23. He tells him that since Saul has rejected the word of the Lord, likewise the Lord also rejected Saul from being king.
26. When Saul hears that he has been rejected as king, he admits his sin. It is not a true repentance, however. He only admits his sin because he does not want to lose his kingship. He was afraid of losing power.
27. So we see the following characteristics in the personality of Saul:
 - He was not a man of God from the beginning
 - He did not fear God. He did not respect clerical duties.
 - He was selfish and wanted only to satisfy his own desires. He was not after God’s heart.
 - He was impatient.
 - He was disobedient.
 - He was dishonest.
 - He was a coward. He was very fearful of Goliath and could not face up to the task (Chapter 17).
 - He was a man of many excuses. He never confessed or repented for his sins.
 - In further reading, we will see that he turns to witchcraft and demonic ways (Chapter 28).
 - He kills himself (Chapter 31).
28. Chapter 15 closes by saying “And the Lord regretted that He made Saul king over Israel” (1 Samuel 15:35).
29. After Saul was rejected, David is anointed king by Samuel in Chapter 16. David was anointed in Bethlehem, which means house of bread. As we will see, David’s life and personality are in complete contrast to Saul’s.

30. David was the youngest of Jesse's children. He had seven brothers older than him. When Samuel went to anoint the king, he did not know beforehand that it would be David. God told him that he would tell Samuel the one (1 Samuel 16:3).
31. Samuel goes to Jesse's house and starts looking at Jesse's sons one by one. The Lord told Samuel "do not judge by outside appearance, and the Lord does not see what man sees, for the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).
32. Samuel took the horn of oil, and all of Jesse's sons passed by Samuel. The Lord did not speak to Samuel regarding any of these sons. Then Samuel asked Jesse if there was anyone else, and they called David from the field where he was tending the sheep.
33. David was a boy. And when David was brought before Samuel, we read, "Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes and good looking. And the Lord said, 'Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!'" (1 Samuel 16:12).
34. The anointed one, David, was chosen amongst all of his brothers who were bigger, stronger and more impressive looking. St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:27, "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong."
35. David was a very humble person. He was often criticized by his brothers (1 Samuel 17:28-29), and he had a very low state in his family. His brothers often ridiculed him and picked on him (1 Samuel 17:28-29). He was a herder of sheep. Yet he loved his brothers and his family very much. He brought his brothers grain and cheeses when they were at battle. David often went back to Bethlehem from Saul's mansion to tend the sheep back home for his parents (1 Samuel 17:15-18). David was very tenderhearted.
36. When David was anointed king, the Spirit of God departed from Saul. Saul had distressing spirits and often became very depressed (1 Samuel 16:14).
37. Although David was anointed king, Saul was still the king in charge, since David was anointed as the king who would follow Saul.
38. When the distressing spirit troubled Saul, he called for David to comfort him by having David play his harp in front of him. (1 Samuel 16:23).
39. We read that David loved Saul greatly (1 Samuel 16:21).

40. David's first assignment from God was to kill the 9.5 foot Philistine Goliath, who was from Gath (1 Samuel 17:4).
41. Saul was very fearful of Goliath. He did not want to face him alone (1 Samuel 17:11).
42. When Saul heard that David is willing to fight Goliath, he was pleased and sent him to fight Goliath.
43. In preparing for the fight with Goliath, we see David's great faith. He tells Saul that the Lord has delivered him before when he killed a lion and a bear (1 Samuel 17:35-36). In verse 37, David gives all of the credit to God for delivering him from the lion and the bear. David said "the Lord who delivered me from from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of the Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37).
44. Then David and Goliath face each other, and David tells Goliath that he is coming to face him "in the name of the Lord of hosts." That is, David is attributing his strength to God and not to himself or any other human element.
45. He tells Goliath that "today the Lord will deliver you in my hand" (1 Samuel 17:46).
46. Goliath has armor on and is carrying a 20 pound spear and a sword. David is wearing no armor and only has a slingshot with 5 stones. Again this shows us the faith and simplicity of David.
47. Finally, David kills Goliath with one strike of his slingshot. Then he cuts off his head.
48. David keeps the armor of Goliath in his tent to remind him of God's victory over Satan and and to remind him about the work of God in his life.
49. David here shows us four great qualities in his personality when defeating Goliath:
 - Have faith in the Lord.
 - Proclaim God's power and deliverance to others, as David did to Saul and Goliath.
 - Do things in the name of God to glorify God.
 - Give God *all* of the credit for the tasks that He enables us to accomplish.
50. The killing of Goliath completely changed David's life. Success in life comes with a great price. When a person experiences success in their life, many things change. They lose many friends and make many enemies. A successful person has more enemies than friends.

51. Saul had promised that the person who kills Goliath would receive three things: wealth, exemption from taxes, and his daughter (1 Samuel 17:25). When David killed Goliath, Saul did not keep his promise to David regarding his daughter. Saul did not give Merab to David. Instead he gave him Michal so that she could be a snare to him (1 Samuel 18:21). Again, we see Saul's dishonesty and disloyalty. He does not honor his promises.
52. David's personality did not change after his defeat of Goliath. He remained humble. David tells Saul "who am I to be the son-in-law of the king" (1 Samuel 18:18).
53. We also read that "David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him" (1 Samuel 18:15).
54. On the other hand, we read that "Now Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, but had departed from Saul" (1 Samuel 18:12).
55. Saul became David's enemy after David killed Goliath because he was very jealous of David. Saul heard people in the streets say "Saul has killed his thousands and David has killed his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7), and this made Saul furious.
56. As a result of Saul's jealousy, he tries to kill David several times, by throwing his spear at him while David was playing his harp (1 Samuel 18:11). We read that Saul did this at least three times (1 Samuel 19:10).
57. We read in 1 Samuel 18:29, "And Saul was still more afraid of David, so Saul became David's enemy continually." When we do not walk with the Lord, we become enemies of those who do walk with the Lord.
58. In Chapter 19, we read that Saul's hatred of David kept growing and he wanted to kill him. The hatred became so deep that David had to flee Saul's house, and he remained on the run until the end of first Samuel. It was in this Chapter that Michal, David's wife, let David down through a window, for Saul was going to kill David at night. So David escaped that night and went and told Samuel everything that Saul tried to do to him (1 Samuel 19:18).
59. Jonathan was Saul's son. He became a great friend to David. Chapters 19 and 20 tell us about the great friendship that Jonathan and David had. They had an inseparable bond. In Chapter 20, we read about Jonathan's covenant with David. Jonathan tells David, "Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you" (1 Samuel 20:4).

60. Jonathan had recognized that David would be the next king and he honored him, whereas his father Saul, did not. We read, “Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt” (1 Samuel 18:3-4). It is as if Jonathan is crowning David as king and telling him, “Although I am the king’s son, I realize that I am not the next king, but you are David.”
61. Jonathan became David’s protector and told David all that his father Saul had been planning. It was Jonathan who helped David know the feelings of Saul toward David by throwing three arrows and giving David a signal whether to come back to Saul’s mansion or to leave.
62. When king Saul noticed that David’s seat was empty and that he had not come to eat for two straight days, he asked Jonathan about David’s whereabouts, and Jonathan told him that David went to Bethlehem to his parents. Then Saul was angered and told Jonathan that as long as David lives, Jonathan’s kingdom would not be established (1 Samuel 20:31). Saul also said that David “shall surely die” (1 Samuel 20:31). Here Saul also tries to kill Jonathan out of his frustration of Jonathan’s loyalty to David. (1 Samuel 20:33).
63. Then Jonathan gives David the signal with the arrows to flee and not come back to Saul’s house, for he was sure that Saul was going to kill him if he came back (1 Samuel 20:41-42).
64. So David flees to Nob and then to Gath. In Chapter 21, we read about David at Nob. At Nob, David came to Ahimelech the priest. Here David commits a great sin. He lies to Ahimelech and tells him that king Saul has “ordered me on some business” when Ahimelech asks him why he is alone (1 Samuel 21:2).
65. David asks Ahimelech for food and Ahimelech gives David the holy bread to eat. In Nob, there was a man named Doeg, who was chief of the herdsmen who belong to Saul. Doeg saw Ahimelech help David and told Saul of this.
66. When Saul heard that Ahimelech had helped David and gave him bread, he killed Ahimelech and all of the priests of Nob. Doeg killed 85 priests that day (1 Samuel 22:18).
67. We see here that David’s lies led to Ahimelech’s death.
68. Goliath’s sword was kept in Nob. David asked Ahimelech for a weapon to protect him. David took the sword of Goliath from Nob as a weapon to protect him. We see here how

David is straying from the Lord. He lies to Ahimelech which led to his death and to the death of 84 other priests, and now David is depending on weaponry to protect him.

69. From Nob, David travels to Gath, Goliath's home town. The men of Gath recognized David and told king Achish of this. And David became scared and "he changed his behavior before them". David started to act insane, by scratching on the doors and having saliva run down his beard (1 Samuel 22:13-14). David did this so that they would think he is insane and let him go. When king Achish saw this, he told them "why have you brought someone to me who is insane?" Then they let David go. We see here how David humiliated himself and insulted God by acting insane. When we are far from God, we humiliate ourselves and insult and humiliate God in the process. We become terrible representatives of God. When we are away from God, no sin or ridicule is impossible for us.
70. After leaving Gath, David escapes into the wilderness to the cave of Adullam in Chapter 22. David has 400 men who were with him. These were people who "were in distress, in debt, and discontented" (1 Samuel 22:2).
71. When Saul had heard that David was in En Gedi, Saul went after David. Saul had 3000 men, and when Saul had to "attend to his needs" (go to the bathroom), he went into the cave where David was hiding (1 Samuel 24:3). The men of David encouraged David to kill Saul, but David would not. David would "not stretch out his hand against the anointed of the Lord." Moreover David restrains his men from killing Saul. David here cuts the corner of Saul's robe, and even this act troubled David (1 Samuel 24:4-5).
72. David cuts the corner of Saul's robe in hopes of restoring his relationship with Saul. David had always longed to restore his relationship with Saul for "he loved him."
73. After Saul was done "attending to his needs", he left the cave, and David came out and called to him, "My lord, the king!" (1 Samuel 24:8). Then David stooped with his face to the earth and bowed down.
74. Here David tries to reason with Saul to restore his relationship with him:
 - He tells Saul that all the gossip Saul hears about David wanting to harm him is not true.
 - David shows Saul the corner of the robe he cut to prove his point.

- David makes a powerful Godly appeal to Saul in 1 Samuel 24:11-15. David pleads his case and tells Saul that he is not after him, he has not sinned against Saul, and tells him that “Let the Lord be judge between you and me and let the Lord avenge me on you, but my hand shall not be against you” (1 Samuel 24:12).
 - David tells Saul to let the Lord be the judge of his (David’s) actions.
 - David’s humility comes out again as he tells Saul, “Are you after a dead dog, a flea” (1 Samuel 24:14).
75. Saul sees David’s righteousness and Saul weeps. When evil confronts righteousness, evil cannot prevail, and Saul’s evil here cannot prevail as he is moved with David’s righteousness. He tells David “You are more righteous than I” (1 Samuel 24:17).
76. However, Saul’s repentance is not a true one. He does acknowledge his own evil and David’s righteousness, and he does acknowledge that David will be the next king, but he does it out of selfish ambition as he tells David to promise him “not to cut off his descendants and not destroy my name” (1 Samuel 24:21). So Saul’s repentance is not a true one. Even after this incident, Saul still pursues David’s life and wants to kill him.
77. We learn four great things about restoring relationships from David in the cave of Adullam. The four R’s of restoring relationships are:
- Restrain yourself
 - Refuse revenge
 - Risk reconciliation
 - Restore the relationship
78. In Chapter 25 we read about David and Abigail. Abigail was the wife of Nabal. The name Nabal literally means fool.
79. Nabal was a very rich farmer who was “harsh and evil in his doings” (1 Samuel 25:3). Abigail was a woman of “of good understanding and beautiful appearance” (1 Samuel 25:3).
80. David and his men had been protecting Nabal from the Philistines. David had asked his men to go to Nabal and ask him Nabal some food, and Nabal refused.

81. When David heard that Nabal would not give them anything, David became furious and wanted to kill all of Nabal's household.
82. When Abigail was told by one of the young men in the household about what happened, she rode on a donkey, met David, and gave him a substantial amount of food (1 Samuel 25:18).
83. David was moved by her wise actions and spared the house of Nabal. Abigail prevented a great sin (by David) from happening by her wise actions.
84. When Abigail told Nabal what she had done, he fell sick and died ten days later.
85. After Nabal died, Abigail married David.
86. In Chapter 26, David spares Saul's life a second time. Saul was still coming after David in the wilderness. When Saul was sleeping, David took a spear and jug of water sitting by Saul's head while he was sleeping. The next morning David tells Saul that he has the spear and jug of water and shows his servant the spear.
87. David's servant, Abishai, wanted to kill Saul but David would not let him, saying "who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed?" (1 Samuel 26:9). We see again David's great fear and respect for the Lord.
88. Again, David makes an appeal for his innocence and righteousness and tries to restore the relationship with Saul in a most humble way, calling himself a flea, and telling Saul that he intends no harm against him (1 Samuel 26:17-25).
89. Saul again gives another false repentance. Saul keeps pursuing David and tries to kill him.
90. Saul's long pursuit of David takes its toll on David. In Chapter 27, David falls into a great depression and is ready to give up. In this Chapter, David defects to Gath out of loss of hope in his struggles with Saul. David here loses his identity due to his discouragement.
91. David wanted to hide with the Philistines to escape from Saul. He was sick of being on the run. When Saul heard that David fled to Gath, he did not pursue him any more (1 Samuel 27:4).
92. David got deeper into trouble by his defection. He had to raid nomadic tribes to provide food for his 600 men and their families, and he would lie to king Achish about whom he

raided. David told king Achish of Gath that he was raiding Israel. The defection to Gath was another sin and a low point in David's life.

93. In Chapter 28, we read about Samuel's death and Saul consulting a medium (fortune teller) after the Lord had not answered him about the Philistines. Saul was afraid of the Philistines and thus consulted a medium to tell him what to do.
94. In Chapter 29, the Philistines attack Israel. David was going to fight for the side of the Philistines, but the Philistines distrusted David and sent him back.
95. In Chapter 30, the Amalekites invaded Ziklag and take David's wives, sons, and daughters captive. David weeps and asks the Lord for help. David and his men recovered everything they lost and everyone who was taken captive. No one was killed.
96. In Chapter 31, the battle between the Philistines and Israel became fierce. Saul is badly hurt. After seeing that he was badly injured, he kills himself. Jonathan is killed in battle and two other sons of Saul are also killed in this battle.

St. Paul's Epistle to Philemon

St. Paul's epistle to Philemon is a wonderful story about the virtues and the characteristics of the Christian life. Of the 14 epistles of St. Paul, this is the only one that was written personally to one person.

Background

Philemon has owned a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus had stolen something from Philemon and ran away. St. Paul had converted Philemon to Christianity. St. Paul and Philemon were friends, and Philemon respected St. Paul a lot. Apparently Onesimus had run into St. Paul at Rome, while St. Paul was in prison, and St. Paul had converted him to Christianity. After his conversion, Onesimus became very valuable to St. Paul in his ministry. St. Paul is writing Philemon asking him to take Onesimus back, so that they can reconcile. Onesimus is a Greek word which means profitable.

There are several things to note in this epistle:

1. It is the only private epistle that St. Paul has written.
 2. St. Paul is asking Philemon for a favor. St. Paul had asked few favors of anyone in the Bible.
 3. He addresses the epistle as: "to Philemon our beloved friend." St. Paul usually addresses himself as an "Apostle of the Lord." But since he is writing as a friend to a friend, he drops the official title.
 4. St. Paul was in prison in Rome at the time of writing this letter. Four of St. Paul's Epistles were written while he was in prison. These are the Epistles to Philemon, the Ephesians, the Colossians, and the Philippians.
1. **Verses 1-3** - We read in the first verse that St. Paul is a "prisoner of Jesus Christ." St. Paul was in prison in Rome at the time he wrote this letter. Imagine the kind of caring person St. Paul was to write to a friend about a runaway slave while he was in prison. Imagine being in prison and thinking about other people's problems, and not our own. That would be great if we could lose ourselves in service to others this way.

Note how St. Paul is so personal in his address. He always mentions people by name and calls them “brothers.” He calls Philemon “our beloved friend and fellow laborer”. This is a great compliment. St. Paul also calls Timothy a brother. These are the kinds of things that we say to people when we truly love them.

In this epistle, Onesimus was a runaway slave who had taken a wrong turn in life and St. Paul was helping him find his way back. We see that people can take many wrong turns in life, and they can be put back on the right track.

2. **Verses 4-7: Christian diplomacy vs. Worldly diplomacy** - St. Paul acknowledges how loving and generous Philemon is. He acknowledges the Christianity of Philemon. In verse 6 he says, “that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.” This means that we learn about Christ by giving to others. In Acts 20:35 we read, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” This means that to be open-hearted and generous-hearted is the surest way to learn more and more of the wealth of Christ. The man who knows Christ the most is not the intellectual scholar and not the saint who spends his whole day in prayer, but the man who moves in loving generosity towards his fellow men.
3. **Verses 8-10** - St. Paul could of demanded that Philemon take Onesimus back, but he didn't. Instead, he made a humble request. St. Paul respected Philemon. We teach Christ by imitating Him. In verse 10, we learn of how St. Paul met Onesimus, “I have begotten him while in my chains.”
4. **Verse 11** - Note that St. Paul does not make any excuses for Onesimus. He says that he was once unprofitable, but now he is profitable, which means that he has converted to Christianity and repented. Christianity is not a religion of excuses or alibis. It is a religion which admits and confronts our imperfections head on. Christianity has the power of making bad men good. St. Paul says that, in Christ, the useless person is now useful. Christianity has the power of putting people on the right track.
5. **Verse 12** - St. Paul tells Philemon that it is his heart's desire that Philemon should receive him. Christianity is not out to help a man escape his past and run away from it. It is out to enable the man to face his past and rise above it. Christianity is never an escape. It is always a conquest.

6. **Verse 13** - Onesimus must have developed a great relationship with St. Paul. St. Paul did not want to let him go. St. Paul valued his service and truly loved him.
7. **Verse 14** - Note the respect St. Paul has for Philemon. He does not want to send Onesimus back without his consent. Love and forgiveness can never be achieved by force. It can never be obtained through orders or threats. It can only come from the heart, and this is what St. Paul is trying to do. He is trying to open Philemon's heart by telling him what is in his own heart.
8. **Verses 15-17** - Onesimus comes back a different man. He went away as a thief and comes back as a "brother in Christ." St. Paul tells Philemon that he should "receive him as you would me" (verse 17). Also, as brothers in Christ, there is no master and slave (verse 16). The Christian always forgives the one who has made a mistake. This is what St. Paul is trying to convey to Philemon. Often in life, we think that God can forgive others but we can't.
9. **Verse 18** - Again, we see how Christ works in St. Paul. Just as Christ shouldered the sins of men, St. Paul is willing to shoulder the consequences of Onesimus. St. Paul writes that he will be responsible for this and pay Philemon in full. He wants him to just accept Onesimus back as a brother in Christ. It also tells us that St. Paul must have money. He could have just lived an easy life. He didn't have to be a missionary. It tells us what St. Paul gave up for Christ.
10. **Verse 19** - Here we see St. Paul's sense of humor. St. Paul is telling Philemon here that you got a lot out of me, let me get something out of you now for the sake of Onesimus. It was St. Paul who had converted Philemon to Christianity, and St. Paul did a lot for Philemon. Now Philemon "owes him one."
11. **Verse 21** - St. Paul always expected the best from others. He showed great confidence in Philemon. He never doubted that Philemon would come through. This is a good rule to follow. If we make it clear that we expect a lot from others, we will probably get it. St. Paul was a very optimistic person.
12. **Verse 22** - St. Paul's optimism comes through again. Even in prison he is optimistic that he will be freed soon. One can imagine the kind of stress that St. Paul was under while writing this letter in prison. Yet, he was not thinking of himself or his self-interests. His

mind was totally focussed on others and the work of Christ. This is similar to Christ's words on the cross. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Also, when Jesus told John to take care of the Virgin Mary while He was on the cross, as He said, "Behold your mother" (John 19:27). Part of Christian spiritual growth is to lose ones self in service to others, so that we gain our true fulfilled self in Christ.

Verses 23-25 - St. Paul gives his final greeting. Note that he mentions Mark, which indicates that Mark has now joined him on his journeys. Earlier, St. Paul did not want to travel with Mark due to his youth and inexperience, and preferred to travel with Barnabas and Silas (Acts 15:36-41). In these verses (23-25), he tells us that the two have reconciled.

In summary, the Christian characteristics that come out in this letter are:

1. **Praise** - St. Paul's praise of Philemon and Onesimus.
2. **Generosity and Love** - St. Paul's plea for Philemon's generosity and love towards his fellow man.
3. **Praying for others** - Verses 4 and 22.
4. **Repentance** - Onesimus's conversion and St. Paul proclaiming it.
5. **Unselfishness** - St. Paul looking out for the interests of others and not his own, while he was in prison.
6. **Power** - The power of Christianity to put a person on the right track after being on the wrong track.
7. **Confrontation of Problems and Not Escape** - Psychology tells us that we should escape our problems. Christianity tells us to face our problems head on and conquer them.
8. **Respect** - St. Paul's respect of Philemon and Onesimus. St. Paul never ordered Philemon to take Onesimus back.
9. **Forgiveness** - The Christian forgives one who has made a mistake. This is what St. Paul is conveying to Philemon.

10. **Responsibility** - St. Paul wants Onesimus to be responsible for his actions, and moreover he is willing to shoulder the consequences of Onesimus's sins. He is willing to pay Philemon in full for what Onesimus has taken.
11. **Expecting the Best from Others** - Uplifting others, and confidence in our fellow man to do good. St. Paul expressed great confidence in Philemon for taking Onesimus back.
12. **Christian Diplomacy** - We all need a Christian sense of humor to make tense moments light. Christian humor sometimes serves as an ice breaker in tense situations.
13. **Fellowship** - Philemon, Onesimus, and St. Paul were all great friends. St. Paul tells Philemon to prepare room for him (verse 22). He all asks Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother (verse 16).

The Missionary Journeys and Epistles of the Apostle Paul

During the Fast of the Apostles, our readings should partly focus on the book of Acts in the Bible, and in particular the works and lives of Saints Peter and Paul. We describe here the missions and epistles of the Apostle Paul.

An understanding of the chronological order of events in St. Paul's ministry can be very valuable as a tool for the study of the book of Acts and St. Paul's epistles. The book of Acts and the epistles of St. Paul sometimes tell us the length of time between one event and another. However, determining the year in which an event took place can require some research. It is most helpful to know the year of the beginning or end of the reigns of political rulers that are mentioned in the text. Some of the more helpful dates in studying the events in St. Paul's ministry are the death of King Aretas of Syria in 40 AD (AD means Anno Domini, the year of the birth of Christ), the beginning of the reign of Claudius Caesar as Emperor of Rome in 41 AD, the death of Herod Agrippa I in 44 AD, the succession of Felix's reign as Procurator in Judea by Porcius Festus in 60 AD.

Here is a summary of the years of St. Paul's journeys and his epistles. The detailed chronology follows.

Event	Time Period
At Damascus	37-40 AD
First Journey	45-47 AD
Second Journey	51-53 AD
Third Journey	54-58 AD
Imprisonment in Judea	58-60 AD
Voyage to Rome	60-61 AD
Imprisonment in Rome	61-63 AD
Post-Imprisonment Journeys	63-67 AD
First Thessalonians	52 AD
Second Thessalonians	52 AD
First Corinthians	57 AD
Second Corinthians	57 AD
Galatians	55-57 AD
Romans	57-58 AD
Ephesians	62 AD
Philippians	62 AD
Colossians	62 AD
Philemon	63 AD
Hebrews	64-65 AD
Titus	64-65 AD
First Timothy	64-65 AD
Second Timothy	66-67 AD

The Chronology

The crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ occurred in the spring of 32 AD. The the day of Pentecost occurred (Acts 2), then the stoning of Stephen, which Saul (St. Paul) participated in before his conversion (Acts 7:59). In about 37 AD, Jesus Christ speaks to Saul (St. Paul) on the road to Damascus. St. Paul is led blind to Damascus (Acts 9:8). After the visit by Ananias, St. Paul then goes to Arabia and returns to Damascus where he spends 3 years (Galatians 1:17-18 and Acts 9:22-23). In 37 AD King Aretas took control of Damascus when Emperor Tiberius Caesar died. St. Paul departed from Damascus at night, being let down from the city wall in a basket (Acts 9:25 and 2 Corinthians 11:32). This could not have been after 40 AD, the year that King Aretas died.

St. Paul met with Barnabus, Peter, and James in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26 and Galatians 1:18-19). St. Paul then goes to Caesarea and Tarsus (Acts 9:30) and St. Peter goes to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). Barnabus gets St. Paul and they stay in Antioch (Syria) for one year (Acts 11:26). This must be between 41 AD (beginning of Claudius Caesar's reign) and 44 AD (Acts 11:28). The Disciples are called Christians for the first time at Antioch (Acts 11:26). James, brother of John, is killed by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2). Herod Agrippa I dies in 44 AD (Acts 12:23).

The first journey of St. Paul begins when St. Paul, Barnabus, and St. Mark set out from Antioch (Acts 13:4). This journey started after 44 AD and ended a "long time" (Acts 14:28) before 50 AD. They left Antioch for Seleucia and sailed to Cyprus, large island 100 miles off Syrian coast. There they went to Salamis and Paphos where St. Paul met Bar-Jesus the sorcerer (Acts 13:4-6). Then they sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, which is now southern Turkey. From here, St. Mark returns to Jerusalem. At Antioch in Pisidia (not to be confused with the one in Syria), St. Paul and Barnabus turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). Then it was on to Iconium, where they abode a "long time" (Acts 14:3), Lystra, where St. Paul is stoned, but lives (Acts 14:19), and Derbe. Then they retraced their steps back through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (in Pisidia) (Acts 14:21). St. Paul and Barnabus went throughout Pisidia, Pamphylia, then to Perga, Attalia, and sailed back to Antioch in Syria (Acts 14:24-26) The first journey ends in Antioch, Syria, where St. Paul and Barnabus stay there a long time (Acts 14:28).

The dates for the events from 50-60 AD are found by counting backwards from the succession of Felix's reign as Procurator in Judea by Porcius Festus in 60 AD. Should one want to check

these dates for accuracy, one should start at 60 AD and work backwards. In about 50 AD, St. Paul and Barnabus go to the council in Jerusalem 14 years after St. Paul's conversion (Galatians 2:1-9 and Acts 15:2). Judas and Silas return to Antioch (Syria) with Barnabus and St. Paul where they continued some days (Acts 15:35-36), possibly in the winter of 50-51 AD.

The second journey begins, possibly in the spring of 51 AD. St. Paul takes Silas through Syria and Cilicia (now southeastern Turkey). They came to Derbe and Lystra, where they find Timothy, who goes with St. Paul and Silas throughout Phrygia and Galatia. But they are forbidden by the Spirit to go into Asia or Bithynia. They passed through Mysia to Troas, the island of Samothracia, and then to Neapolis in Macedonia (now northern Greece). At Philippi, God opens the heart of Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:14-34). Passing through Amphipolis and Appolonia, they came to Thessalonica, where St. Paul taught for 3 weeks. After teaching some in Berea, St. Paul departed ahead of Silas and Timothy, southward into Achaia (now southern Greece), to Athens, possibly for the winter of 51-52 AD (Acts 17:14-15). St. Paul then makes his first visit to Corinth where he stays a year and a half (Acts 18:5). This may have been from the spring of 52 AD to the fall of 53 AD. Here, St. Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, who had just come from Rome, from which Claudius Caesar had banished all Jews. Silas and Timothy rejoin St. Paul. First Thessalonians was written from here in about 52 AD (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, 6). We know that it was written from Corinth, and not from Athens, because Silas and Timothy had already rejoined St. Paul (1 Thessalonians 1:1 and Acts 18:5). Second Thessalonians was also written from Corinth. We know that it was soon after the first letter, because like the first letter, Silas was with St. Paul when second Thessalonians was written. After St. Paul leaves Corinth, there is no further mention of Silas traveling with St. Paul. St. Paul left by boat with Aquila and Priscilla to Cenchrea and then across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla stay there where they would later meet Apollos (Acts 18:19 and 26). St. Paul sails on to Caesarea and then goes up to Antioch in Syria, where the second journey ends. St. Paul stayed a while (Acts 18:23). This may have been the winter of 53-54 AD.

The third journey begins with Galatia (central region of Turkey) possibly in the spring of 54 AD and then Phrygia (Acts 18:23). Then St. Paul arrives at Ephesus where he stayed for 3 years (Acts 20:31) probably from the fall of 54 AD to the fall of 57 AD. St. Paul meets disciples of John the Baptist. He preached in the synagogue for 3 months (Acts 19:8). He disputed daily in the school of Tyrannus for 2 years (Acts 19:9-10), so that all that dwelt in Asia heard the

word. St. Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead into Macedonia, but St. Paul stayed in Asia for a season (Acts 19:22). St. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians near the end of this stay in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8,19), probably in 57 AD. It was not written with Timothy, who St. Paul had sent ahead into Macedonia (Acts 19:22). St. Paul foresaw his route of travel for the next four or so years in Acts 19:21-22. This agrees with his plans in 1 Corinthians 16:1, 3, 5, 8-10. Note how the “great door” opened to St. Paul and “many adversaries” in verse 9 compares with the events in the Ephesian amphitheater in Acts 19:23-41. In 1 Corinthians 3:6 St. Paul says “Apollos watered”. This refers to Apollos teaching in Corinth when St. Paul was at Ephesus, (Acts 19:1).

St. Paul had rejoined Timothy when Second Corinthians was written (2 Corinthians 1:1). St. Paul had come to Troas and continued to Macedonia (2 Corinthians 2:12-13 and 7:5), which seems to correspond to Acts 20:1. St. Paul also talks of a third visit to Corinth in 2 Corinthians 13:1 and 12:14. So Second Corinthians was most likely written in the fall of 57 AD from somewhere in Macedonia (northern Greece), possibly Philippi. In 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, St. Paul says 14 years ago I ascended into heaven. From 57, going back 14 years to 43 AD, this puts us back before St. Paul’s first journey, probably when he was at Antioch in Syria. After going through Macedonia (northern Greece), St. Paul came to Achaia (southern Greece) where he stayed 3 months (Acts 20:2-3), making third visit to Corinth. This is where he spent the winter of 57-58 AD (1 Corinthians 16:5-8). Romans was written at this time (Romans 15:23-26 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-3). Going back to Macedonia (Acts 20:1), they were at Philippi (northeastern Greece) in the spring of 58 AD in the “days of unleavened bread” (Acts 20:6).

Then they sailed to Troas, where a young man fell out of a window, and St. Paul raises him from the dead (Acts 20:7-12). Then St. Paul went to Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Trogylium, and Miletus (now in southwestern Turkey). From here, St. Paul addresses Ephesian elders whom he had called to meet him (Acts 20:17-38) in the spring of 58 AD (Acts 20:16). Sailing to Coos, Rhodes, Patara, and passing on the south side of Cyprus, they came to Tyre (which is now in Lebanon) where they stayed one week. Then they went south to Ptolemais and to Caesarea where they stayed many days (Acts 21:10). Then St. Paul goes to Jerusalem, where the third journey ends.

Here let us pause to look at the question: When was Galatians written? Galatians was written when St. Paul was not in prison and when neither Silas or Timothy were with him (Galatians 1:1). It was written after the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-32 and Galatians 2:1-

10) and after St. Paul's second visit to the region on his second journey in about 51 AD (Acts 16:1-6). Since they were "so soon removed" from grace (Galatians 1:6), it must have been before the prison years of 58-63 AD. So it could have been written when St. Paul was alone in Athens in the winter of 51-52 AD, which would make it St. Paul's first letter. But this is unlikely, since St. Paul was only in Athens a short time (Acts 17:15). Or it could have been written from Antioch between St. Paul's second and third journeys in the winter of 53-54 AD (Acts 18:22-23). But this is also unlikely because St. Paul would have probably mentioned that he would be coming to them soon on his third journey. It could have been written from Corinth in the winter of 57-58 where St. Paul wrote Romans. But most likely, it was written from Ephesus during St. Paul's 3 years there from 54-57. St. Paul had recently passed through the region of Galatia "... strengthening all the disciples ..." (Acts 18:23) and spent far more time in Ephesus where he could have gotten the unfavorable report about the churches in Galatia (Galatians 1:6) which was relatively nearby.

The third journey ends at Jerusalem in 58 AD. St. Paul is beaten by the Jews, preaches to them (Acts 22:1-21), and is brought before the Sanhedrin. Jesus Christ tells St. Paul that he will go to bear him witness in Rome. Many Jews vow to kill St. Paul (Acts 23:12). In 58 AD, St. Paul is taken to Governor Felix (reigned 53-60) at Caesarea, "many years" (Acts 24:10) after 53 AD and 2 years before the end of Felix's reign. St. Paul then spends 2 years in prison in Caesarea in Judea. In 60 AD, Governor Portius Festus's reign begins. St. Paul appeals to Caesar (Acts 25:11). Some days pass, then Herod Agrippa II hears St. Paul.

The voyage to Rome begins - St. Paul, still a prisoner, sails to Sidon with Luke and Aristarchus (Acts 27:1-2) on the way to Italy. They sailed to Myra (now southern Turkey) and on to Lasea, a large island of Crete, 50 miles southeast of Greece, where much time was spent (Acts 27:7-13). In the fall of 60 AD, they reached Melita, a small island south of Sicily. St. Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake but lived. St. Paul healed the father of Publius and others. St. Paul (still captive) spends the winter of 60-61 AD (Acts 28:11) on the island with his captors. In the spring, they sailed on to Syracuse (on the island of Sicily), then to Rhegium (on the southern tip of Italy), then to Puteoli (on the western coast of Italy).

The voyage to Rome ends - St. Paul spends 2 years in his own hired house (Acts 28:30) as a prisoner in Rome from 61-63 AD. During this time he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In about 62 AD, St. Paul wrote Ephesians before Timothy came to him (Ephesians 1:1) while in prison in Rome (Ephesians 3:1, 4:1, and 6:20). Also in about

62 AD, St. Paul wrote Philippians from prison (Philippians 1:7) in Rome (4:23) with Timothy (1:1). St. Paul wrote Colossians from prison (Colossians 4:18) in Rome in about 62 AD with Timothy (1:1) and fellow prisoner, Aristarchus (4:10). St. Paul, with Timothy, wrote Philemon from prison in 63 AD (Philemon 1:1).

St. Paul after the imprisonment in Rome - We know that St. Paul had further journeys after he was released from the prison in Rome in 63 AD. After his release, he wrote the epistles of Hebrews, Titus, First Timothy, and Second Timothy, not necessarily in that order, although Second Timothy was apparently his last. This took place after the events recorded in the book of Acts, so all of our information comes from various statements that St. Paul makes in his letters. In them are clues that St. Paul may have traveled to some or all of the following places: Colosse, Spain, Corinth, Miletus, Troas, Crete, Nicopolis, Philippi, Italy, Judea, Ephesus, and Macedonia. This allows for the possibilities that St. Paul traveled to more about as many diverse places as in all of his previous journeys combined. There are probably several possible ways that one could reconstruct the sequence of these travels which would not disagree with scripture. Since we do not know which one would be correct, we will just list what we know about the journeys. Thus, the references below are not intended to be chronological, although they all occurred after St. Paul's release from prison in 63 AD.

In Philemon 22, St. Paul foresaw his release and tells those in Colosse to prepare him lodging. We know that Philemon was written to the Colossians because of Archippus (Colossians 4:17 and Philemon 2), Onesimus (Colossians 4:9 and Philemon 9-10), and others (Colossians 4:10-14 and Philemon 23-25). Also, while in prison in Rome St. Paul wrote to those in Philippi that he may be coming to visit them (Philippians 1:26). In Romans 1:10, 15:24 and 28, and 16:1, 3, and 5 St. Paul speaks of aspirations of eventually going to Spain. Did he ever do this in his final years? The Bible does not say whether he did or not. We do however have the account of the century author, St. Clement of Rome, regarding St. Paul: "After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects" (The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Chapter 5). The "extreme limit of the west" may be Spain. We do not know for sure.

At some time after being released from the prison in Rome, St. Paul went to Corinth and Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20). He also went to Troas (2 Timothy 4:13), Crete (Titus 1:5), and Nicopolis for the winter (Titus 3:12). St. Paul leaving Titus in Crete must have been during

a period of liberty after St. Paul's imprisonment in Rome ended in 63 AD. St. Paul did not go there during the first 3 journeys. There is no mention of Titus or of any preaching on Crete in Acts 27:7-13, on the voyage to Rome. St. Paul says he will send Artemas or Tychicus to Titus. He tells Titus to come to Nicopolis where St. Paul has determined to winter (Titus 3:12). The letter to Titus was probably written around 64-65 AD. There are three cities called Nicopolis: (1) in Achaia (southern Greece), most likely the one to which St. Paul was referring, (2) 15 miles west of Jerusalem, and (3) in the area that is now Romania. The book of Hebrews was apparently written from Italy (Hebrews 13:24). Timothy had been released from prison (Hebrews 13:23) and was coming to St. Paul. St. Paul was apparently at liberty as well, since they planned to then go to visit the Hebrews. This could have been in Judea, as St. Paul says, "... for you had compassion of me in my bonds ..." (Hebrews 10:34). This must have been in reference to St. Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea from 58-60 AD. Hebrews was probably written around 64-65 AD.

St. Paul had told Timothy to stay and teach in Ephesus when St. Paul went to Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3). During the third journey, St. Paul had done the opposite, staying in Ephesus himself, and sending Timothy with Erastus to Macedonia (Acts 19:22). So First Timothy was written around 64-65 AD during a period of liberty after St. Paul's Roman imprisonment of 61-63 AD. St. Paul said he was hoping to come to Timothy in Ephesus shortly, but may have to tarry long (1 Timothy 3:14-15). Timothy was in Ephesus where he received both First Timothy and Second Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:16-18, 4:14, 4:19, Acts 19:33, and 1 Timothy 1:20). Second Timothy may have been written from prison (2 Timothy 1:8) with St. Paul ready to die (2 Timothy 4:6-8), possibly about 66 AD. Yet he asks Timothy to come to him before winter (2 Timothy 4:9 and 21). St. Paul was probably martyred sometime around 67 AD.

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: An Introduction

1. St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans covers every aspect of Christianity.
2. St. Paul wrote this Epistle around 56 A.D.
3. The main theme of the Epistle is God's righteousness revealed in Christ for our salvation.
4. There are also many subthemes in the epistle, such as
 - The natural mortality and actual sinfulness of all (1:18 - 3:20).
 - Salvation through Christ apart from the Mosaic Law (3:21 - 4:25): We live by faith in response to grace, rather than by the dead works of the Law.
 - New life in Christ: freedom from sin, death and the law through our sacramental identity with Christ, established in Holy Baptism (Chapters 5 - 7).
 - New life in the Holy Spirit: the power to be Godlike, established in the Sacrament of Chrismation (Chapter 8).
 - God's plan for Jews and Gentiles, and their reconciliation in Christ (Chapters 9 - 11).
 - Christian life in the Church and in the world (Chapters 12 - 16).

The Basis of God's Judgment

- St. Paul talks about the basis of God's judgment in Romans 2:2-16.
- Even as believing Christians, we must not take God's final judgment for granted.

Romans 2:2-16 describes God's righteous judgment, showing how we can prepare ourselves for it. God's judgment will be:

1. **According to truth (Romans 2:2-3):** Nothing is hidden from God. He sees everything and knows the truth about each of us. One of mankind's great self-deceptions is to say, "Who sees us" (Isaiah 29:15) and think there is no judgment.

2. **According to impenitent hearts (Romans 2:4-5):** An unrepentant or hard heart despises God's goodness, treasuring up the wrath of God at the judgment. A repentant heart, on the other hand is grateful for God's patience and abides in Christ, practicing a lifetime of repentance, which produces confidence before Him at the judgment (1 John 2:28).

3. **According to our deeds (Romans 2:6-15):** The "doing good" referred to in 2:7 is not trying to gain merit with God. Rather, it is the unity of intentions with actions, faith with works. Even unbelievers are rewarded for good works, apart from spiritual understanding (Romans 2:14-15). But we note the following:
 - (a) "Doing good" means seeking God's glory, not one's own glory; God's honor, not one's own honor; the eternal reward of immortality, not reward here and now. "Doing good" is seeking first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).
 - (b) Good intentions alone, or faith without works, will not save (Romans 2:13). Simply to hear and not do is religion without reality. Those with true faith, "the doers" of the truth, practice virtue from pure and repentant hearts (James 1:21-27).
 - (c) "By nature" (Romans 2:14) people are inspired by and cooperate with God's grace. Therefore, good deeds are natural to us, whereas evil deeds are contrary to nature. Because we all fail, we need God's mercy (Romans 3:9-19). The presence of God's law in our conscience (Romans 2:15) condemns anything we do which is contrary to true human nature. Therefore, even Gentiles - people not under the Law of Moses, those who do not know Christ - have an internal law from God, the natural law written in their hearts, according to which God will judge them. Melchizedek, Job, and the Ninevites are Old Testament examples of non-Jews who were judged to be righteous. Jews then, have two laws from God - The Law of Moses and conscience - and are accountable to Him for both (Romans 2:12).
 - (d) Those who are condemned choose to reject God. There is no automatic, fated condemnation: God's just judgment of us is based on our exercise of free will. Although sin impairs our powers, it does not destroy God's image in us or our free will.

4. **By Jesus Christ (Romans 2:16):** In the day of judgment we are not judged directly by God the Father, whom we cannot see, but by the incarnate Son whom we do see, Christ Jesus (Acts 17:31, John 3:16-21, 35, 36). Christ will judge on the basis of the light He

Himself has given to each of us (John 1:9) and our response to His light (John 3:16-21). “The secrets of men” are “the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

The Law

One key to understanding Romans is to properly distinguish between the several ways St. Paul uses the word “law” in his epistle.

1. **The Mosaic Law (Romans 2:12-13)** was written by God on tablets of stone (2 Corinthians 3:3, 7) and given to the Jews through Moses (The 10 Commandments). This Law reveals God’s righteousness to prepare men for the Messiah and for God’s grace. When St. Paul speaks of “the law” he is most often referring to the Mosaic law.

The law is good but it cannot be kept. It is revelation from God, but it is not an end in itself. The purpose of the Mosaic Law is to

- (a) Reveal a difference between good and evil.
- (b) Make the world accountable to God (Romans 3:19).
- (c) Manifest sin (Romans 3:20).
- (d) Be a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

Though it is not opposed to grace, the Law cannot save us or make us righteous.

2. **The natural law (Romans 2:14, 15)** has been “written” by God in the heart of every human who has ever lived. This is the voice of conscience. It is a reliable guide to God’s righteousness for those who are pure in heart; but it can be dulled or obscured completely by habitual sin.
3. **The law of works (Romans 3:27)** is our attempt to establish righteousness before God on the basis of keeping the natural law and/or the Mosaic Law. This law reveals human weakness and sin.
4. **The law of faith (Romans 3:27)** is the synergy, the cooperation, of our faithfulness with God’s. It alone is the means by which we attain the righteousness of God. God has been revealing His righteousness by this law little by little since the Creation, but now has

revealed it fully in Christ. As both the natural and Mosaic Law bear witness to the law of faith, so those who become righteous by grace through faith fulfill in Christ both the natural and the Mosaic Law.

5. **The law of sin (Romans 7:25, 8:2)** is the power of the sinful passions in our mortal humanity. Passions - desires for such things as food, sex, praise, possessions - are natural; their sinful over-indulgence is not. Carnal (physical) passions are especially strong. They aid the unnatural domination of the body over the soul. Sometimes carnal passions overpower the will. The law of sin coupled with the Mosaic Law breeds intense warfare between sin and righteousness. Only God's grace can bring victory for righteousness.
6. **The law of the Spirit (Romans 8:20)** is also called "the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2) and "the law of liberty" (James 1:25, 2:12). It is the power and life of the Holy Spirit active in those who by faith in Christ live out their baptism and chrismation to the fullest possible degree. This makes the righteousness of God gained by faith real in one's life. Coupled with the law of faith, the law of the Spirit defeats the law of sin and fulfills the natural and Mosaic law. It orients one's innermost being toward God and restores the power of the spirit over the flesh, the soul over the body.

Justification by Faith

For most of Church history, salvation was seen as comprehending all of life: Christians believed in Christ, were baptized, and were nurtured in their salvation in the Church. Key doctrines of the faith centered around the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son of God, and the atonement.

In Western Europe during the sixteenth century, however, and even before, justifiable concern arose among the Reformers over a prevailing understanding that salvation depended on human works of merit (James 2:17, 20), and not upon the grace and mercy of God. Many involved with the Reformation experienced a rediscovery of Romans 1:17, “The just shall live by faith” and Romans Chapter 5. Their slogan of salvation became: justification by *faith alone*.

This Reformation debate in the West was late-breaking news for the Orthodox East: why this new polarization of faith and works? It had been settled since the apostolic era that salvation was granted by the mercy of God to righteous men and women. Those baptized into Christ were called to believe in Him and do good works. A discussion of faith *versus* works was unprecedented in Orthodox thought.

The Orthodox understanding of justification differs from the Protestant in several ways:

1. **Justification and the New Covenant** - When Orthodox Christians approach the doctrine of salvation, the discussion centers around the New Covenant. Justification (being or becoming righteous) by faith in God is part of being brought into a covenant relationship with Him. Whereas Israel was under the Old Covenant, wherein salvation came through faith as revealed in the law, the Church is under the New Covenant. Salvation comes through faith in Christ who fulfills the law, and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, leading us to the knowledge of God the Father. Whereas some Christians focus on justification as a legal acquittal before God, Orthodox believers see justification by faith as a covenant relationship with Him, centered on union with Christ (Romans 6:1-6).
2. **Justification and God’s Mercy** - Orthodoxy emphasizes it is God’s mercy - not our faith - which saves us. “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God

through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2). It is God who initiates or makes the New Covenant with us.

3. **Justification by Faith is Dynamic, Not Static** - For Orthodox Christians, faith is living, dynamic, continuous - never static or merely point-in-time. Faith is not something a Christian exercises only at one critical moment, expecting it to cover all the rest of his life. True faith is not just a decision, it’s a way of life.

This is why the modern evangelical Protestant question, “Are you saved?” gives pause to an Orthodox believer. As the subject of salvation is addressed in Scripture, the Orthodox Christian would see it in at least three aspects: (a) I have been saved, being joined to Christ in baptism; (b) I am being saved, growing in Christ through the sacramental life of the Church; and (c) I will be saved, by the mercy of God at the Last Judgment.

A final difficulty for Orthodox Christians is the word *alone*. Justification by faith, though not the major New Testament doctrine for Orthodox as it is for Protestants, poses no problem. But justification by faith *alone* brings up an objection. It contradicts Scripture which says, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). We are “justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28), but nowhere does the Bible say we are justified by faith “alone”. On the contrary, “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17).

As Christians we are no longer under the demands of the Old Testament law (Romans 3:20), for Christ has fulfilled the law (Galatians 2:21; 3:5, 24). By God’s mercy, we are brought into a New Covenant relationship with Him. We who believe are granted entrance into His Kingdom by His grace. Through His mercy we are justified by faith and empowered by God for good works or deeds of righteousness which bring glory to Him.

Bible Study for the Book of Joshua

Chapters 1 - 3

1. What was Rahab's great act of faith that led St. Paul to write in Hebrews 11:31, "By faith Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies in peace".

Rahab, who was a harlot, had great faith in God because of the miracles He did for Moses, such as the parting of the Red Sea (Joshua 2:9-11). She confesses that God is the God of heaven and earth, something the other inhabitants of Jericho would not do, despite the fear they had of the Israelites and the miracles God did for Israel. Thus, her great act of faith was hiding the spies and risking her life in protecting them, for she had complete faith that God would cause the Israelites to triumph over Jericho (and this is shown when she asks for the spies to spare her and her family (Joshua 2:12-13).

Notice how similar Rahab is to the thief who was crucified to the right of our Lord Jesus. Both had sinful professions and lived sinful lives. Both witnessed the power of God and confessed their belief that God is the Lord of all (for the thief's confession, see Luke 23:40-41). And, both asked to be spared and remembered by the Lord out of their great faith (compare Joshua 2:12-13 to Luke 23:42).

Finally, note that Jesus descended from the harlot Rahab (Matthew 1:5). Normally in the Jewish tradition, the genealogy of a great man never mentioned the women of his lineage. So why would Matthew mention Rahab and three other women in Jesus's genealogy? And why were the four women mentioned all of bad reputation or known as having a colorful reputation? Notice also that Jesus descended from kings (David, Solomon) and sinners (Rahab, King David). The Jews took their genealogy very seriously since it defined their status in life. Jesus is born of the greatest kings and even sinners, which at once shows His glory and humility. But also notice how Jesus turned the importance of genealogy on its head; indeed, it no longer was important where one descended from, but rather what one believed and did, as we will see in the Gospels.

Chapters 4 - 10

1. What do the twelve stones symbolize (both in the New and Old Testaments)? (Joshua 4)
2. How does the Lord appear to Joshua, and why does He appear to him in this way? (Joshua 5)
3. What is the significance of the miracles that God performs for Joshua (drying up the Jordan, the fall of Jericho, the sun stands still)? (Joshua 3, 6, 10)

That all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever (Joshua 4:24).

1. What do the miracle of the drying up of the Jordan and the twelve stones symbolize? (Joshua 4)

The drying up of Jordan is commemorated and mentioned in prayers of certain Divine Liturgies, including the Divine Liturgy of our Lord's Baptism and the Feast of the Apostles (why?). We should compare the difference between the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan.

The crossing of the Red Sea led to travel in the wilderness and was followed by manna from heaven. This is symbolic of the beginning of a journey, much like baptism. The crossing of the Jordan ended the travel in the wilderness and the manna coming from heaven (since the Israelites were filled with the produce of the land). For the Israelites, there was no more need for water, food, or faith in the manna. This is symbolic of the end of life, or death.

Why did the manna from heaven end? Manna was a sign of corruption of the body (John 6), as our Lord Jesus said that the food which is labored for cannot grant eternal life. Manna was food for the body. Once Israel crossed the Jordan, and they entered the promised land, which was abundant with good things, there was no longer need to physically labor for food. Thus, the crossing of the Jordan signals the end to the physical struggle and the beginning of what was to be the golden time in the promised land (if Israel could only keep its covenant with God).

Twelve stones are taken (one for each tribe), to commemorate the miracle of the crossing of the Jordan. When we die, we will take our worship with us (much like they take stones

with them after crossing the river). We know from Revelation 6:9 and 8:3 that there is a heavenly altar where we will worship in heaven. Also, the twelve stones can be seen as symbolizing the Twelve Disciples who stood as a testament and a reminder of the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus, after He completed His mission on earth (analogous to the time in the wilderness and the struggle of the Israelites).

2. How does the Lord appear to Joshua, and why does He appear to him in this way? (Joshua 5)

The Lord sent Archangel Michael to appear to Joshua as Commander of the Lord's Army, because he was the archangel appointed to watch over Israel and because this was a war led by the priests of Israel.

From scripture, we know that every archangel was appointed to guard over a nation, but Israel was God's special nation and Archangel Michael, the chief of the army of the heavenly hosts, was the archangel who stood watch over Israel. In Daniel 10:11, the Archangel Gabriel tells Daniel that Archangel Michael helped Gabriel conquer the devil and cast him out of heaven; in Daniel 12:1, Gabriel indicates that Michael is the archangel who watches over Israel.

From the tradition of the church, in the Synaxarium on the 12th day of Hatoor, we commemorate Archangel Michael as the angel that Joshua saw in glory (Joshua 5). So we know from tradition and from Scripture that the Commander of the Lord's Army was indeed Archangel Michael.

Jude 1:9 makes reference to a story only mentioned in tradition, not in Scripture: Archangel Michael had a fight with Satan over the body of Moses. Michael had a mission from God to hide Moses's body, and the devil wanted to show it to the people so that they would worship it. Michael said, "May the Lord rebuke you", showing that he uses the power of God and not any power of his own. In the same way, Archangel Michael is advising Joshua as a spiritual general talking to a human general. Just as Archangel Michael used the power of God to conquer the devil, so must Joshua use the power of God if he wants to defeat Jericho.

3. What is the significance of the miracles that God performs for Joshua and the Israelites (drying up the Jordan, the fall of Jericho, the sun stands still)? (Joshua 3, 6, 10)

These miracles are all related to the warfare that God commands and Israel uses to recap-

ture the promised land. Notice that the priests are commanded to lead this warfare, and the priests are the vehicle through which God performs these miracles (drying up of the Jordan (Joshua 3:13); fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:4-5)). The priests lead this warfare because God is establishing a royal priesthood as the rulers of the promised land. This royal line of priests later will become an earthly line of kings, but our Lord Jesus comes to restore His kingdom on earth (the Church) and opens the gates to the heavenly kingdom through His death and resurrection.

In the story of the fall of Jericho (Joshua 6), we see that through warfare and by God's help, Israel was able to make a stronghold fall. St. Paul recalls the story of Jericho when he alludes to spiritual warfare and weapons that cast down arguments and every high thing bringing every thought into captivity (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Spiritual warfare lays a siege around high things (strongholds and fortresses in our life, such as sin and temptation). It is only through God and spiritual warfare that we are able to destroy the strongholds which keep us chained in sin.

During the Divine Liturgy of the Catechumens, the priest and the deacon take the gospel and the censer and go around the altar seven times during the readings: 3 turns around the altar for the Pauline, 3 turns around the altar for the reading of Acts, and once for the Gospel. They re-enact the story of Jericho using spiritual warfare to turn around any doubts and any fears one may have, and to make the fortresses of fear, doubt, sin, and temptation fall, like the walls of Jericho fell. They always encircle the altar because in our church the altar represents the Ark of the Covenant of the old church. The altar is the most holy sanctuary in our church, so the priest and deacon turn around it to turn the minds of the people around, and the priest and deacon leave the altar with the incense (prayers of saints) and most importantly, the Word of God (the Gospel, the only spiritual weapon we have Ephesians 6:17).

In Ephesians 6, St. Paul discusses spiritual weapons. He describes the clothing of high priests, not that of a typical Roman soldier. Recall from Exodus 28:15, 31-43 how priests are clothed; St. Paul discusses the same clothing and weaponry here. Again, this relates to the theme of the book of Joshua, and especially the miracles performed. The priests are the army of God, and they are the ones who lead every battle. Our church adopts the same idea; our warfare is spiritual (not physical), in that we are trying to capture hearts and minds into the captivity of Christ with the power of God (the Gospel); the clergy lead this spiritual warfare.

Chapters 11-17

1. Once the Israelites sanctified themselves, and conquered the land by the grace of God and the leadership of the priests, the next step was to divide the land. How does this relate to and resemble our daily lives? (Joshua 13-17)
 2. How does the line of Canaan continue until the time of our Lord Jesus (see Matthew 8:28; Matthew 15:22), even though God commanded Moses not to allow a single Canaanite to remain in the land? (Joshua 9:24-27; Joshua 11:19-23)
 3. Bonus question: How does the line of Rahab continue despite the fall of Jericho, and what is the genealogy of Rahab's line?
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1. Once the Israelites sanctified themselves, and conquered the land by the grace of God and the leadership of the priests, the next step was to divide the land. How does this relate to our daily lives? (Joshua 13-17)

Once the Israelites sanctified themselves and conquered vast portions of the promised land, Joshua divided the land so that each tribe would be responsible for a portion of the land to build cities, produce food, etc. This process is analogous to our daily lives. Once we cleanse our bodies from sin through repentance and confession, we must care for the inheritance that God has given us preserving the sanctity of our souls, raising children, building houses (i.e., building houses and temples of God by serving others). God has given us an inheritance, a gift. You are God's field, you are God's building; do you not know that you are the temple of God? (1 Corinthians 6:9,16).

God has settled us down in our lives, and so we cannot just sit around and wait for something to happen. We must actually do something with our inheritance, just as the Israelites had to divide the promised land and actively do something with their portions. Recall the parable of the talents, and how displeased God was with the servant who did nothing with the gift given to him (Matthew 25:24-27). Also, the proper time to care for God's inheritance by serving others comes when we have conquered our bodies; it is not wise to attempt to serve others while we are still struggling to conquer our bodies (in trying to overcome sins, especially with things like addiction, adultery, etc.). Note that the Levites did not receive inheritance in the land (Joshua 13:14). The Levites also did not have farmland or animals. This is because God is their inheritance, as they are

consecrated to serve God's altar. Likewise, the priests of the New Testament and the new church should not have any other occupation because they should be dedicated spiritually and totally serving God's house. Also, just as the Levites did not have their own animals and farmland so that they could totally concentrate on service, so, too, priests should not be dependent on material possessions. The promised land resembles our lives on earth when we embark on a spiritual journey with our Lord. We are called to a certain state of grace; this state of grace is a state of joy, peace, and extreme spiritual fulfillment. We no longer feel needy, and this state of grace fills the deep void that is usually occupied by fear, sin, and weakness. God gave Joshua victory over the promised land through physical warfare, but in the case of our lives, God gives us victory by killing our sinful passions. Inside ourselves, we conquer fear, sin, and weakness and gradually take over our lives by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Then we begin to experience the state of grace that is nicely described by the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22. We begin experiencing victory, joy, love, peace, kindness, longsuffering, and all goodly things.

This spiritual victory happens only in God's time; we cannot really force it by our own timing. Thus, we must wait for our Lord to tell us how and when to proceed, and we are best able to hear God's direction in our lives through meditation, prayer, reading, fasting, confession, among other things. We should not be afraid of how big the sin is that we must conquer (much like God told Joshua not to be afraid of the giants in the promised land). We should not hold on to or hide our sins, in the way that Achan hid his sin (Joshua 7:19-21). If we attempt to keep something for ourselves in a hidden place (like a sin that we are not willing to give up), but at the same time we ask God to take over our lives, we will be crushed because we are not honest with God or with ourselves. Recall that our Lord Jesus warned us that we cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

2. How does the line of Canaan continue until the time of our Lord Jesus (see Matthew 8:28; Matthew 15:22), even though God commanded Moses not to allow a single Canaanite to remain in the land? (Joshua 9:24-27; Joshua 11:19-23)

Our Lord Jesus encounters descendants of Canaan at least twice in the Gospels (to recall the line of Canaan, see Genesis 10:15-17). In the story of curing the two demon-possessed men, Jesus was in land of Gergesenes (Matthew 8:28). Our Lord Jesus also healed the daughter of a Canaanite woman. How could this be, when Moses was told not to keep a single Canaanite in the land? These Canaanites that continue until at least the time

of the Gospels descended from the Gibeonites (descendants of Canaan). Because of their covenant with the Israelites (see Joshua 9), they were not destroyed, but rather were spared and allowed to live among the Israelites as water carriers and wood cutters (Joshua 9:26-27). Notice that, although the Canaanites were despised by the Jews, our Lord Jesus bridged this gap and healed Canaanites, revealing the extent of His salvation as a light to all people, even those who had once been despised and rejected and condemned to death.

3. Bonus question: How does the line of Rahab continue despite the fall of Jericho, and what is the genealogy of Rahab's line?

Rahab's house was spared when Jericho fell because Rahab hid the spies that were sent to Jericho (Joshua 6:17), and her great act of faith spared her household (Hebrews 11:31). From Matthew 1:5-6, we know that Rahab married an Israelite named Salmon. Together, they had a son named Boaz, who married Ruth. Ruth and Boaz had Jesse, who was the father of King David (See also Ruth 4:20-22).

Chapters 18 - 24

1. Why do Moses and Joshua predict that Israel will break the covenant? (Hint: See Deuteronomy 10:12-16; and 30:1; and 31:25-29; Joshua 23:14-16; and 24:22)
2. Our Lord gave the Israelites the promised land, but it had to be won through physical warfare. Our Lord gave us freely our promised land, that is, our salvation, without this physical warfare. Why this difference?

Joshua declares he and his house will worship the Lord, and the Israelites, too, swear they will worship God. However, Joshua tells them they cannot. This is so because God is a jealous God, and He will not stand for them to worship their false idols. (Joshua 24:19). While in the wilderness, they worshiped Moloch and Remphan (Acts 7:43). And Joshua warns them that if they forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do harm (Joshua 24:20). This is why Joshua tells the people that they bear witness against themselves (Joshua 24:22). Joshua, like Moses, renewed the Covenant with God, but he knew that Israel would break the covenant. In Deuteronomy 30:1; 31:25-29, Moses declares that when (and not if) the times comes, the people will choose curses over blessing.

In Deuteronomy 10:12-16, Moses tells the people that they need to circumcise their hearts because the original circumcision was not working for the Israelites, as they were stiff-

necked. St. Paul responds to this by saying in Colossians 2:11-12 that the only way to circumcise the heart so that people can love God and follow Him completely is through baptism and faith. Joshua tells the people that they cannot follow the Lord completely because they will not be able to match His requirement, which is utter holiness. They cannot be lacking in any one point, because otherwise they will die (Joshua 24:19-20). Moses added that he knows why the people could not meet God's requirements: they did not circumcise their hearts, and they cannot because they do not want to follow God completely and give up their other desires (Deuteronomy 31:29). Since the people did not ask for it, God did not give them a circumcised heart. Spiritually for us, it is the same idea: we think we can conquer sin and live spiritually, but we are not willing to struggle completely against sin. The only thing we can offer to God is a request, as David did in Psalm 51 when he said, "create in me a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me." We cannot achieve a pure heart on our own, so we must ask God for it. And yet, before we even ask for it, God gives us the means to the circumcision of the heart through baptism.

The main point is this. Practically speaking, we cannot abstain from sin under our own power. What we actually do is ask God to give us power over sin; we ask God to purify us and strengthen us by the Holy Spirit. This is an important point to realize, because many times we think we can overcome sin without the need to turn to God, without the need to pray, fast, confess and seek advice from our spiritual father, and yet when we do not do these things, we find ourselves stumbling in the same sin again and again. We cannot purify ourselves; we can only ask God to do it for us, and we struggle along the way to achieve it.

3. Our Lord gave the Israelites the promised land, but it had to be won through physical warfare. Our Lord gave us freely our promised land, that is, our salvation, without this physical warfare. Why this difference?

This question enables us a review what we learned about the Israelites in the books of Exodus through Joshua. God made a promise to the descendants of Abraham in Genesis 17:8 that they would inherit a promised land. And yet we see the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites, having to fight for their land by physical warfare after they were led from captivity. At the same time (and as we will see in the book of Judges), the Israelites go through many cycles of breaking the covenant and renewing the covenant (see above).

Essentially, the Israelites lacked faith, even after the many miracles and deliverances God performed for them. Recall that after being saved from captivity in Egypt, the Israelites began to murmur against God and Moses because of the strictness of the law, because they were tired of eating manna, and because of many other things. And still Moses, and later Joshua, interceded on their behalf and renewed the covenant with God. But even by the end of Joshua (Joshua 24), we find that the Israelites still sinned against God, despite their many warnings and despite Joshua telling them that they were witnesses against themselves. Their essential lack of faith, as demonstrated by the many times they turned away from God, is the reason they had to physically fight for the promised land. Physical warfare served many purposes for them, including making them realize how dependent they were on God for their success. Indeed, when one of them (Achan) committed a grave sin (Joshua 7), they did not succeed in their battles, and it was only when they cast out Achan that they were able to again succeed in physical warfare for the promised land. (For a list of those who were faithful to God during the times of the Old Testament, see Hebrews, Chapter 11.)

How is our gift of salvation different from the gift of the promised land? First of all, it was given freely to us when our Lord Jesus died on the Cross, of His own will. Second, in order to accept this gift of salvation, we must have faith in God and love Him. If you think about it, it is a prerequisite for us to believe that our Lord saved us in order for us to accept this gift of salvation. As St. Paul says, “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:24-25). Likewise, it is absolutely essential for us to love God to keep the gift of salvation in our lives.

The main lesson here is this. Sin is a sign that we have ceased abiding in God’s love. When we turn away from God and from loving Him, we find ourselves stumbling. St. Paul acknowledges that we must abide in love, faith and hope, and that the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Indeed, these are the cornerstones of our lives as Christians; our Lord Himself gave us one of the greatest commandments of all: “love the Lord your God with all you heart, soul, strength, and mind” (Matthew 22:37). Like the Israelites, we often cease abiding in God’s love, and stumble as a result. Keep this in mind as we begin the book of Judges.

Bible Study for the Book of Judges

Chapters 1 - 3

1) What do the cycles (turning away from God and then being saved by a judge) have in common so far, and how do these cycles resemble patterns we have seen during the time of Moses and Joshua? [Judges 3, 4, 6]

After Joshua dies, it is not clear who the next leader of Israel is, but Judges 1 reveals that there are still large portions of the promised land to be conquered. When Joshua dies, the children of Israel immediately fell into sin and began worshiping the Baals and Ashtoreths, which were Canaanite goddesses. (Judges 2:13; 3:7). The repeating cycle (of turning to the Lord when the judge comes and then turning away from the Lord after deliverance) shows us that, in order to lose the covenant with God, the children of Israel merely had to forget the covenant and forget God, they did not even have to reject the covenant. There are some common threads between the cycles in Judges and what we have studied so far in Exodus, Numbers and Joshua. First, we know that the judges, who are the deliverers of each cycle, are prophets and priests of God. In the same way, we know that the children of Israel could only be led from captivity by priests (Moses and Aaron). Also, recall the miracles in Joshua, such as the crossing of the Jordan, the fall of the city of Jericho, and all the successful battles waged in the promised land; they were all led by priests, and God makes it clear that it is only by the priests that the children of Israel will conquer the promised land. (Joshua 3:8; 6:4). Also, there are seven cycles in the book of Judges (7 judges), and we know that the number 7 is a special and holy number. Recall that the fall of Jericho was led by 7 priests, 7 times around the city. Just like the children of Israel were led by priests in successful battles during the time of Joshua, so too we learn in Judges that the children of Israel had to be rescued and delivered by a judge sent from God. In the cycles we have studied so far, the children of Israel turn away from God and worship the false gods of the inhabitants of the land, in the way that Moses and Joshua predicted they would (Deuteronomy 31:16; Joshua 24:19-20). When they turn away from God, they fall into captivity under a foreign people (Mesopotamians, Moabites, Canaanites, Midianites). A judge is sent from God to deliver the children of Israel (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon), and the people are redeemed. Notice that as soon as each judge dies, the children of Israel again begin to worship false gods they continually lose their faith and forget the covenant. With the

first few cycles, the children of Israel spend a longer time in captivity and a shorter time in freedom as time progresses. At the beginning of Judges, the judge who delivered Israel gave them both physical and spiritual deliverance; however, by the end of Judges, the deliverance was just physical deliverance from being enslaved in captivity.

Lesson: Do we have a judge in our lives sent from God to redeem us each time we turn away from God and cease to abide in His love? Our Lord Himself will be our Judge in the day of His Second Coming, but our Lord did not leave us alone. He sent us a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, which abides in us and serves as a voice of conscience when we turn away from God. Do we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and love God? Or do we ignore the voice of the Holy Spirit, or forget God after the voice subsides, and fall into repetitive cycles? Even when the children of Israel continually forgot the covenant with God, we find ourselves asking, How could they do such a thing? Why would God keep forgiving them and sending judges to deliver them? In Judges 3:18, we see how merciful our Lord is, for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning. Our Lord is always there to receive us when we repent and return to loving Him; His love and mercy and forgiveness are unceasing. It is this great love of our Lord that gives us hope and encourages us to struggle against the world, so that we can truly and completely love Him and abide in His love.

Chapters 4 - 7

1) How did God help Gideon to lead the Israelites and conquer the Midianites? [Judges 7]

God blessed Gideon, a simple farmer who himself proclaimed his own weakness in Judges 6:15. Yet God blessed him with the gift of revelation and special understanding, so that he could lead Israel against the Midianites. In Hebrews 11:32, St Paul testifies to Gideon's great faith. How did God bless Gideon to save the children of Israel? God gave him courage to destroy the altar of Baal in the face of the possibility of being killed by the Israelites who worshiped Baal. Gideon also built a new altar to the Lord next to the place of Baal's altar, in order to redirect the children of Israel to their true God. (Judges 6:30). God allowed Israel to be saved by Gideon and three hundred men only, so that the Israelites would realize that their deliverance did not come from their own strength, but from God (Judges 7:2,7). In the same way, we cannot triumph over sin by our own power; we can only defeat sin in our lives by turning to God and letting His grace and love and power work in our lives.

Chapters 8-14

1) What did St. Paul mean in Hebrews 11:32-34, when he recounted the faith of the Judges? What was the faith that each of those Judges present by their actions and stories?

In Hebrews 11:32-34, St. Paul testifies about the faith of the judges who were chosen by God to lead Israel out of its captivity (both physical captivity when they were subdued by kingdoms, and spiritual captivity when they worshiped false idols). St. Paul mentions a few of the judges who we have read about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah. Last week, we discussed the great faith and actions of Gideon. In Judges 4, Barak was called by the prophetess Deborah to lead the children of Israel in war against Sisera, the commander of the army of King Jabin of Canaan. By his faith in the power of the Lord, Barak led his ten thousand men against a strong army and routed and killed the enemies. He did this, even knowing that he would not receive the glory of battle in killing the enemy commander, for Deborah prophesied that Sisera would die at the hands of a woman (Judges 4:9). Nonetheless, Barak led the battle and triumphed by his faith that God would save. In Judges 5, Deborah and Barak proclaim the greatness of the Lord: "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength" (Judges 5:31). In Judges 11, we learn that Jephthah was a great warrior. He was an outcast from his father's house and his tribe because he was the son of Gilead and a harlot. Jephthah made his living by raiding villages with men of bad reputation. When the Ammonites held Israel in captivity, the elders then turned to Jephthah for his help because he was a mighty warrior. Jephthah tried to reconcile with the king of Ammon, who believed that Israel had wrongfully taken the Ammonite's land when Israel crossed the Jabbok as they came out of Egypt (Numbers 21:23-25). The king of Ammon wanted these lands restored, but Jephthah tried to explain to the king that God gave these lands to Israel through battle. (Judges 11:19-27). When the king of Ammon refused to listen to Jephthah, Jephthah vowed to the Lord that if he succeeded in battle against Ammon, he would sacrifice, as a burnt offering to the Lord, the first thing that met him when he returned home. God granted Jephthah victory in battle, and so great was Jephthah's love to the Lord that he sacrificed his daughter his only child - as a burnt offering, because she was the first thing to greet him when he returned from battle. (Judges 11:38). For the discussion of Samson, please see question 3 below.

2) How did Abimelech come to power, what was his great sin, and how did he fall from power? (Judges 9)

Abimelech was the son of Gideon, and he had seventy brothers. His great sin was slaughtering all but one of his brothers. He proclaimed himself a king in Israel, though he was not the legitimate king of Israel because he did not come to power by God. One of his brothers Jotham escaped the terrible slaughter. In Judges 9:20, Jotham curses Abimelech and the men of Shechem for their wickedness. However, God repaid Abimelech for his evil. In Judges 9:22-32, the men of Shechem the same men who had supported him when he killed his 70 brothers - question the legitimacy of Abimelech's reign and begin to murmur against him; they plot to overthrow his rule. The men of Shechem and Abimelech wage battle. Abimelech traps Shechem in a fortress and sets it on fire, killing all those who waged battle against him. However, Abimelech himself died a dishonorable death when a woman dropped a millstone on his head. Thus, God avenged the evil of Abimelech and the men of Shechem: And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal (Judges 9:56).

3) What was the significance of Sampson taking a Nazarite vow from birth? (Judges 13, foreshadowing the story of Sampson and Delilah Judges 16)

Recall in Numbers 6, God tells Moses that there is one way that a person not from the tribe of Levi can consecrate himself to the Lord. He or she must take the Nazarite vow to separate themselves to the Lord (Numbers 6:2). They cannot drink any wine or product from the vine; they cannot cut their hair; they cannot go near a dead body because it is unclean. Why did God impose these specific requirements for the Nazarite vow? One who takes the Nazarite vow separates himself to the Lord, and all the days of his separation he shall be holy to the LORD (Numbers 6:8). The idea of separating oneself to God is physical as well as spiritual; though one has to live in the world, he does not have to be a part of the world. Thus, during the years in the wilderness, water was scarce but wine was plentiful. Men usually cut their hair or were clean-shaven. People would bury their dead relatives and would normally touch the body of the dead person in doing so. The requirements for the Nazarite vow show us that the person who took the vow would appear separated from the rest of society he would appear physically and socially different to other people because he could not drink wine while everyone else did; he could not cut his hair, although it was custom to do so; he could not touch or bury his dead relatives or even go near a dead body, and so he could not partake in funeral rites. Before Samson was born, the Angel of the Lord told his parents that Samson would be a Nazarite from the time he was in his mother's womb, and that he would be a judge to deliver Israel from the

Philistines. (Can you see why, in Judges 16, Samson tells Delilah that his great strength comes from the fact that no razor has touched his hair? See question 1 below).

Lesson: If we want to serve God, we too can separate ourselves unto Him, just as Samson did. In doing so, we will face criticism from the world because we will not appear to be the same as them. Our Lord said, “Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19). This is a daily obstacle that we will face, for we live in the world, but we are not of the world instead, we are citizens of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19; Philippians 3:20). Our Lord Jesus promised us great blessings for separating ourselves unto Him, for we will be blessed when the world reviles us and persecutes us for abiding in His love (Matthew 5:11-12).

Chapters 15-21

1) What were Samson’s acts as judge of Israel, how did he lose his strength, and how did he redeem himself? (Judges 15-16)

2) How do the stories in the last chapters of Joshua illustrate the corruption of the Levites specifically and of the Israelites generally? (Judges 17-19)

1) Samson almost single-handedly defeats the Philistines, a very powerful nation. We learn that the Spirit of God was mightily upon him (Judges 15:14), and he had great strength. After defeating the Philistines, he judges Israel for 20 years. In Judges 16, Samson tells Delilah that his strength comes from his hair. Earlier, we discussed the Nazarite vow: Samson’s parents had taken a Nazarite vow for him before birth and he had separated himself unto God. He was not allowed to cut his hair, touch dead bodies or drink wine or partake of any products of the vine. The idea of separating himself unto God implies that he was separated from society by his physical appearance and his social characteristics, as well as by his spiritual devotion to God. So, when Samson says that his strength comes from his hair, it means that his strength comes from the divine power of God through his separation unto God by taking the Nazarite vow. Here, we see a theme developing: Moses could only lead the Israelites out of Egypt by God’s guidance and power; the Israelites were only able to conquer Jericho and the promised land by the power of God through the priests; then the children of Israel are delivered by judges who are men of God, and when they cease to abide in God’s love, they fall into bondage and sin. Likewise, when Delilah cuts Samson’s hair, he loses his strength because he is no longer being guided by God’s power since the Lord had departed from Him (Judges 16:20). And yet notice

that it is not just the literal cutting of his hair that is the reason for Samson losing his power. It is also underlined by the fact that Samson was defiling himself by having affair with Delilah and was no longer spiritually separated unto God. He let his lust conquer him, which eventually led to him betraying his secret to Delilah and the cutting of his hair. So, it is not enough to physically separate oneself unto God: the separation must be complete physical, spiritual, emotional. Our Lord thus commanded us: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. After Samson loses his strength, his eyes are gouged and he is taken as a slave. But his hair begins to grow back (Judges 16:22), and he again separates himself unto God. He prays to God to restore his power one last time and commits a sacrificial act in destroying the temple by pushing the two pillars supporting the walls. He sacrifices his life to kill the Philistines, but he delivers his people by doing so.

Lesson: The story of Samson gives us great hope, because he is like most of us he struggles with sin, with temptation, with lust, and yet he tries to separate himself unto God. When God's power leaves us, it is always because of our own sin, because we have turned away from God and have ceased abiding in His love. And yet, the story of Samson shows us that all we have to do is turn back to God, give up our worldly desires, and repent, and the Spirit of God dwells within us again. The Holy Spirit which dwells within us is like a candle when our hearts and minds are filled with thoughts of the world, with lust, with envy or anger, etc., the flame of the candle is smothered and grows lower because it does not have enough oxygen to burn brightly. But, when we clear our hearts and minds of those things, we let the flame of the candle burn brightly because it is not smothered by anything else. The flame grows and consumes us, just as our heavenly Father's love consumes us and fills us in a way that no earthly thing could ever satisfy us.

2) How do the stories in the last chapters of Joshua illustrate the corruption of the Levites specifically and of the Israelites generally? (Judges 17-19)

Interestingly, the last few chapters of Judges seem to be additional stories added on to the end of the book, not talking about judges of Israel, but showing Israel's corruption. In Judges 17, we learn of a man named Micah who employs a Levite priest to serve as a priest-for-hire in his household, which worships an idol and not Yahweh (Judges 17:13). In Judges 18, the tribe of Dan asks this same Levite priest to be their priest. The priest takes Micah's idols and carved image with him when he serves the Danites; now we see that a Levite priest himself is spreading idolatry to the children of Israel. In Judges 19, a Levite takes a concubine for himself.

When the concubine is taken from the household and raped by a group of men, she returns to the Levite's house and collapses at his door. The Levite performs a gruesome act. He cuts her body to pieces, to the point that even the children of Israel, as corrupt as they have become, are shocked (Judges 19:30.) The last few chapters of Judges reveal the chaos that has taken hold of Israel, as they are consumed by civil war.

Recall the prophecies of Moses and Joshua regarding that the children of Israel would break the covenant with God and worship foreign gods and false idols. This theme was recurrent in the cycles in Judges. Each time Israel began to worship false idols, they fell into captivity, were redeemed by a judge sent from God, and then when the judge died they again fell into worshipping idols. By the end of Judges, we see that even the Levites have fallen into corruption and are no longer keeping the covenant with God. And if the tribe that was supposed to uphold the covenant with God cannot be faithful to Him, think of how much worse the corruption was with the children of Israel. Now corruption and falling away from God starts from the highest spiritual levels (Levite priesthood) and progresses down; the Levites and the children of Israel fell far away from the time when they were able to cross the Jordan and make Jericho fall. Why? Because they completely turned away from their love and faith for God; they forget that it is only by God that they are able to survive and conquer. Thus, as we will shortly see, with the corruption of the Levites, there was a vacuum of leadership, and soon the children of Israel looked for a king to lead them.

Bible Study for the Book of Ruth

Chapters 1 - 4; Recommended Psalms: 34, 45

Introduction: Ruth is the only book in the Bible named for a gentile woman. Jewish tradition in the Talmud teaches that the author of the book is Samuel the Prophet. It is said that the story took place during the days of the judge Gideon (Judges 6:1-11) during the famine. The book teaches us about great faith and devotion, and symbolizes the Gentiles' acceptance of faith in our Lord Jesus and entering the New Church. Ruth offers us a living example of a faithful active church member. The book also serves as a bridge to connect the days of the patriarchs of Israel (Abraham, Jacob, Moses) to the kings of Israel. Ruth, as we will learn below, entered into the field of Boaz to collect grains. But her actions show us she also entered the field of our Lord Jesus Christ; she married the True Bridegroom (the true Boaz, who is the Bridegroom for us all), and she gathered the "Grain of life" and was satisfied by fullness; this was the satisfaction and fullness that the patriarchs and prophets had been laboring for.

It is a book traditionally read during harvest time (Pentecost) by the Jewish people. The early Church saw it as the story of marriage between Christ and the Gentile Church, which was the occasion of Pentecost in Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts.

1. How is Boaz a type (as in typology) of Christ?

Boaz (which means "strength, might") is the groom of the faithful Ruth; he lifts her from the threat of the famine and saves her from the humiliation of begging for food. Likewise, Christ our Lord is our strength and our might and the True Bridegroom; He lifts us from the humiliation of hell and saves us from the sting of death.

Ruth went to the field of Boaz to collect grain, for she "who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life" (John 4:36). Ruth was without a husband and waiting to be redeemed by a kinsman. Christ is our near relative; all people and all nations wait to receive Him as their Groom, just as Ruth waited to receive Boaz. In Ruth 2:8, Boaz called Ruth his daughter; asked her to stay close to his maidens and to him, and drink from the vessels that his laborers drank from. Likewise, Christ our Lord calls us His sons and daughters; asks us stay with Him and abide in His love; and He invites us to drink the living water (John 4:14) which is the Holy Spirit that we attain through the Church sacraments. Boaz asked Ruth to share in his food (Ruth

2:14) which symbolizes both the union of Christ to His bride, the Church; and also our union with Him in the communion of His holy Body and precious Blood. Ruth, in gathering the True Grain, achieves a fulfillment which no food could give her. Boaz redeemed Ruth and gave her what the world could not give - a second chance and a new life. To accept his blessings and unite with him in marriage, (in Ruth 3) Ruth washed his feet and anointed them (symbolic of what? see question 4); put on garments (Christ is our garment - Galatians 3:27); and lay down (accepting suffering and burial with Christ to enjoy the power of His resurrection when He lifts us, redeems us, and gives us life by defeating death).

2. How is Ruth related to King David? What is the significance of Ruth being a Moabite? (Ruth 4)

Ruth bore Obed (which means “slave”), who is the grandfather of King David. Obed represents Christ who became a slave (Philippians 2:7). Naomi can be seen as representing the Law, and those who cling to the Law rather than recognizing the truth (hint: what did Naomi and Elimelech do when the famine came? See Chapter 1). When Obed is born, Naomi rejoiced over him and embraced and nursed him, as if he were her own son. This represents the fulfillment of the Law and the prophecies that were to come true in the Messiah. Ruth’s lineage is of great significance. Like Rahab, Ruth is one of the four women mentioned in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Like Rahab the harlot, Ruth comes from an irreputable background – she is a Moabite and a gentile (Recall in Genesis 19:30-37, Moab is the son of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter). However, notice that our Lord is not ashamed to be born from the line of these women - or even from King David who committed adultery. Ruth, like Rahab, showed great faithfulness by staying with her mother-in-law, and for this faithfulness she was remembered and blessed. Indeed, the Lord is not looking to our family background, but instead He is looking to our hearts - our love, worship, and faith (John 8:37-38). Even though Ruth was a gentile, her lineage bore the Savior of the world. What does that say about us gentiles who were accepted into Christ’s Church? We should never be ashamed that He descended from sinners or people with colorful pasts, for He came to call the sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). He is the true Healer and the only One who covers all the sins of our past, all the things we are ashamed of - He is not ashamed to call us His sons and daughters, so how could we ever be ashamed to call Him our Father? (see 2 Timothy 1:8-12). Father Lev Gillet writes: “If Jesus is born in my soul, He is born there in spite of and through the accumulation of my sins. Jesus pierces, finds His way through my faults, climbing over

them one after the other. It is His genealogy in me. In His breakthrough shines His mercy, His condescension, also His strength.” (From his book: Jesus, a Dialogue with the Savior).

3. What does Ruth’s devotion and faithfulness to her mother-in-law show us?

When the famine came, Ruth had no obligation to stay with her mother-in-law Naomi, especially since Ruth’s husband (Naomi’s son) had died. Ruth could have gone back to her parents and family, but she clung to Naomi and would not leave her side. Ruth’s acts show us that simple faithfulness and devotion can lead to great blessings. How did God bless Ruth? (Hint: Ruth 4:17; see question 2)

Lesson: Through faithfulness and devotion in our relationships (with our Lord, with our family, with each other), we can be blessed with great grace, much like the way Ruth was blessed for her devotion to Naomi. Despite our sinful past, our Lord will not be ashamed to call us His sons and daughters if we can overcome our past by showing Him our faith and love to Him.

4. How does Ruth come to marry Boaz? (Ruth 3)

Again, because of Ruth’s devotion to her mother-in-law, she obeyed Naomi’s instructions and went to Boaz so that he would redeem her and marry her. And notice how Boaz was kind to Ruth - he did not take advantage of the young woman, but proclaimed her virtuousness. Why are Ruth’s acts not merely acts of seduction to get Boaz to marry her? Recall in Deuteronomy 25:5, a man had a duty to marry the widow of his brother or kinsman, so that she would not marry a stranger outside the family and lose her inheritance. Thus, Ruth goes to Boaz, who is a kinsman of her late husband, to offer herself to serve him and marry him, as it was her duty according to the law of Moses in order to preserve her inheritance. The marriage, in a way, acts like collateral to preserve the inheritance and land. Why did Boaz accept the duty to marry Ruth when there was one kinsman who was actually closer to Ruth’s late husband? (Hint: Ruth 4:6-8). Recall in question 1 that Boaz is a type figure of our Savior. Ruth went to Boaz and asked him to redeem her by “covering her with his blood” and by accepting and uniting with her after she had been widowed and without a husband for many years. Essentially, she wanted to be united with the True Bridegroom, the One who will accept us after we have been left by the world, abandoned or widowed; the only One who can truly fulfill us. Just like Ruth, we long to unite with our Beloved (Song of Solomon 6:3). Ruth didn’t meet Boaz in the field; instead, she met him in his bedchamber, where life is secret and hidden from the world, much like we meditate in secret and our meditations are hidden from the world. In Ruth 3:3-4, she washed

Boaz's feet and anointed them - what do the washing (with water) and anointing (with oil) symbolize? How is this parallel to the ministry of our Lord Jesus? When He came to minister to the Jews, they rejected Him - they passed up the duty of preserving their inheritance as God's chosen people. Thus, Jesus turned to the next of kin - the Gentiles - who accepted the duty of preserving and purchasing the inheritance He offered. (Interestingly, when a kinsman rejected the duty of marrying his brother's wife and preserving the inheritance, he was supposed to remove his sandals from his feet. Do you see the parallel to when Jesus instructed His disciples that if a city rejected their teachings, they should take off their sandals and shake the dust from them? (Matthew 10:14)

Bible Study for the First Book of Samuel

Introduction: The book is written by Samuel (which means “Heard by God”), who was the last of Judge of Israel. The book shows us the transition from the judges to the Kings, but it does not yet signify the transition from the tabernacle to the temple, which happens during the reign of Solomon, which we will read about in 1 Kings. In our study of the covenants, we are about to study the fifth covenant (between David and God). This book shows us many examples of personal relationships many righteous people had with God. This book also specifically points to the Church as it is portrayed in the Gospel of St. Matthew, the Kingdom of God on earth, led by the True David, who is Christ our Lord.

1 Samuel 1-7

1. What were the qualities of Hannah prayers that made it acceptable before God? Do you see parallels in the New Testament? (1 Samuel 1-2)

The most significant aspect of Hannah’s prayer is that it is from the heart. In 1 Samuel 1:11, Hannah prays out of the bitterness of her soul, while her prayer in Chapter 2 is a prayer in response to God answering and fulfilling her request for a son. In both instances, her prayer shows insistence. Her first prayer is a silent prayer accompanied by a vow, moved by feelings of grief and self-concern. What is the focus of her second prayer, and how does it differ from the first? It is filled with rejoicing, showing how she has been filled by the satisfaction of God when He answered her prayers. Notice the parallel between the story of Hannah and the story of the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18:7: “Shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?” This prayer is a private moment between her and God, that she keeps hidden in her heart. (Recall how St. Mary pondered all things in her heart.) Here, Hannah didn’t want to share her private moment with anyone, not even Eli. From her private moment flows the depth and joy of her prayer. She praises God because she is moved by the Spirit, and praise of our Lord only comes from the joy of answered prayer, and from the ultimate feeling of fulfillment that only God can provide us with. In the Gospel of St. John, our Savior said, “Until now you’ve asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full,” which shows us that it is only through prayer and being fulfilled by God that the true fulfillment of joy arises. (John 16:24)

Also notice how Hannah's prayer is filled with faith, and when her prayer is answered, she is fulfilled, with no more tears or bitterness. Recall that the Lord will wipe away our every tear and when we are fulfilled by the Lord's salvation, there will be no more pain or suffering (Revelation 21:4). Also, Hannah prays when she is in need and distress, but continues to pray after her prayer has been answered - how many times have we prayed to our Lord requesting something, and failed to thank Him and praise Him for that which He has given us and has not given us? How is Hannah's prayer in 1:11-2:10 similar to St. Mary's prayer in Luke 1:46-55? Hannah prays for the Lord to strengthen His anointed; which can be interpreted on many levels - to protect Samuel, to protect the line of the kings of Israel that is to come, and to protect the Messiah who comes from the line of King David. Look closely at St. Mary's prayer - St Mary is using Hannah's prayer, which shows us that St. Mary knew the Scripture despite her young age.

2. In the story of Samuel, we were told something about the way God communicated with prophets in the Old Testament. How? Is it the same way in the New Testament? (1 Samuel 3) In the Old Testament, God was speaking to people, but they had the perception that they were hearing voices - to them, the manifestation of God's voice was an external thing. The proof of this is in Samuel, because for him, God's voice was an external thing, not speaking to him directly in his heart. But in the New Testament and the New Church, God's voice is in the core of the person - God speaks immediately into the heart of the person, to inspire us to know, want and do immediately. There is no confusion as to Who is speaking to us. We are citizens of the New Testament and the New Church and we look for the voice of God in our hearts, through the Holy Spirit which abides in us. In Acts, St. Peter says that God pours out His voice through the Holy Spirit to lead the apostles to preach the Word of God (Acts 2:33). In Jeremiah 31:33, Jeremiah prophecies about the New Covenant, a time when the Spirit of God would write His commandments in our hearts, rather than using an external device to teach people.

3. Why will God judge Eli's house forever? (1 Samuel 3-4)

Eli's sons committed a grave sin against God and the offerings of the tabernacle. Eli, as priest, should have punished his sons according to the law, and by not doing so, Eli was negligent in his duties of worshipping God. And yet, many people were negligent in their duties, but why would God judge Eli's house forever? Eli is a Levite priest; recall that the Levites were not originally meant to be part of the priestly order. Instead, the first born son was supposed to be part of the true priestly order. However, God substituted the Levites for the first-born in the

priestly order, as the men of Levite tribe were willing to sacrifice their families and take on the duties of the priestly order (Numbers 3:12-13). However, Eli undid what the Levites had done in taking up the priestly duties. He, a Levite priest, was not willing to be zealous (like the Levites) to preserve God's glory and dignity; he was not willing to execute his sons for sinning against God. Thus, God will judge the iniquity of Eli's house forever. How does our Lord and Savior fulfill the true priestly order? Our Lord Christ returns the priesthood to its original design - He is the First-Born of the heavenly Father who becomes the High Priest of the New Church (Hebrews 5:9-10).

Lesson: Many times, we become like Eli, unwilling to place the Lord above our friends and family. Or, sometimes we lose our first love to worship Him and become consumed with worldly affairs that distract us from the true goal of salvation (Revelation 2:4). We must strive daily to abide in God's love, including times when we must place our Lord above friends, family, work, and school, to make Him once again our first love.

1 Samuel 8-14

1. Why is Saul the first king of Israel? What attributes does he have that lead the people to choose him? (1 Samuel 10)

2. Why is it said "is Saul also among the prophets"? (1 Samuel 10-12)

"Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you" (1 Samuel 12:24).

1. Why is Saul the first king of Israel? What attributes does he have that lead the people to choose him? (1 Samuel 10)

Recall in Genesis 15, 17, and 22, that the Lord made promises to Abraham, which comprise the Abrahamic covenant. The first promise (Genesis 15) concerned the promised land, and God delivered His promise by giving the children of Israel the land of Canaan through Moses and Joshua. The second promise (Genesis 17) was the promise of circumcision, and from Abraham's descendants a divine kingship would come. (The third promise (Genesis 22) blessed Abraham's seed, for from Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed, and this is by the coming of the Messiah. We will discuss the third promise in greater detail when we study 2 Samuel. The people cry out in 1 Samuel 8 for a king, but why did Samuel react as he did and reject the idea, when God had promised Abraham that a divine kingship would arise? Wasn't

this request for a king fulfilling part of the Abrahamic covenant? The people wanted a king for the wrong reasons - they wanted to be like other nations that were ruled by kings, and were able to conquer territory, succeed in battle, and gather wealth and fame. As Samuel points out to the people, God is their King - if they wanted to succeed as a nation, they needed only to return to the time when they followed God and let Him lead their ways - just as He did when they crossed the Red Sea, conquered Jericho, and crossed the Jordan; and conquered the promised land. In all of those situations, they were led by God through His priests, but as read in Judges, the people have fallen far from the time when they sought the Lord's guidance, and even the Levite priesthood has become corrupt. Nevertheless, the Lord chooses a king for the people because they cry out for it, and they do not heed Samuel's words that God is the only King they need. God chooses Saul, who is the most handsome and tallest man among the children of Israel. Notice how the selection of Saul might be appealing to the children of Israel for his physical characteristics, because his beauty and height will signify worldly strength to them. Yet, as we will read later, although Saul was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel, he still was not the ideal king of Israel, because he was not a man after God's heart (1 Samuel 13). God would fulfill his promise to Abraham of a divine kingdom through the second king of Israel, a man who was indeed after God's heart - King David.

Lesson: Sometimes we ask the Lord for things that may be beneficial to us, and the Lord may grant us our requests, but unless we seek after these things according to the Lord's will, they will be useless to us. Before we ask for anything, we must first look into our hearts and see how the Lord has blessed us, and ask ourselves what we truly need. Then, if we do make a request of our Lord, we ask Him to guide us according to His will and show us how to use the thing which He has given us (or not given us), recognizing that it is His love that leads us in all we do and seek.

2. Why is it said "is Saul also among the prophets"? (1 Samuel 10:12)

In 1 Samuel 10, Samuel anoints Saul as the first king of Israel, pouring oil over his head. The anointing with oil, as we know from the church teachings and traditions, is the gift of the Holy Spirit, just like we receive the Holy Spirit through Chrismation after Baptism. When the Spirit of God falls upon Saul, Samuel tells him that a certain gift will also come upon him that day - the gift of prophesying. And, indeed, Saul goes among the prophets and prophesies. The people are shocked that a man they knew could do such things - much in the same way that people were in disbelief when the Apostles performed miracles through grace of the Holy Spirit.

Why does God send His Spirit upon Saul? Recall in Numbers, when the council of seventy was appointed during the time Moses (the Sanhedrin), the gift of the Spirit fell upon them, and they too could prophesy. In Numbers, God was establishing a new order - a priestly order of elders. Here, God is establishing the new order of kingship, and a kingdom that would serve as a prototype for His New Kingdom, the church. We will study this in greater detail later. However, even though Saul has the gift of prophesying and the anointing of the Spirit, he is not automatically made a righteous king. In fact, he tries to perform the duties of a priest in 1 Samuel 13 to make a sacrifice to God, and in doing so, he violated the Lord's commandments and instruction of the priestly order. Our Lord Jesus warned us of this offense, for many will seek Him claiming to have prophesied in His name, but He will not know them in that hour because they were workers of iniquity and lawlessness (Matthew 7:22). Saul many times acted foolishly, without first seeking the counsel of God's guidance. Later we will read about further acts of Saul's disobedience.

Lesson: As St. Paul wrote, even though we may be blessed with gifts of the Holy Spirit - speaking in tongues, prophesying - but we do not abide in God's love and seek His divine guidance, these charismatic gifts of the Spirit will not be useful to anyone. (1 Corinthians 13). We may be blessed with gifts of the Spirit, but we must use them for the glorification of our Lord's name and for the edification of the Church (1 Corinthians 14:12).

1 Samuel 15-21

1. Why was Saul rejected as King and David anointed? (1 Samuel 15-16)
2. What lessons can we draw from Jonathan's loyalty to David? (1 Samuel 20)

In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, even to His ears. Psalm 18:6; please also refer to 1 Samuel 19:18.

1. Why was Saul rejected as King and David anointed? (1 Samuel 15-16)

As we mentioned earlier, King Saul was not a man after God's heart (1 Samuel 13:14). Though he had the gift of prophecy by the anointing of the Spirit, Saul was not obedient to God's commandments. In 1 Samuel 15, when the Lord commanded that Saul slaughter all the Amalekites and all their livestock, Saul spares their king, Agag, and the best of the livestock, from which ten percent would be offered as a sacrifice to the Lord and the rest kept as war booty.

Saul was a man after his own heart - he was motivated by greed and ambition to spare Agag and kept the best livestock, and in doing so, he disobeyed the Lord's direct commandment. Samuel chastises Saul, and the Lord rejects Saul as king, because Samuel tells Saul that the Lord desires obedience over empty sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). What is the connection to the ministry of our Lord Jesus? (hint: Matthew 9:13) The Lord found a king after His heart in the boy David, son of Jesse. Recall who David is a descendant from - Ruth, Rahab, and most importantly, and the royal tribe of Judah (see Genesis 49:10 - "the scepter shall not depart from Judah"). Who was David? A faithful boy, the youngest of his brothers, and a simple shepherd. And yet the Lord chose him to be anointed as King of Israel, for through David, God would fulfill the second promise made to Abraham - the establishment of a kingdom (Genesis 17:6-7). Even as Saul attempted to chase after David and kill him, David was obedient to the Lord's commandments. We will study his kingdom and its parallel to Christ's life and the New Kingdom later.

2. How is David able to triumph over the giant Goliath? (1 Samuel 17)

When David asks to be matched against the giant Goliath, he does so because he feels the need to protect God's armies (1 Samuel 17:26). Remember that the Spirit of God is upon David (recall David has been secretly anointed). Notice how David does not feel comfortable in the armor of the king, but rather prefers to wear his shepherd's clothing and use a slingshot as his weapon. David does not purport to be a valiant soldier or man of honor or strength. Rather, David's purpose in fighting Goliath is to glorify God and unify the children of Israel in the Lord: "Then all the assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands." (1 Samuel 17:47). David reminds Israel that any power, strength and authority come from God, and without God, the people have nothing. Indeed, David restores Israel to the path that they followed under Moses, Joshua and the judges - it is only by seeking the Lord's guidance that they were able to triumph. This story also follows a long pattern of having great faith in following the Lord's commands, even if the result seems physically impossible (young David matched against a giant, using only a slingshot). Look at how similar it is to the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites surviving in the desert by the manna, the walls of Jericho falling, the crossing of the Jordan. These acts required great faith by the leaders who led the people. And yet, it is only by God's power and grace that these acts could be accomplished (Recall the instructions to the disciples in Matthew 10:19-20).

Lesson: Before we take any steps, we must trust in the Lord and not lean on our own

understanding (Proverbs 3). Many times, we are confronted with seemingly impossible physical and mental tasks that we must overcome in order to follow the Lord's commandments and to glorify His name before others. It is especially at these times that we must learn to take off the outer coat of armor given to us by the world, for it will give us no aid, protection or comfort. Instead, we should strip off the outer layers to reveal to the Lord our innermost layer - our heart. When we have stripped ourselves of the world's influences and humbled ourselves to the point that we are naked in front of the Lord, that is when the Lord will clothe us with righteousness, longsuffering, patience, hope and courage. That is when the Lord will make what seems impossible become a reality, and when we can do all things through Him, for He will strengthen us and the Holy Spirit within us will swell to fill us completely (Philippians 4:13).

3. What lessons can we draw from Jonathan's loyalty to David? (1 Samuel 20)

Jonathan's acts were the opposite of Eli's acts. Jonathan was willing to sacrifice his family connection to his father in order to follow and help David. Why? Jonathan and David made a covenant - Jonathan treated David as his kin, because he sensed that David walked with the Lord. Try to recall all the instances we have read so far where one person was willing to sacrifice all he had for the Lord - including his family relations if necessary. (Two of the most prominent examples that we have read so far are Abraham and Moses.) Recall what our Lord Jesus said: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). We face many instances in our own lives where we must decide whether to take up our cross and follow the Lord, or choose the thing which we love that may hinder us from the goal of salvation (whether it is money, family relations, friendship, etc).

1 Samuel 22-28

1. Why did David spare Saul? (1 Samuel 24, 26) Recommended Psalms: 18, 57, 42

2. What lessons can we draw from the story about David and the Holy Bread? (1 Samuel 21)

3. How does Jonathan's loyalty to David affect Saul's actions? (1 Samuel 22, 23) Recommended Psalms: 52, 54, 63

1. Why did David spare Saul? (1 Samuel 24, 26)

David shows how truly righteous he is. Despite Saul's attempts to kill David, even though

David has done nothing wrong to the king, and despite several opportunities to harm or kill Saul, David recognizes that King Saul was anointed by God and refuses to harm the Lord's anointed. David proclaims: "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him." David's love for the Lord is so great that he will not harm anything the Lord has blessed, even though it is apparent that Saul is not a good king after the Lord's heart, and even after David knows that he has secretly been anointed by Samuel to be the king of Israel. David's righteousness is further manifested when Saul dies in 1 Samuel 31, as David mourns the loss of the one who tried to kill him. Notice that, although David perceives that he should not harm the Lord's anointed, Saul cannot see that David is now the anointed king. David sees by the Holy Spirit, but Saul only looks at David by the eyes of the world - in David, Saul only sees a young man who stands to threaten his security as king. Although Saul thinks that the Lord is still on his side (1 Samuel 23:21), in fact the Spirit has left him (1 Samuel 16:14). When the Holy Spirit leaves a person, there is room for distressing spirits and demons to inhabit the person and corrupt his actions, just as it occurred with Saul (1 Samuel 16). The vacancy in Saul's heart and his lack of faithfulness to the Lord leads him to his downfall and bitter death. On the other hand, Jonathan, Saul's son, recognizes that David is the Lord's anointed, and he willingly gives up his inheritance to the throne of the kingdom of Israel to follow and protect David (1 Samuel 20).

Notice the language used in 1 Samuel 24:11-12 and 1 Samuel 26:19 – David prefigures our Lord Jesus as a type of Christ. Like our Lord Christ, David is persecuted though he has committed no wrong. David attempts to protect the one who persecutes him, just as our Lord begged the Father for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him. Like David, Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit, as He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel."

Lesson: Saul's actions illustrate envy, which is different from jealousy. Envy is a destructive jealousy - it seeks the destruction of the other. Good jealousy, on the other hand, would seek self-improvement. St. Paul wrote, "Good is the jealousy that leads to betterment."

2. What lessons can we draw from the story about David and the Holy Bread? (1 Samuel 21)

Recall in Genesis 14, the high priest Melchizedek visits Abraham and shares bread and wine with him. Melchizedek (literally, "king of righteousness") was the last high priest-king

mentioned in the Old Testament; later, the Levites took up the priestly duties to serve the Lord and the tabernacle, but no Levite ever became a priest-king. Throughout the kingship of David, we will see a recurring theme: David attempts to unite the roles of kingship and priesthood again, following in the order of the high priest Melchizedek. Why? Because David recognizes that God's covenant with Abraham regarding a kingship in the land of Israel (Genesis 17) is not an ordinary earthly kingdom, but rather it is a kingdom to be led by men of God, by His priests and righteous servants (much like the conquering of the promised land could only be led by priests and servants of the Lord). This is why David fulfills the covenant regarding kingship coming from Abraham's seed, while Saul does not: David is after God's heart because he realizes that the kingdom the Lord seeks to establish is not merely an earthly kingdom. The divine kingship culminates and is completed by the true divine King who comes from the line of David and serves as the Lord's High Priest, who is Christ our Lord. We will look closely at this theme later. Thus, in 1 Samuel 21, we see David enter the tabernacle and eat the showbread, which is the holy bread of the Tabernacle. Interestingly, our Lord Jesus points to this story when the Pharisees accuse Him of breaking the law by plucking heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8). David eating the Holy Bread shows us that he is acting in a priestly capacity by eating of bread that is not for common people, but is only accessible to priests (Leviticus 24:5-9; Numbers 28:9-10). David also provides an example of a blameless violation of the Sabbath rule, which is what Christ points to when the Pharisees accuse Him of breaking the Lord's ceremonial law. Our Lord Jesus demonstrates to us that we cannot rigidly adhere to ceremonial law (Sabbath, circumcision, etc...) while displacing human need or service to God; when we follow the law, we follow it by the spirit of the law as well as the letter of the law. Christ uses this story to teach the Pharisees that He desires mercy and love over empty rigid adherence to the ceremonial law, and that if David, the beloved king of the Jews, violated the Sabbath in a permissible way, how much more so should they revere Jesus, the True King? The showbread also suggests the Bread from heaven (Christ - see John 6) which is set upon the holy table of the house of God (the church) as an offering, and those who truly seek the Lord and labor for Him may partake of this Bread.

3. How does Jonathan's loyalty to David affect Saul's actions? (1 Samuel 22, 23)

When Saul discovers Jonathan's loyalty to David, for Saul this is the straw that broke the camel's back, and Saul in his frustration lashes out at the priests. Saul discovers that Ahimelech had helped to hide David, and Saul goes completely mad and slaughters the priests of the Lord.

Why? Because Saul is fearful of losing his throne, and even his own son Jonathan was willing to give up his inheritance as king in recognition that David should be the king of Israel. Notice who murders the priests? Doeg, who is Saul's dedicated servant and an Edomite. Recall in Genesis 27:40, when Isaac gave blessings to his sons Esau (renamed Edom) and Jacob (renamed Israel), he stated that Edom would always serve Israel, and it would come to pass that when Edom became restless (restless, perhaps, because of fear of losing one's kingdom or power), it will strike out against Israel. Doeg's actions in murdering the priests to protect King Saul's security upon the throne are very similar to actions taken by another Edomite - King Herod - in murdering children of Israel in an attempt to prevent Jesus from taking his throne (Matthew 2:16). When Doeg the Edomite told King Saul that Ahimelech was hiding David, David said of him: "God shall likewise destroy you forever, you love evil more than good" (Psalm 52:5,3). Because of his fear, envy and greed to secure his kingdom, Saul begins again to persecute and chase David. Even though David spares Saul's life, Saul completely loses the peace of the Holy Spirit and is driven into a mad frenzy to kill David. When Saul calls upon the Lord for help and the Lord does not answer, Saul betrays his faith in God by taking a desperate action - he consults a medium, who is not even a Jewish prophetess but rather practices magic, to figure out what he should do. For this action, Saul would ultimately lose his life (1 Chronicles 10:13-14).

1 Samuel 29-31; 2 Samuel 1-4

1. Saul is only one of two people who commits suicide in the Bible (the other is Judas Iscariot). What led Saul to commit suicide? What was David's reaction? (1 Samuel 31; 2 Samuel 1; 1 Chronicles 10)

2. How do David's actions in times of war show his righteousness? (2 Samuel 3,4) "Give us help from trouble, For vain is the help of man. Through God we will do valiantly, For it is He who shall tread down our enemies" (Psalm 60:11-12).

1. Saul is only one of two people who commits suicide in the Bible (the other is Judas Iscariot). What led Saul to commit suicide? What was David's reaction? (1 Samuel 31; 2 Samuel 1; 1 Chronicles 10). In many ways, Saul is similar to the figure of Judas because he betrays the Lord and the Lord's anointed several times: by refusing to follow God's commandment to kill Agag; (2) by consulting a medium (who practices sorcery); (3) and by committing suicide. The Scripture tells us that Saul "died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord. He did not inquire of the Lord"

(1 Chronicles 10:13-14). Judas committed suicide because he could not live with his guilt of betraying the Lord. Out of his selfish ambition and greed, being blinded by the world and its desires, Judas betrayed our Lord Jesus into the hands of His enemies. Likewise, Saul committed suicide out of his shame after he had betrayed the Lord several times, out of his greed to hold on to a kingdom which no longer belonged to him. Both Judas and Saul failed to see the glory of the True Kingdom which was promised to those who are willing to follow God's commandments and follow the Lord's anointed. St. John tells us only those who follow the will of the Lord, and resist against the world and its desires, will inherit the kingdom of God and abide forever (1 John 2:17). The Church views suicide as the final sin in a succession of a multitude of sins. Suicide is the culmination of hopelessness and lack of trust in the Lord, when a person has abandoned all hope for God's work in his life and takes his life out of God's hands by ending it. Saul and Judas did not allow the mysteries of the Lord to work in their lives, and they completely shut God and His teachings out of their hearts and minds. Imagine how Saul and Judas felt: they turned away from the Lord and sought fulfillment from the world, which led to their complete inner emptiness. At the same time, they prevented the Lord from working in their hearts, which only increased their feelings of emptiness and desperation. Their last action - taking their own lives - served as a final testimony to completely shutting God out of their lives. Recall that after Saul's first act of disobedience, Samuel prophesied to Saul that the Lord would snatch his kingdom away from him and give it to his neighbor (David). What does David do when he hears the news of Saul's death? After being persecuted and chased, we expect that David would want to gloat over Saul's death in triumph. Rather, David shows his righteousness, humility and great love for the Lord; he mourns Saul's death with lamentations, weeping and fasting. Why? David mourns and weeps bitterly not because of his love for Saul, but out of his love for the Lord. Saul was anointed by God, and even though Saul betrayed the Lord, David loves the Lord so much that he loves everything the Lord's hands have touched and blessed. In this way, David prefigures our Lord Jesus, because he loves the one who tries to kill him and mourns over his persecutors. Our Lord Jesus continues to lament over His children who turn away from Him or cease to abide in His love.

Lesson: Our Lord commanded us that when someone wrongs us, we must not triumph when that person stumbles or and we must not try to retaliate, but instead give the person our other cheek, in order to achieve humility before the Lord. Indeed, David perfectly illustrates what it means to love our own enemies and even enemies of the Lord, as they are all God's creations: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who spite you, and

pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven” (Matthew 5:44-45).

2. How do David’s actions in times of war show his righteousness? (2 Samuel 3-4)

When Saul died and a dispute arose as to who would become the next king of Israel, David showed how his love for the Lord prevailed over all things, even over any desire to win the battle to become king of all Israel as it was promised to him. Although David always kept the goal of the kingship in front of his eyes, David’s actions illustrate how David is different from King Saul. While Saul was the first king of Israel, he was not the king of Israel who would fulfill God’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17). As we read earlier, Saul was not a king after God’s heart. God promised that Abraham’s descendants would bear a line of kings, but God was not speaking about mere earthly kings. Rather, as we learned earlier, God meant to establish a line of priest-kings, and of this the Lord said: “I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and My mind” (1 Samuel 2:35). Thus, David tries to fulfill God’s promise to Abraham by becoming a priest-king, following in the tradition of the High Priest King Melchizedek. Even though David is involved in a battle over the throne of Israel, he always attempts to do according to what is in the Lord’s heart and mind. When Joab, David’s servant, kills Abner to avenge his brother’s death, David rebuked his servant and mourned for Abner. When Ishbosheth was killed, David explained to his men that, just as he could not rejoice over the death of the Lord’s anointed, he could not rejoice over the death of innocent person, and executed those who killed Ishbosheth (1 Samuel 4:11). If we think about it, how would a priest-king lead a battle if he wanted to lead it according to God’s heart and mind? He would not seek blood of innocent people, or gloat over the death of an enemy, but would rather ascribe to the kingdom meekly and righteously. In the same way, our Lord Jesus built up His kingdom (the Church) in a meek fashion - look at the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, which prescribe the requirements of citizenship in Christ’s kingdom on earth. Christ did not look for the physically valiant or politically savvy to be citizens of His kingdom - He looked to the qualities of our spirits and hearts. We will explore this theme and the similarities between David’s kingdom and Christ’s kingdom in the future.

The Lord's Feasts

- The Coptic Church celebrates 7 major Lord's feasts and 7 minor Lord's feasts.

The Major Lord's Feasts

1. **Annunciation** - This feast is the Annunciation of the birth of Christ by Archangel Gabriel to Saint Mary. It is celebrated on 29th Baramhat (April 7th). The Gospel reading is Luke 1:26-38. Also, on the 29th of each Coptic month (except during the Great Lent, the 50 days of the Holy Pentecost, and the month of Kiahk), the Gospel reading for the Divine Liturgy is the Annunciation of Archangel Gabriel to Saint Mary that she would conceive Jesus through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38).
2. **Nativity** - This is also known as Christmas. It is the feast of the the birth of Christ. It is celebrated on 29th Kiahk (January 7th). The Divine Liturgy for this feast starts the night of January 6th and concludes after midnight on the 7th. The Gospel reading is Matthew 2:1-12.
3. **Epiphany (Theophany)** - This is the feast of the baptism of Christ. The word Epiphany means manifestation. The word Theophany means manifestation of God. The Feast of the Epiphany is celebrated on 11th Tubah (January 19th), and is always 12 days after the Nativity feast. The Divine Liturgy for this feast starts at night on January 18th and concludes after midnight on January 19th. The Gospel reading is John 1:18-34.
4. **Palm Sunday** - This is the feast where Christ rode through Jerusalem on a donkey and the people layed down palm branches in the street for Him. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the Holy (Passion) Week. Palm Sunday is recorded in all four Gospels, and thus there are four Gospel readings on Palm Sunday. These are Matthew 21:1-17, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:29-48, and John 12:12-19.
5. **Resurrection** - This feast celebrates the resurrection of Christ from the dead. It is also called Easter. It is celebrated the Sunday following Palm Sunday. The Divine Liturgy for this feast is done on Saturday night, the night before Easter Sunday. The Gospel reading is John 20:1-18.

6. **Ascension** - This feast takes place 40 days after the Resurrection. It is the feast of the Ascension of our Lord to heaven. It is always 10 days before Pentecost. Pentecost is celebrated on a Sunday, and thus the Ascension is always on a Thursday. The Gospel reading is Luke 24:36-53.
7. **Pentecost** - This feast takes place 50 days after the Resurrection and 10 days after the Ascension. This feast is always celebrated on a Sunday. It is the feast of the coming of the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-21), and this feast marks the beginning of the Early Church. The Gospel reading for this feast day is John 15:26 - 16:15.

The Minor Lord's Feasts

1. **Circumcision** - According to Jewish custom, male children were circumcised 8 days after birth. The Feast of the Circumcision is celebrated on 6th Tubah (January 14th). The Gospel reading is Luke 2:21-39.
2. **Entry into the Temple** - This feast is celebrated 40 days after the birth of Christ. It is celebrated on 8th Amshir (February 16th). Christ entered the temple 40 days after his birth. The Gospel reading is Luke 2:21-39. In Leviticus 12:1-5, we read about the "days of purification" for women after giving birth to male or female children. For male children, the mother's days of purification are 40 days and for female children, they are 80 days.
3. **Flight into Egypt** - This is the feast celebrating the fleeing of Jesus, Saint Mary, and Joseph into Egypt until the death of Herod. It is celebrated on 24th Bashans (June 1st). The Gospel reading is Matthew 2:13-23.
4. **The Wedding at Cana** - This feast celebrates Jesus's first miracle after starting His ministry when He was 30 years old. The wedding at Cana is where Jesus turned water into wine at the request of Saint Mary. It is celebrated on 13th Tubah (January 22). The Gospel reading is John 2:1-11.
5. **Transfiguration** - This feast is where Jesus was transfigured and talked with Moses and Elijah. The Apostles Peter, James and John witnessed the transfiguration. It is celebrated on 13th Misra (August 19th). The Gospel reading is Mark 9:2-13.
6. **Holy Thursday** - This is Thursday of the Holy Week where Jesus had the Last Supper with His disciples and then washed their feet. The Last Supper is recorded in all four

Gospels. It is the only day of the Holy week in which there is a Divine Liturgy. The Gospel reading for the Liturgy is Matthew 26:20-29.

7. **First Sunday after Easter** - This feast celebrates Jesus appearing to His disciples for the second time one week after His resurrection (on Sunday) in the upper room, where Saint Thomas was present, touched the hands and side of Jesus, and believed. This feast is sometimes called the Sunday of Saint Thomas. This feast is always celebrated the Sunday after Easter Sunday. The Gospel reading is John 20:19-31.

The Flight into Egypt

A magnificent event occurred between the Incarnation and the baptism of Christ. This is the Flight into Egypt by Joseph, Mary and Jesus, which is recorded in Matthew 2:13-23. This event is celebrated by our church on the 24th of Bashans (June 1st). The original celebration of this event took place, according to ancient church tradition, on the first Sunday after Christmas, and this is in fact the Gospel reading of the first Sunday after Christmas.

We want to understand the connections between the Old Testament and the New Testament regarding the flight into Egypt and the prophecies regarding the birth of Christ.

1. **Connection Between the Christmas Gospel and the Flight into Egypt** - The gospel reading of Christmas about the Magi is directly linked to the flight into Egypt, and Herod and divine inspiration play a central role in each.

The Magi were divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, and not to take the same route back from which they had come (Matthew 2:12). This was to avoid meeting Herod who hated the Christ child and wanted to kill Him. Herod would never know His birth place, nor the location of His home nor who His kindred were. The divine inspiration then immediately mentions how an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to wake up and take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt away from the presence of Herod who intended to kill Him (Matthew 2:13-14).

2. **Prophetic Basis Underlying the Event of the Flight into Egypt** - It is critical to relate the flight into Egypt to the prophecies about this event in the Old Testament. It is important to see this so that we can understand and believe that Christ is the ultimate end of all the prophecies and books of the Old Testament with all their narratives and incidents. Thus the Old and New Testaments are entirely about Christ!

The story of the flight into Egypt is recorded in Matthew 2:13-23. St. Matthew's gospel was written in the style for the Jews. St. Matthew was writing primarily for the Jews. For the event of the flight into Egypt, as recorded in Matthew 2:13-23, we see that the exact same event occurs with Moses in the Old Testament (Exodus 2:15, 3:2, 4:19-20). In Exodus, 2:15, we read, "When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by

a well.” Compare this with Matthew 2:13. Also, in Exodus 3:2, we read, “And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush.” Compare this with Matthew 2:13. In Exodus 4:19, we read “And the Lord said to Moses in Midian, ‘Go return to Egypt; for all the men who were seeking your life are dead’.” Compare this with Matthew 2:19-20. Thus, in these two events we notice several things:

- Relationship between Jesus and Moses - Pharaoh sought to kill Moses and Herod sought to kill Jesus. An angel of the Lord appeared to Moses, and an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph. The Lord told Moses to return back to Egypt and Moses did. The angel of the Lord told Joseph to return back to Israel with the Christ child, and they did.
- Relationship between Egypt and Pharaoh with Israel and Christ - The origin of bitter slavery, oppression and murder are transformed into Jerusalem and King of Jerusalem. Egypt is transformed into a city of peace, and slavery and oppression to sin has come to an end with the coming of Christ.

3. **Writing Style of St. Matthew** - St. Matthew writes about the event into its prophetic form, quoting them intact. For example, he uses the plural form “for those who sought the Child’s life are dead,” (Matthew 2:20). He says this although Herod *alone* sought Jesus’s life. St. Matthew here is writing exactly as in Exodus, “For all the men who were seeking your life are dead,” (Exodus 4:19). We also find St. Matthew using words like “withdrew” or “fled” just as they occur in the story of Moses. For example, in Exodus 2:15, we read, “But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh.” St. Matthew uses these words frequently in his gospel. For example, in Matthew 2:20, we read, “He withdrew to the district of Galilee.” In Matthew 4:12, we read, “When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee.”

4. **Joseph of the Old Testament and Jesus** - We discussed earlier the parallels between the Joseph of the Old Testament and Jesus.

Joseph of the Old Testament	Jesus
Sold as a slave	Sold for 30 pieces of silver
Imprisoned for 2 years	Numbered with the transgressors
Betrayed by his own brothers	Betrayed by His own disciple
Rejected by his own	Rejected by His own
Sent by Jacob his father to find his lost brothers	Sent by God the Father to find the lost sheep
Stripped of his coat	Stripped of His garment
Saved Egypt from famine	Saved the world from eternal death

5. **Joseph of the Old Testament and Joseph of the New Testament** - There are also major parallels between Joseph of the Old Testament and the Joseph of the New Testament.

Joseph of the Old Testament	Joseph of the New Testament
Son of Jacob	Son of Jacob (Matthew 1:16)
Named the “the righteous” or “the just”	Named “ the righteous” or “the just” (Matthew 1:19)
Joseph has dreams that he will save Egypt	Joseph sees the angel of the Lord in a dream to take the Savior to Egypt
Obedient to God	Obedient to God
Led by an angel to Egypt	Led by an angel to Egypt
God preserved Joseph from death and led him into Egypt away from his brothers	God preserved Joseph from death and led him into Egypt with Mary and the Christ child

6. **Pharaoh and Herod** - There are major parallels between the life of Pharaoh and the life of Herod. Pharaoh gave orders to kill the male children out of envy and fear of the growth of the Israelites and their dominion. Herod hated Christ because he heard the Magi say that He was the “King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). Therefore Herod became envious and hated Christ and killed all the male children 2 years and younger. After killing the male children, both Herod and Pharaoh went into a state of derision and paranoia and started killing everyone. We are warned of this in Psalm 2:2-5. After the male children were killed, Herod and Pharaoh went on a killing rampage of their own family, and their lives were destroyed. Herod killed his wife’s grandmother and her brother, his own wife, her mother, and two of his sons.

7. **The Innocent Children Slaughtered** - When the innocent children were slaughtered, Matthew 2:18 makes a reference to Jeremiah 31:15, which reads “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they were no more.”

8. **Return To Israel** - The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream again, and said “Rise, take the Child and His mother and go to the land of Israel” (Matthew 2:20). We first note that Herod’s death in Israel is the death of the last false king of Jerusalem. Christ has been the King of Jerusalem since His return to Israel. Christ’s return to Israel is an event also experienced in the life of Moses, when the Lord said to Moses in Exodus 4:22-23, “And you shall say to Pharaoh, thus says the Lord: Israel is My son. My first-born. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me.” The prophet Hosea also prophesied about Christ’s return to Israel in Hosea 11:1, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.”

9. **He Shall be Called a Nazarene** - In Matthew 2:23 we read, “And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.” Joseph fled to Galilee since it was more safe and peaceful. He then became an inhabitant of Nazareth, as did Jesus, and thus was called a Nazarene. The word Nazareth is Hebrew and is derived from the word meaning *branch*. It is not a primary branch which originally formed the tree, but rather a tender secondary branch sprouting on the side of the tree, close to its root. Nazareth, then, was a secondary, weak city of low status, and got its name from being an insignificant place.

Recall when Nathanael mocked Phillip when he was told that Jesus came from Nazareth. Nathanael said “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Thus Christ shows us His humility by being a Nazarene. It was a title of humility.

The prophecies in the Old Testament make several references to Nazareth and Christ through *the branch*. In Isaiah 11:1 we read, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” Just before this, Zechariah describes how the Lord will cut off all the branches, and only the trunk shall be left, from which will sprout, “My servant the branch” (Zechariah 3:8).

Also, in Isaiah 10:33 we read, “Behold the Lord, the Lord of hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power, the great in height will be hewn down, and the lofty will be brought low.”

In Jeremiah 23:5, we read, “Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”

In Zechariah 6:12-13, we read, “Behold the man whose name is the branch, for he shall grow up in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule upon his throne. And there shall be a priest by his throne.”

Christ Himself referred to Himself as the branch when He said, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He will take away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:2).

10. **Descriptions of Christ from the Old Testament** - The following are descriptions of Christ in the Old Testament given chronologically in time.

Abraham saw His reflection in Melchizedek, King of Salem (Genesis 14:18-19,22).

Jacob called Him Shiloh (Genesis 49:10).

To Moses, He was the Passover Lamb and the Lifted-up One (Exodus 12:21, 15:2).

To Joshua, He was the Captain of Our Salvation (Joshua 5:13-15).

Ruth saw Him as Family Redeemer (Ruth 2:11-12, 3:11, 4:6).

Samuel portrayed Him as Family Restorer.

David called Him Lion of Judah and good Shepherd (Revelation 5:5).

To Solomon, He was the Beloved (Song of Solomon, 2:8,16).

Ezra and Nehemiah pictured Him as the Restorer (Ezra 6:5).

To Esther, He was our Advocate.

Job said He was my Redeemer (Job 19:25).

Isaiah described Him as a Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:5,7).

Jeremiah saw Him at the potter's wheel (Jeremiah 18:1-3,5-6).

Daniel called Him the Prince and the Smiting Stone (Daniel 2:34-35, 8:25, 9:25).

Hosea likened Him to a Bridegroom redeeming a fallen wife (Hosea 3:14-16).

To Joel, He was the Restorer (Joel 2:19,25).

Amos saw Him as a Heavenly Husbandman (Amos 5:16-17).

To Obadiah, He was the Savior (Obadiah 1:17-21).

Jonah saw Him as our Resurrection and Salvation (Jonah 2:6,9).

Micah called Him a Witness (Micah 1:2).

To Nahum, He was a stronghold in a day of trouble (Nahum 1:7).

Habakkuk described Him as God of my Salvation (Habakkuk 3:13,18-19).

To Zephaniah, He was a Jealous Lord (Zephaniah 1:18, 3:8).

Haggai said He was the Desire of all Nations (Haggai 2:7).

Zechariah called Him the Righteous Branch (Zechariah 3:8, 6:12-13).

Malachi declared Him the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2).

And John the Baptist said, "Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:19).

The Gospel Readings of Lent

The Great Lent has two main themes:

1. Fasting and prayer
2. Confession and repentance

The readings of the Sundays of lent greatly emphasize these themes.

1. **Pre-Lent Sunday** - This is the Sunday right before the beginning of Lent. Lent always starts on a Monday. The Gospel reading for Pre-Lent Sunday is Matthew 6:1-18. The three main themes in this reading are

- Doing charitable deeds and giving alms (tithes)
- Fasting
- Prayer

The Pre-Lent Gospel reading sets the stage for our spiritual life during the period of Lent. The Pre-Lent Gospel reading talks about doing these three things in humility, and in particular, praying and fasting in secret and without recognition as well as doing charitable deeds without being noticed.

2. **First Sunday of Lent** - The Gospel reading for the first Sunday of lent is a continuation of the Pre-Lent Sunday Gospel reading. It is Matthew 6:19-33. The main themes in this Gospel reading are:

- Focus on the heavenly rather than the earthly. We read in Matthew 6:19-21, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures in earth, where moth or rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

- Do not worry (verses 25-33). During the period of lent, we are to focus on heavenly things and not worry about the earthly things. We are to not worry about our troubles, our possessions, our health, our jobs, our financial security, and our cares of this life. Such worries distract us from fasting, prayer, repentance, and our heavenly goal.

3. **Second Sunday of Lent: The Temptation on the Mount-** The Gospel reading for the second Sunday of lent is Matthew 4:1-11, where Jesus is tempted by the devil after having fasted 40 days in the wilderness. This Gospel passage teaches us several things:

- The importance of fasting in overcoming temptation and sin, and in particular, overcoming the devil (Matthew 4:2).
- Being filled with the Holy Spirit as a result of fasting. Fasting raises our spiritual awareness, and as a result, the Holy Spirit is active in our life (Matthew 4:1, Luke 4:1).
- We see a one on one confrontation between Christ and Satan, in which Christ is victorious. This gives us great comfort and joy in knowing that Satan is defeated, doomed, and his days are numbered. Christ is always victorious and He will be victorious again in His second coming.
- This Gospel passage shows us the trickery and deceit of the devil. He twists words and meanings to fit his own definitions. He even twists words and meanings from the Bible.

Satan tempts Jesus three times here: i) he commands Him to turn the stone into bread, ii) he commands Him to jump off the pinnacle of the temple, and iii) he commands Him to worship him. The first temptation is an attack on the body, for Jesus was hungry after His fast, and the devil tempted him with food so that Jesus would satisfy His physical needs. The second temptation was an attack on the soul, in which the devil tells Jesus to jump, thus defying the laws of gravity and defying the capability of humanity. The second temptation is more serious than the first. Then the third temptation is the ultimate one, and most serious, in which the devil asks Christ to worship him, thus commanding Him to be in complete submission to him. In these temptations, we see that the devil is not only cunning and deceptive, but we see that he is also a liar. He tells Jesus that he will give Him the kingdoms of the world if He worships him (Luke 4:6). This, of course, is a lie,

since the devil does not have authority whatsoever over anything of this world, but rather it is Christ who has the authority over all. This is why Christ calls the devil, “the father of lies” (John 8:44).

The temptation of Jesus on the mount is recorded in three of the four Gospels. It is recorded in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13.

4. **The Third Sunday of Lent: The Parable of the Prodigal Son** - The Gospel reading for the third Sunday of Lent is Luke 15:11-32. This is a very spiritually rich parable with so many lessons. It is a parable and thus not an actual event that occurred. The Gospel of Luke contains most of the parables of Jesus. The parable of the prodigal son is only found in the Gospel of St. Luke. This Gospel reading tells us many things:

- Confession and Repentance - The prodigal son “comes to himself” (Luke 15:17) and realizes his sins and wrong ways. As a result, he repents and returns home to his father after having lived an immoral life.
- Arrogance and Humility - The prodigal son leaves his father’s house an arrogant person, who demanded his inheritance (Luke 15:11), and he returns home a humble person only wanting to be a servant in his fathers house (Luke 15:19).
- The Loving father - This parable also tells about about a loving father who accepts his son unconditionally without any questions or reservations. He sees him from afar, immediately accepts him, gives him the best of what he has, and prepares a big celebration for him. The father also deals with the elder son in a very loving way.
- The Sins of the Tongue - The elder son criticizes and maligns his younger brother to his father, and he is jealous of him. We see here the importance of the sins of the tongue, and the sins of jealousy and hypocrisy. The Catholic Epistle reading for the third Sunday of Lent is James 3:1-12, which talks about the sins of the tongue.

5. **The Fourth Sunday of Lent: The Samaritan Woman** - The Gospel reading for the fourth Sunday of Lent is John 4:1-42. It is a story of repentance in which Jesus has a one on one personal encounter with a person whose life changes as a result of this encounter. This story is only found in the Gospel of John. This Gospel reading tells us many things:

- Repentance - the Samaritan woman, who was a liar, an adulterer, and a person who had lived an immoral life having five husbands, repents and preaches Christ to her

own people. Repentance results in freedom from the slavery of sin, and the Samaritan woman demonstrates her freedom by eagerly telling her own people about Christ, as if she had just been freed from jail.

- The love of Christ - the way Jesus deals with this woman was critical in her repentance. Jesus is patient, He does not condemn or accuse, but rather He uplifts and encourages. Jesus was a Jew and Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus shows us that He is here to break the barriers of communication in order to win our hearts. It is Jesus who initiates the conversation and our relationship with Him.
- Jesus slowly reveals Himself to those who are ready and able to accept Him. He does not tell the Samaritan woman that He is Christ until she is spiritually ready. He gradually builds up to it, educating and teaching her in His loving way until she is prepared to accept Him as the Christ.
- In verses 1-9, Jesus initiates dialogue, in verses 10-15, He tries to gently teach and educate and the Samaritan woman is still hostile towards Him. In verses 15-21, Christ's loving ways begin to have an impact on her, as the woman begins to take a hard look at herself and examine herself. In verses 22-26, Christ teaches her about Christianity and she accepts it, and in verse 26, Christ reveals Himself to her.

6. The Fifth Sunday of Lent: The Man at the Pool of Bethesda - The Gospel reading for the fifth Sunday of Lent is John 5:1-18. Again, this is a story of repentance that happens after Jesus has a one on one personal encounter with the man at the pool. This story is only found in the Gospel of John. There are several things to note in this Gospel passage.

- It illustrates man's emptiness, helplessness, and loneliness without God. The man at the pool says, "I have no man" (John 5:7). The man at the pool was helpless for 38 years because it is only Christ who can help and fill the emptiness in our life. No ordinary man can do it.
- Jesus asks the man if he wants to be healed (John 5:6). Jesus always respects our free will and gives us the choice to repent or not. He never imposes or forces His will upon us, regardless of our condition. Before He makes us well, He always asks us if we want to be made well. This tells us that repentance is really a two way street. We have to want it, and when we decide we want it, Christ will give it.

- Jesus goes on to tell the man at the pool, “Rise, take up your bed and walk” (John 5:8). It is as if Jesus tells the man, “let’s do this together”. That is, miracles happen when our will and God’s power cooperate to make them possible. The man at the pool could of made up excuses and said that he has been in this condition for 38 years, and so why should things change now? But he didn’t. He made the effort to get up and he had *faith*, and working as a team with Christ, he was able to get up and be made well.
- Christ healed the man on the Sabbath (John 5:9). The pharisees could not accept this because they were bound to the laws and were hypocrites. They were completely blind to acts of love and compassion. Their hearts were hardened and they could not understand the compassion and love Christ had for humanity. Jesus heals the man on the Sabbath to show us that a law without love is no law at all, and therefore should be broken. He also shows us that He never stops working for us, and that He is always performing miracles and healing our sickness.

7. The Sixth Sunday of Lent: The Man Born Blind - This Gospel reading is also from the Gospel of John, and again involves another one on one personal encounter with Christ. It is in John 9:1-38. We therefore see that the fourth, fifth, and sixth Sunday Gospel readings for Lent are all from the Gospel of John and all involve one on one personal encounters with Christ that completely change a person’s life. The Gospel readings of the fifth and sixth Sundays involve miracles that Jesus performed. Christ was asked to perform a miracle in the Gospel reading of the second Sunday, but He did not. This story is only found in the Gospel of John. There are several things to note in this passage:

- The man born blind had not committed any sin, and so this is not a reading about repentance, as were the readings of the Prodigal son, the Samaritan woman and the man at the pool of Bethesda. The main aim of this reading is that God’s glory is revealed and that we see that He is “the light of the world” (John 9:5). Thus, Christ heals the blind man to glorify God (John 9:2-3).
- The blind man is a symbol of humanity who are blind to Christ and are in need of illumination from Christ, and this is why Christ says, “I am the light of the world” in John 9:5. The clay and saliva are a reminder that all of humanity was made from the dust of the ground (Genesis 1:26), and that Christ wishes to restore man to a new state. The clay and saliva symbolize the restoration of man to his new state.

- The pool of siloam was quite far from the temple, so the blind man had to walk a long way to wash his eyes in order to see. It shows us the great faith that he had, and that he would indeed see if he did as Jesus said.
- This Gospel passage also tells us about those who see and those who do not see. It gives us a contrast between the personality of the man born blind (one who sees) and the personality of the pharisees (ones who do not see). The pharisees question the blind man four separate times about this miracle, in John 9:10, 15, 17, 26. The blind man responds by saying that “If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.” He is a witness to Christ. The more the blind man is pressed, the stronger he becomes in his witness and faith.
- The pharisees try to discredit the miracle by lying and saying that the man was not blind from birth (John 9:18), by discrediting Jesus and saying that He is not from God because He does not keep the Sabbath (John 9:16), and by saying blasphemy against Christ by calling Him a “sinner” (John 9:24).
- We see here that as the story progresses, the man born blind becomes more aware of who Jesus is and develops a stronger faith and belief, whereas the pharisees criticism of Jesus becomes more sharp and hostile and they lapse into a deeper darkness.
- The man born blind becomes a real witness for Christ in this story. He witnessed Christ before his neighbors and the pharisees, and as a result, he was thrown out of the temple (John 9:34). He was a man of faith and courage. His parents, on the other hand, denied Christ out of their fear. They did not witness Christ and put the responsibility on their son. Thus, this Gospel passage is a great lesson on witness and denial of Christ.
- As in the parable of the prodigal son, the story of the Samaritan woman, and the man at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus meets the man born blind after his conversion. The man born blind must of been worshipping in the temple right before Jesus met him, because we read that the pharisees had thrown him out (John 9:34). It is this one on one encounter that Jesus has with the man born blind that parallels the Gospel readings of the two previous Sunday’s (the Samaritan woman and the man at the pool of Bethesda). It is here that Jesus reveals to him that He is the Son of God (John 9:37). This only comes after that man’s eyes were opened physically *and* spiritually, and thus he was now ready for spiritual illumination. The man born blind says,

“Who is He Lord, that I may believe in Him” (John 9:36). The man, now, seeing His divinity, worshiped Him (John 9:38).

- Jesus’s coming brought judgment (John 9:39) by increasing the accountability of those who saw and heard Him, but did not believe. The brilliance of Christ’s light becomes an illumination to some, but a blinding glare to others (John 9:41).

8. **The Seventh Sunday of Lent: Palm Sunday** - Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the Holy week, and it is on this day that the highest honor and respect are paid to Jesus. The Psalms are sung in the Singarian tune, and the liturgy is said in the most joyous tune. The events of Palm Sunday are recorded in all four Gospels. They are given in Matthew 21:1-17, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:29-48, and John 12:12-19. We will talk about Palm Sunday and the Holy Week in a separate lesson.

Epiphany (Theophany)

1. The Epiphany (or Theophany) commemorates the baptism of our Lord Jesus by St. John the Baptist in the river Jordan.
2. The word Epiphany means manifestation. The word Theophany means manifestation of God.
3. The baptism of Christ is recorded in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-22.
4. We read in Matthew 3:13-17, “Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me? But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him. Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.”
5. We see the manifestation of the Holy Trinity at the baptism of Christ: God the Father speaks from heaven, God the Son (Jesus) is being baptized by John, and God the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) appears in the form of a dove. The baptism of Christ is a great example of seeing our one God through the Holy Trinity.
6. This manifestation of Christ is different from all the others (birth, magi, and wedding at Cana), because on this day God reveals Himself fully: He is one in three persons. This is the mystery which allows us to call on the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as one God. Nothing can be added to this vision.
7. This is why the word Epiphany meaning “manifestation” was replaced by Theophany in the Coptic Church meaning “manifestation of God”, the latter specifying and developing the meaning of the feast.
8. The Coptic Orthodox Church commemorates only one event in our Lord’s life at Epiphany: our Lord’s baptism. Our Lord’s first public manifestation or appearance takes place at His baptism.

9. Baptism is the symbol of death and resurrection; Christ came to the earth in order to die and be raised.
10. Baptism is a symbol of repentance of sin and its forgiveness; Christ came as the Lamb of God who takes upon Himself the sin of the world in order to take it away.
11. Baptism is a symbol of sanctification; Christ has come to sanctify the whole of creation.
12. Baptism is a symbol, finally, of radical renewal. When one is baptized the old is over and the new has come. And Christ has appeared on earth to bring all things to an end, and to make all things new. The act of baptism, therefore, contains in symbol the entire mystery of Christ, the whole purpose of his coming.
13. At his manifestation in the Jordan, our Lord Jesus, who is made like us in every respect except for sin, enters into the water to identify with our fallen condition in order to bring it to an end and to create us anew for life in the kingdom of God.
14. At the river Jordan, God reveals Himself in the person of Jesus. He is the Word of God incarnate, on Him rests the Holy Spirit from all eternity, the Father witnesses to the divinity of Christ and proclaims Him to be His only Son: “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).
15. Baptism and Confirmation (receiving the Holy Spirit) are two sacraments in the Orthodox Church.
16. Christ did not need to be baptized. He was sinless and already full of the Holy Spirit. He did it as an example to us so that we can follow His example. The baptism of Christ is a great example of humility.
17. John the Baptist baptized by water only. That is, John’s baptism did *not* result in receiving the Holy Spirit. Our baptism today, through Christ’s baptism, is a baptism by water and spirit.
18. We cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are baptized. Jesus says in John 3:5, “Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”
19. Theophany is one of the 7 major feasts of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

20. The Coptic Orthodox Church has 7 major feasts and 7 minor feasts for our Lord Jesus. The 7 major feasts are Annunciation, Christmas (Nativity), Theophany, Palm Sunday, Resurrection (Easter), Ascension, and Pentecost. The 7 minor Lord's feasts are Circumcision, entering the temple, the flight into Egypt, the wedding at Cana, the transfiguration, Holy Thursday, Sunday of St. Thomas.

Nayrouz

- Nayrouz is a Persian word which means “the beginning of the year.”
- The Nayrouz feast is celebrated on the first of Tute (September 11).
- The Nayrouz feast is a joyful feast with joyful hymns in the liturgy, which continues until the Feast of the Cross (17 Tute, September 27th).

Diocletian

- Diocletian’s reign was from 284 AD - 305 AD. The Roman Empire was in control of Egypt at that time and he was the Roman Emperor for 21 years.
- Diocletian outlawed Christianity during his reign, and those who were found practicing their faith were martyred.
- Diocletian came and horrified the entire world, and Egypt in particular, with his violence and persecutions.
- It is estimated that he killed over 800,000 Copts during his reign.
- The Egyptian calendar goes back to 4240 BC. Copts restored the calendar with the beginning of Diocletian’s reign in 284 AD, to commemorate the millions of Coptic martyrs.
- His reign is considered a golden era in which the church offered true witnesses to Christ, when the souls of martyrs departed to paradise.
- Thus, the Coptic calendar started in 284 AD, and thus we are now in the year 2004 - 284 + 1 = 1721 A.M. (Anno Martyri, meaning year of the martyrs).
- In the Coptic Synaxarium, we often have dates recorded in terms of A.M.
- The Nayrouz feast is also known as the feast of the Martyrs, and the Coptic Church is often referred to as the Church of the Martyrs.

- The period from September 11 - September 27 is a very joyful one, and the church announces her joy and gladness with the martyrs through bearing the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the sufferings and martyrdom are turned into a source of joy.
- Several well known Coptic saints were martyred during Diocletian's reign, including Saint Demiana, Saint George, and Pope Peter I.
- Pope Peter I is known as the Seal of Martyrs since he was the last one martyred under the reign of Diocletian. He is mentioned in the Commemoration of the Saints in the Divine Liturgy.
- One of the Church Fathers writes, "If the martyrs of the whole world were put on one arm of the balance and the martyrs of Egypt on the other, the balance would tilt in favor of the Egyptians."
- The parents of Diocletian were both slaves to Anulinas, a member of the Roman Senate. His mother named him after the city in which she was born.
- After an outstanding display of valor, young Diocletian was granted his emancipation (freedom); thereafter he worked within the Emperor's palace.
- Gradually he was promoted through various offices until he became a consul (chief magistrate), and later head of the palace guard.
- Diocletian fought in the Persian war and was so impressive that he was eventually elected to the imperial throne.
- Diocletian had astounding perseverance for realizing his goals, with a flexibility for varying the means and great artistry in subserving his skills and the skills of others to the interests of his ambitions, and in disguising these ambitions with the strongest of pretenses, pretending them to be for the sake of justice and common interest.
- He was mean and hypocritical and at the same time, he was courageous, a flatterer, and refined. Such contradictory attributes combined into one person render him as one of the toughest and dangerous sorts.
- Diocletian died an insane man under the care of a Christian nurse.
- After Diocletian, Maximinus Daza was emperor from 305 - 313 AD.

- After Daza, Constantine the Great became Emperor of Rome from 313 AD to 340 AD.
- Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313 AD which restored religious freedom to the Christian Church.
- Constantine the Great died as a Christian.

The Coptic Calendar

- The pharonic Egyptians in 4240 BC were the first in the world who measured time, who dated the years, and who divided the year into months.
- For their record keeping, they used a solar calendar, which was adopted by the rest of the world.
- They (pharonic Egyptians) knew that the year was approximately 365 days long, and they organized their calendar with precision, dividing it into months with 30 days allotted to each.
- To adjust their solar year so that it would begin on schedule, they added an extra 5 days to the total of 12 months, which they called the “small month.”
- The Coptic year was divided into 3 seasons. Every season had 4 months, with the season of the rising of the Nile coming at the head of all the seasons. After this came the season of planting and cultivation, and the last was the season of fruit of harvest.
- In the Coptic Liturgy, we give a special prayer to each of these three seasons. First is the prayer for the rising of the waters, then for the crops, and then for the winds and the fruits. In more recent Liturgy books, these three prayers have now been merged into one prayer.
- Thus, the Coptic year is first and foremost tied to the Nile.
- The Coptic year is based on precise stellar observations. Right before sunrise or sunset in mid-September, one can see a brightly shining star known as Sirius.
- Because the appearance of Sirius always preceded the flooding of the Nile, the source of life and prosperity, the star became an object of adoration to the ancient Egyptians.

- Sirius appears only once a year and close to the sun, and for this reason, the ancient Egyptians called it the “flood bringer.”
- Thus, the ancient Egyptians adapted the Coptic year according to the course of the star, considering the moment of its appearance to be the beginning of the year.
- The Coptic months are
 - Tute (1 Tute is Nayrouz (the new year)) - 30 days
 - Babah - 30 days
 - Hatour - 30 days
 - Kiahk - 30 days (29 Kiahk is the Nativity Feast)
 - Tubah - 30 days
 - Amshir - 30 days
 - Baramhat - 30 days
 - Baramoudah - 30 days
 - Bashans - 30 days
 - Baounah - 30 days
 - Abib - 30 days
 - Misra - 30 days
 - El-Nasi (the small month, 5 days: September 6 - 10)

Church Readings

- During the Nayrouz there are special deacon’s hymns for the Praxis, Psalm, and Gospel responses. The basic response is “Bless the crown of the Year with Your goodness O Lord ...”
- Gospel readings: The gospel reading for the 5th Sunday of a month is always Luke 9:12-17, the two fish and the five loaves.

- On the 29th of each Coptic month (except during the Great Lent, the 50 days of the Holy Pentecost, and the month of Kiahk), the Gospel reading is the Annunciation of Archangel Gabriel to Saint Mary that she would conceive Jesus through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38).
- On the 21st of each Coptic month (except during the Holy 50 days of the Pentecost), we always commemorate the Virgin Mary in the Synaxarium reading.
- On the 12th day of each Coptic month (except during the Holy 50 days of the Pentecost), we commemorate Archangel Michael in the Synaxarium.

The Feast of the Cross

- The Feast of the Cross is celebrated twice in the Coptic Orthodox Church: on the 17th of Tute (September 27th) and the 10th of Baramhat (March 19th).
- The Feast of the Cross is a most joyful day in the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Church sings the hymns and conduct the liturgy in the Hosanna tune, which is the most joyful tune in the Coptic Church. The Palm Sunday and Feast of the Cross liturgies are both done in the Hosanna tune.
- The tunes in the Coptic Church are: Hosanna, Festal (during the Holy 50 days, minor and major Lord's feasts, from Sept 11-27), Kiahk, Annual, and Lenten.
- The Feast of the Cross is *not* one of the Lord's feasts. The Coptic Orthodox observes 7 major Lord's feasts and 7 minor Lord's feasts. The major Lord's feasts are the Annunciation (29th Baramhat, April 7th), Nativity (29th Kiahk, January 7th), Epiphany (11th Tubah, January 19th), Palm Sunday, Resurrection, Ascension (40 days after Resurrection), and Pentecost (50 days after resurrection). The 7 minor Lord's feasts are the Circumcision (6th Tuba, January 14th), Jesus entering the Temple (8th Amshir, February 16th), Flight into Egypt (24th Bashans, June 1), Wedding at Cana (13th Tubah, January 22), Transfiguration on the Mount (13th Misra, August 19th), Holy Thursday, Sunday of Saint Thomas (first Sunday after Easter).
- The Cross of Christ was found by Saint Helena (Helen), the mother of Emperor Constantine the Great. The Commemoration of the Appearance of the Cross is celebrated on the 10th of Baramhat. And because this always comes during the Great Lent, it was substituted by the Church Fathers for the Seventeenth of Tute which is the day of the consecration of its church.
- After Queen Helena found the precious cross, she built several holy places and churches.
- There are three important days regarding the Feast of the Cross:
 - 16th Tute: The Commemoration of the Consecration of the Sanctuaries of the Resurrection.

- 17th Tute: The Feast of the Consecration of the Church of the Honorable Cross (the bishops marched with the honorable Cross around all of the holy places).
- 10th Baramhat: The Commemoration of the Appearance of the Cross

16th Tute

- We celebrate the consecration of the sanctuaries of the Resurrection in Jerusalem in the year 326 A.D.
- In the twentieth year of the reign of Emperor Constantine and after the meeting of the Holy Council at Nicea, Queen Helena told her son Constantine that she had vowed to go to Jerusalem to get the blessings of the holy places and to search for the wood of the life giving Cross.
- He rejoiced at this and gave her much money, and he sent with her a large number of soldiers.
- When she arrived there and received the blessings of the holy places, she searched for the wood of the Cross and found it after much toil. She praised it with great praises and paid to it much reverence and honor.
- She commanded the building of the sanctuaries of the Resurrection - the Golgotha, Bethlehem and the manger, the fortress of Zion, Gethsemane and the sanctuaries, and other holy places - and that they be inlaid with pearl and covered with gold and silver.
- There was in Jerusalem a saintly bishop who advised her not to do that saying, “For after a while foreign people will come and seize this place and destroy it and take the precious stones and the silver and the gold. But it is preferable to build good and strong buildings and the remainder of the money be given to the poor and the needy.”
- She accepted his words and gave him the money and set him in charge of the work.
- When she returned back to her son and told him what she had done, he rejoiced, and sent large sums of money and commanded to pay the workers their wages in full so they would not complain.

- When the building of the holy places was finished in the thirtieth year of the reign of Emperor Constantine, he sent vessels and precious vestments for the altars. He sent word to the Archbishop of Constantinople and to Saint Athanasius, the Pope of Alexandria to take their bishops and to go to Jerusalem where they would meet the Archbishop of Antioch and the Bishop of Jerusalem.
- They tarried there until the sixteenth of the month of Tute, when they consecrated all the altars that had been built.
- On the seventeenth day they marched with the Honorable Cross around all the holy places and they worshiped God therein, and gave offerings, and they glorified the Cross and honored it. Then they returned to their chairs.

17th Tute

- The Cross was revealed by the lover of God, Queen Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, from under the pile of dirt in Golgotha, after she ordered its removal.
- As to the reason for how this great pile of dirt came into being, it was thus: the Jewish leaders when they saw all the signs and wonders which were made manifest from the sepulcher of our Savior, such as raising the dead and healing the sick, became angry, and they sent forth throughout Judea and Jerusalem ordering all the people to cast the sweepings of their houses and the dirt over the sepulcher of Jesus of Nazareth. And they continued to do so for more than two hundred years, until it became a very great heap.
- When Saint Helen came to Jerusalem, and asked the Jews about the whereabouts of the Cross, they did not inform her. Finally, some of them told her about an old Jew called Judas who knew the place.
- She called him, and he denied at first but when she urged him, he told her about the pile. She ordered its removal and the Holy Cross was found.
- She built a church for it and consecrated it and celebrated it on the seventeenth day of the month of Tute.
- All Christian people make pilgrimages to that place every year as they do in the Feast of the Resurrection.

- A certain Samaritan called Isaac, as he was traveling with his family among the people going to Jerusalem, reproved the people for taking such trouble in going to Jerusalem to worship a piece of wood.
- Among the people was a priest whose name was Okhidus. While traveling along the road, they became thirsty.
- They found no water and they came to a well where the water was foul and bitter. The people became dismayed.
- Isaac the Samaritan started mocking them saying, “If I witness a power by the name of the Cross, I will become a believer of Christ.” The priest Okhidus was moved with divine zeal and prayed over that foul water and made the sign of the Cross on it, and it became sweet.
- All the people and their animals drank, but when Isaac drank, the water was bitter and wormy.
- He regretted and cried and came to the saint, Father Okhidus, and he bowed down at his feet and believed in the Lord Christ.
- Then he drank from the water, and he found it sweet. That water had the power of becoming sweet for the believers and bitter for the others.
- A cross of light appeared in the well and a church was built there. When Isaac the Samaritan arrived in Jerusalem, he went to its bishop who baptized him and his family.
- The appearance of the Honorable Cross at the hands of Queen Helena was on the tenth of Baramhat. And because this always comes during the Great Lent, it was substituted by the Church Fathers for the Seventeenth of Tute which is the day of consecration of its church.

10th Baramhat

- When Queen Helen’s son Constantine accepted the Faith in the Lord Christ, she vowed to go to Jerusalem to look for the Cross.

- Her righteous son prepared everything needed to fulfill this holy visit. When she arrived to Jerusalem with multitude of soldiers, she asked about the place of the Cross but no one would tell her.
- She took one of the Jewish elders and pressured him by hunger and thirst until he was forced to direct them to the place where they might find the Cross at the hill of Golgotha.
- She ordered them to clear out the site of Golgotha where they found three crosses and that was in the year 326 A.D.
- However, they did not know the cross upon which Our Lord Christ was crucified, they brought a dead man and they laid upon him one of the crosses and then the other, but he did not rise up. But when they laid the third cross upon him, he rose up immediately, then they realized that this was the Cross of Our Lord Christ.
- The Empress and all the believers kneeled down before the Holy Cross, and she sent a piece of it with the nails to her son Constantine.
- Immediately after, she built the churches that were mentioned on the Sixteenth day of the blessed month of Tute.
- When the Persians were defeated by Heraclius, they retreated from Egypt to their country in 627 AD.
- On their way back they passed through Jerusalem, a Persian prince entered the church of the Cross which was built by Empress Helen.
- He saw a great light shining from a piece of wood located on a place decorated with gold. He thrust his hand to it and there went forth from it fire which burned his fingers.
- The Christians told him that this is the base of the Holy Cross and they told him how it was discovered and no one was able to touch it except a Christian.
- He deceived the two deacons who were standing to guard it and gave them much money so they would carry this piece and go with it with him to his country.
- They took it and put it in a box and went with him to his country along with those who were captured from the city of Jerusalem.

- When Emperor Heraclius heard that, he went with his army to Persia, fought with them and slew many of them.
- He traveled about this country searching for this piece of the Holy Cross but he could not find it, for the Persian prince had dug a hole in his garden and ordered the two deacons to put the box in it and buried it, and then he killed them.
- One of the captives of that Persian prince, who was the daughter of one of the priests, was looking out of the window by chance and saw what happened.
- She went to Heraclius the Emperor and told him what she saw. He went with the bishops, priests and the soldiers to the place.
- They dug there and found the box, they took the piece of the Holy Cross out, in 628 A.D., wrapped it in magnificent apparel and Heraclius took it to the city of Constantinople and kept it there.

Synaxarium Reading for 16th Tute

We celebrate the consecration of the sanctuaries of the Resurrection in Jerusalem in the year 326 A.D. In the twentieth year of the reign of Emperor Constantine and after the meeting of the Holy Council at Nicea, Queen Helena told her son Constantine that she had vowed to go to Jerusalem to get the blessings of the holy places and to search for the wood of the life giving Cross. He rejoiced at this and gave her much money, and he sent with her a large number of soldiers. When she arrived there and received the blessings of the holy places, she searched for the wood of the Cross and found it after much toil. She praised it with great praises and paid to it much reverence and honor. She commanded the building of the sanctuaries of the Resurrection - the Golgotha, Bethlehem and the manger, the fortress of Zion, Gethsemane and the sanctuaries, and other holy places - and that they be inlaid with pearl and covered with gold and silver. There was in Jerusalem a saintly bishop who advised her not to do that saying, "For after a while foreign people will come and seize this place and destroy it and take the precious stones and the silver and the gold. But is preferable to build good and strong buildings and the remainder of the money be given to the poor and the needy." She accepted his words and gave him the money and set him in charge of the work. When she returned back to her son and told him what she had done, he rejoiced, and sent large sums of money and commanded to pay the workers their wages in full so they would not complain. When the building of the holy places was finished in the thirtieth year of the reign of Emperor Constantine, he sent vessels and precious vestments for the altars. He sent word to the Archbishop of Constantinople and to Saint Athanasius, the Pope of Alexandria to take their bishops and to go to Jerusalem where they would meet the Archbishop of Antioch and the Bishop of Jerusalem. They tarried there until the sixteenth of the month of Tute, when they consecrated all the altars that had been built. On the seventeenth day they marched with the Honorable Cross around all the holy places and they worshiped God therein, and gave offerings, and they glorified the Cross and honored it. Then they returned to their chairs. May their prayers be with us all. Amen.

Synaxarium Reading for 17th Tute

On this day the church celebrates the appearance of the Honorable Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was revealed by the lover of God, Queen Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, from under the pile of Golgotha, after she ordered its removal. As to the reason for how this great pile of dirt came into being, it was thus: the Jewish leaders when they saw all the signs and wonders which were made manifest from the sepulcher of our Savior, such as raising the dead and healing the sick, became angry, and they sent forth throughout Judea and Jerusalem ordering all the people to cast the sweepings of their houses and the dirt over the sepulcher of Jesus of Nazareth. And they continued to do so for more than two hundred years, until it became a very great heap. When Saint Helena came to Jerusalem, and asked the Jews about the whereabouts of the Cross, they did not inform her. Finally, some of them told her about an old Jew called Judas who knew the place. She called him, and he denied at first but when she urged him, he told her about the pile. She ordered its removal and the Holy Cross was found. she built a church for it and consecrated it and celebrated it on the seventeenth day of the month of Tute. All Christian people make pilgrimages to that place every year as they do in the Feast of the Resurrection. A certain Samaritan called Isaac, as he was traveling with his family among the people going to Jerusalem, reprovved the people for taking such trouble in going to Jerusalem to worship a piece of wood. Among the people was a priest whose name was Okhidus. While traveling along the road, they became thirsty. They found no water and they came to a well where the water was foul and bitter. The people became dismayed. Isaac the Samaritan started mocking them saying, "If I witness a power by the name of the Cross, I will become a believer of Christ." The priest Okhidus was moved with divine zeal and prayed over that foul water and made the sign of the Cross on it, and it became sweet. All the people and their animals drank, but when Isaac drank, the water was bitter and wormy. He regretted and cried and came to the saint, Father Okhidus, and he bowed down at his feet and believed in the Lord Christ. Then he drank from the water, and he found it sweet. That water had the power of becoming sweet for the believers and bitter for the others. A cross of light appeared in the well and a church was built there. When Isaac the Samaritan arrived in Jerusalem, he went to its bishop who baptized him and his family. The appearance of the Honorable Cross at the hands of Queen Helena was on the tenth of Baramhat. And because this always comes during fasting, it was substituted by the fathers for the Seventeenth of Tute which is the day of consecration of its church. Glory and worship be to Jesus Christ our Lord forever and ever. Amen.

Synaxarium Reading for 10th Baramhat

The church celebrates the appearance of the glorious Cross of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ twice: The First on the sixteenth day of the month of Tute, 326 A.D. by the hands of the righteous Empress St. Helen, the mother of Constantine the great, the righteous Emperor. This Saint when her son Constantine accepted the Faith in the Lord Christ, she vowed to go to Jerusalem. Her righteous son prepared everything needed to fulfill this holy visit. When she arrived to Jerusalem with a multitude of soldiers, she asked about the place of the Cross but no one would tell her. She took one of the Jewish elders and pressured him by hunger and thirst until he was forced to direct them to the place where they might find the Cross at the hill of Golgotha. She ordered them to clear out the site of Golgotha where they found three crosses and that was in the year 326 A.D. However, they did not know the cross upon which Our Lord Christ was crucified, they brought a dead man and they laid upon him one of the crosses and then the other but he did not rise up but when they laid the third cross upon him he rose up immediately, then they realized that this was the Cross of Our Lord Christ. The Empress and all the believers kneeled down before the Holy Cross, and she sent a piece of it with the nails to her son Constantine. Immediately after, she built the churches that were mentioned on the Sixteenth day of the blessed month of Tute. The Second celebration that the church commemorates the Cross is on the Tenth day of the month of Baramhat by the hands of Emperor Heraclius, in 627 A.D. When the Persians were defeated by Heraclius they retreated from Egypt to their country. On their way back they passed through Jerusalem, a Persian prince entered the church of the Cross which was built by Empress Helen. He saw a great light shining from a piece of wood located on a place decorated with gold. He thrust his hand to it and there went forth from it fire which burned his fingers. The Christians told him that this is the base of the Holy Cross and they told him how it was discovered and no one was able to touch it except a Christian. He deceived the two deacons who were standing to guard it and gave them much money so they would carry this piece and go with it with him to his country. They took it and put it in a box and went with him to his country along with those who were captured from the city of Jerusalem. When Emperor Heraclius heard that, he went with his army to Persia, fought with them and slew many of them. He traveled about this country searching for this piece of the Holy Cross but he could not find it, for the Persian prince had dug a hole in his garden and ordered the two deacons to put the box in it and buried it and then he killed them. One of the captives of that Persian prince, who was the daughter of one of the priests, was looking out of

the window by chance and saw what happened. She went to Heraclius the Emperor and told him what she saw. He went with the bishops, priests and the soldiers to the place. They dug there and found the box, they took the piece of the Holy Cross out, in 628 A.D., wrapped it in magnificent apparel and Heraclius took it to the city of Constantinople and kept it there. May the blessings of the Holy Cross be with us and Glory be to God forever. Amen.

Kiahk - Part I

- The Nativity fast (the Advent) starts on November 25th and ends on January 7th (29th Kiahk).
- The Nativity fast is 43 days long. We fast in order to prepare ourselves for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ.
- The original Nativity fast was 40 days. Why 40? the number 40 represents a period of trial and completion in the Bible. Jesus fasted 40 days on the mount before starting His ministry, the flood lasted for 40 days in the days of Noah, Jesus ascended to heaven 40 days after the resurrection, the Israelites were in the wilderness for 40 years until they entered the promised land, Jonah proclaimed to the Ninevites that the city would be overthrown in 40 days, Moses was on the mount for 40 days, etc...
- Three days were added to the fast by Patriarch Abraam (62nd Coptic Pope) in 970 AD as a remembrance of the moving of Mukkatam Mountain. The moving of Mukkatam Mountain is read in the Coptic Synaxarium on 6th Kiahk (December 16th), which is the departure day of Patriarch Abraam.
- January 7th is the Feast of the Nativity, one of the seven major Lord's feasts.
- The month of Kiahk starts from 1st Kiahk (December 11th) to 29th Kiahk (January 7th).
- Kiahk is period where we again focus on the life of Saint Mary and the birth of Jesus. The midnight praises during the month of Kiahk focus on the life of Saint Mary.
- The Gospel readings for the liturgy during the four Sundays of Kiahk are all from Luke and sequentially cover the entire first chapter of Luke.
 - **First Sunday of Kiahk** - The Gospel reading is Luke 1:1-25. This reading is the Annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist by the Archangel Gabriel to Zacharias.
 - **Second Sunday of Kiahk** - The Gospel reading is Luke 1:26-38. This reading is the Annunciation of the birth of Christ to Saint Mary by Archangel Gabriel.

The Annunciation of the birth of Christ to Saint Mary by Archangel Gabriel is one of the seven major Lord's feasts, celebrated on 29th Baramhat (April 7th). Also, on the 29th of each Coptic month (except during the Great Lent, the 50 days of the

Holy Pentecost, and the month of Kiahk), Luke 1:26-38 is the Gospel reading for the Divine Liturgy.

- **Third Sunday of Kiahk** - The Gospel reading is Luke 1:39-56. This reading is the visit of Saint Mary to Elizabeth's house, where John the baptist leaped in Elizabeth's womb and the Virgin Mary stayed with Elizabeth 3 months until John the baptist was born. John the baptist was 6 months older than Jesus.
 - **The Fourth Sunday of Kiahk** - The Gospel reading is Luke 1:57-80. This Gospel reading records the birth of John the Baptist to Elizabeth. In this reading Elizabeth insisted on the name John and Zacharias's tongue was loosed and he prophesied about Christ.
 - **29th Kiahk (Nativity Feast)** - The Gospel reading is Matthew 2:1-12. This Gospel reading is the birth of Jesus, the visit of the wise men, and the declaration of Herod.
- The Gospel of Luke is the only Gospel that records the annunciation to Saint Mary by Archangel Gabriel.
 - The Gospel of Matthew records the Annunciation to Joseph by Archangel Gabriel (Matthew 1:1-25).
 - Luke and Matthew are the only two Gospels that record the birth of Christ (Matthew 2:1-23, Luke 2:1-52).
 - Luke is the only Gospel that records the circumcision of Jesus (Luke 2:21-39) and Entry into the Temple (Luke 2:21-39), and Matthew is the only Gospel that records the Flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-23). These three events are minor Lord's feasts in the Coptic Church. The circumcision is celebrated on 6th Tubah (January 14th), the Entry into the Temple is celebrated on 8th Amshir (February 16th), and the Flight into Egypt is celebrated on 24 Bashans (June 1st).
 - During the month of Kiahk, the deacon's responses are different than the annual responses. The Intercessions, the Praxis, and Gospel responses are different, and sung in the Kiahk tune. Also, the Gospel response for the 3rd and 4th Sundays of Kiahk is different than the 1st and 2nd Sundays of Kiahk.
 - The Communion hymns focus on Saint Mary and the birth of Christ. such hymns include The Burning Bush, The Three Youth in the Fiery Furnace, and Amen Alleluia. Also, Rejoice O Mary (Efrahi Ya-Marium) is often sung during the liturgy.

Kiahk - Part II

- In this lesson, we will learn about the Tasbeha, both the annual Tasbeha and the Tasbeha for Kiahk.
 - The word Tasbeha means praise, and in English it is referred to as the Midnight Psalmody. The word “Psalmody” is derived from the word Psalms, which are the main body of poems in Scripture (the Book of Psalms) and were given a distinctive system of accents.
 - Praising is a natural response to the love of God in our spiritual life. Praising and singing is the work of the Angels and the heavenly hosts, with all their ranks, as the Lord said to Job, “Where were you ... when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38: 4, 7).
 - The Tasbeha is chanted from The Holy Psalmody book. There are two kinds of psalmodies:
 - The annual psalmody which is used for the entire Coptic year except for the month of Kiahk.
 - The Kiahk psalmody, which is used only during the month of Kiahk.
 - In short, the theme of Tasbeha can be explained as a journey of an enslaved soul that woke up from slavery and is now rejoicing at the mighty hand of the Lord that saved it from slavery and passed it through water (the Red Sea) and fire (the three young men) until it reached its final place of rest (heaven), and is now singing joyfully with the cloud of witnesses in front of the Throne of God. As we read in Psalm 66:12, “We passed through water and through fire and you brought us out to your rich fulfillment.”
 - The Tasbeha is composed of Hoces, also called Canticles or Odes. The three words Hoce, Canticle, and Ode all mean the same thing. A Canticle is a song or hymn with words taken from the Bible.
 - The word Hoce is a Coptic word for canticle.
1. **Ten Theno** - The Tasbeha starts with the beautiful long tune **Ten Theno**, which means “Let us arise O sons of light that we may praise the Lord of powers.” Each stanza in Ten Theno ends with “Glory be to You, O lover of mankind.”

2. **Tennav** - After Ten Theno, **Tennav** is sung which means “Let us look at the Resurrection of Christ.” Tennav is said every day from the Feast of the Resurrection and during the Holy Fifty days, and then after that, it is said only on Sundays until the end of the month of Hatour.

3. **The First Hoce (Canticle, Ode)** - The first hoce consists of the praises of Moses when he and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and were saved from the hands of the Egyptians. It can be found in Exodus, Chapter 15.
 - The crossing of the Red Sea is a cause for joy and praise to all of Christianity. This hoce also symbolizes every person who has come out of the strict slavery of sin.
 - We praise with Moses in the Tasbeha saying, “Your right hand O Lord is glorified with power, Your right hand my Lord has defeated your enemies.”
 - The theme of the first hoce is **freedom from slavery and water**.
 - Following the first hoce, the *Lobsch* is sung. The word Lobsch is a Coptic word which means explanation, and thus the Lobsch is an explanation about the previous hoce. It is a poetic praise that is sung in a long hymn and beautiful melody.

4. **The Second Hoce** - The second hoce consists of Psalm 135.
 - In the second hoce, we thank God for He is good and beneficent.
 - We meditate on His creation and we thank Him for His creation, as we say, “Alleluia, His mercy endures forever.” This phrase is repeated after every verse of the Psalm.
 - After the second hoce is another Lobsch, and it starts by “Let us thank Christ our Lord with the Psalmist David the Prophet.”

5. **The Third Hoce** - The third hoce is the praise of the three saintly youths which we can find in the Canonical Books (addition to the Book of Daniel).
 - In this hoce, the three youth ask all of creation to join with them in the praise of God and the blessings of His infinite power, as we say, “Praise the Lord O you rain with the dew. Praise the Lord you clouds and wind.”
 - After each verse, we say “Let us praise Him and exalt Him above all, forever.”

- One might wonder why we say “Praise the Lord O you rain, dew, clouds, wind,...”. When we see their beauty, we express our feelings of gratitude and thanksgiving on their behalf. They would like to send a message to God their creator, but they cannot, so we act as a bridge or a messenger to deliver these praises to God.
 - The third hoce has the **fire** theme.
 - Following the third hoce comes the Vatos Psali for the three saintly youths. It is sung in Greek and Coptic.
 - After the Vatos Psali is another Greek praise for the three saintly youths called **Tenen**, which is sung only in the month of Kiahk.
 - After Tenen is another Coptic praise for the three saintly youths called **Ten Oh Ensok**, meaning “We follow you with our hearts”.
6. **Commemoration of the Saints** - After these hymns comes the commemoration of the saints. When we become involved in praising and glorifying God, the entire victorious church participates with us, that is, all of the heavenly hosts in heaven and the saints.
- It is the souls of the saints who have preceded us to paradise who participate with us, support us, and accompany us in our continuous struggle against the world, sin, and the weakness of the body.
 - We also ask intercessions from the heavenly hosts and saints, and prayers from the prophets. We say “Intercede in our behalf that He may forgive us our sins.”
 - Specifically, we say “Intercede on our behalf” to Saint Mary, the heavenly hosts, Saint John the Baptist, and the 144,000.” We say “Pray to the Lord on our behalf” to the martyrs, the prophets, and the rest of the saints.
7. **Doxologies** - After the commemoration of the saints come the Doxologies. The word Doxology come from the Greek word Doxa which means glory. Thus, Doxology means glorification. It is paying honor and respect to the saints.
8. **The Fourth Hoce** - After we receive the blessings of the saints and the heavenly hosts, we return once again to praising God.
- The fourth hoce is composed of three psalms. They are Psalm 148, 149, and 150. These psalms express the joy, victory, and fulfillment.

- The theme of this hoce is **heaven and rich fulfillment**.
 - Ten Theno to the end of the fourth hoce is sung every day in the Midnight Psalmody without change. These praises are sung the same set way in every day of the Midnight Psalmody.
9. **The Psalis** - After the fourth hoce come the Psalis, which change every day. The word Psali is a Greek word which means chant (song). There are seven Psalis and each day of the week has one Psali specifically for that day.
- The Psali is organized around the name of the Lord Jesus, which is repeated in almost every verse.
 - Sunday has two Psalis. The first is a hymn for the Virgin Mary and the second is for the Lord Jesus, **Ai Koty**, which means “I asked for You from the depth of my heart.” Thus, at the end of the first stanza in Ai Koty, we say, “My Lord Jesus help me” and in the second stanza, we say “My Lord Jesus Christ help me.”
 - At the end of the Psali for Jesus, in the days of Adam, we sing **Lipon Anshan The ooti**, which means “And whenever we gather for prayer, let us bless the name of my Lord Jesus.” In the days of Vatos, we sing **Eshop an Shan Erepsalin**, which means “When we sing hymns let us say with ... O Lord Jesus Christ create mercy with our souls.”
 - Adam refers to the days Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, and Vatos refers to the days Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The tunes in the Adam and Vatos days are different.
 - We use Adam and Vatos to refer to the days because Adam, who is the Adam of the Old Testament, is the first word in the Monday Theotokia, and Vatos, which is a Coptic word meaning “bush” (referring to the burning bush that Moses saw) is the first word in the Thursday Theotokia.
10. **The Theotokia** - Theotokos is a Greek word meaning mother of God. The word Theo means God and tokos means mother. Thus, the Theotokias are all of the prophecies and symbols in the Old Testament referring to the Virgin Mary.
- In the Theotokias, there are deep theological praises regarding the Incarnation of Christ.

- For each day of the week, there is a specific Theotokia, and thus there are seven in all. The tune of the Theotokia is different in the Adam and Vatos days.
 - In the Sunday Theotokia, we read from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:29-32), then sing **Shere Ne Maria**, and **Semouti**.
 - The Theotokias end with the Lobsch (explanation), with the exception of Sunday which does not have a Lobsch. Instead, on Sunday, we say **Nem Ghar nen Nooti**, which means “Who in the gods is like You O Lord.” This praise is sung in the Holy Fifty days after Easter, then only on Sundays until the last Sunday in the month of Hatour.
 - **Antiphonarium** - After the Theotokias, we read the Antiphonarium, or El-Defnar of the day. This is a shortened story of the saint of the day. The word Antiphonarium is a Greek word which means “a brief history.”
 - After the Antiphonarium, we recite the end of the Theotokias: In Adam we say, **Nik Nai O Panooti** which means “Your mercies O my God are countless.” In Vatos, we say, **O Pen Chois Isos Pikhrestos** which means “Our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - After the end of the Theotokias, we recite **We magnify you O mother of the true light**, and then recite the **Nicene Creed**.
 - Then we ask for God’s mercy and recite **Ef Noti Nai Nan, Kirie Eleyson**.
 - Then we pray **Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth** and end with **Our Father who art in heaven**.
- During Kiahk, we use this same basic structure except several more hymns are added.
 - We also say all seven Psalis, the seven Theotokias, and the seven Lobsch’s in the Sunday Midnight Psalmody.

The Transfiguration of Jesus

- The word “transfigured” means “to change form or appearance.”
- The transfiguration is one of the 7 minor Lord’s feasts in the Coptic church, where Jesus was transfigured and talked with Moses and Elijah. The Apostles Peter, James and John witnessed the transfiguration. It is celebrated on 13th Misra (August 19th), during the fast of Saint Mary. The Gospel reading for this minor feast day is Mark 9:2-13.
- The transfiguration is a *theophany* - a manifestation of God, especially of the divinity of Christ, through a display of His uncreated, divine energy. Therefore, the Coptic Orthodox Church celebrates the Transfiguration as a minor Lord’s feast.
- The Transfiguration is recorded in three of the four Gospels. It is found in Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-13, and Luke 9:28-36. It is also mentioned in 2 Peter 1:16-21.
- The Transfiguration occurred shortly after the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand. The account of the Transfiguration confirms that Jesus is the Son of God and points to fulfillment of the prediction that He will come in His Father’s glory at the end of the age (Matthew 16:27).
- This event marks the beginning of Jesus’s journey to Jerusalem for His passion.
- Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother to witness the Transfiguration. Peter, James and John are the inner circle of the apostles. They were also chosen to be separate from the rest of the twelve in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37) and at the raising of Jarius’s daughter (Mark 5:37).
- The Transfiguration took place on a high mountain. A mountain is symbolic of revelation, a kind of Galilean Sinai; God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:12-18) and Elijah at the same place (1 Kings 19:8-18).
- The brightness of the illumination in the Transfiguration recalls the brightness of the face of Moses after the Sinai revelation (Exodus 34:29-35), which made it necessary for Moses to veil his face.

Several elements of the Transfiguration show that Christ is the Messiah and God.

1. Because God is light (1 John 1:5), the bright cloud, the shining face of Jesus like the sun, and the witness of His garment (Matthew 12:2, 5) all demonstrate that Jesus is God.
2. The Father bears witness from heaven concerning His Son. He does *not* say, “This has become My beloved Son,” but “This *is* My beloved son” (Matthew 17:5), indicating that this divine glory is Christ’s by nature. From eternity past, infinitely before Jesus’s Baptism and Transfiguration, He is God’s Son, fully sharing in the essence of the Father: Jesus Christ is God of God!
3. The Transfiguration not only proclaims Christ’s divine sonship, but foreshadows His future glory when He as the Messiah will usher in the long-awaited Kingdom: The bright cloud recalls temple worship and the cloud that went before the Israelites in the wilderness, the visible sign of God being extraordinarily present. Peter sees this as a sign that the Kingdom has come. Knowing that the Feast of Tabernacles is the feast of the coming Kingdom, he asks to build booths (Matthew 17:4), as was done at that feast, to serve as symbols of God’s dwelling among the just in the Kingdom.
4. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus in the Transfiguration. Moses and Elijah represent, respectively, the Law and the Prophets. Specifically, Moses represents the Law and all those who have died, and Elijah represents the Prophets, and since Elijah did not experience death (2 Kings 2:11), he also represents those who are alive in Christ. It is Elijah who will come to bear witness of Christ, along with Enoch, in the ends of the days (Revelation, 11:1-13). Their presence shows that the Law and the Prophets, the living and the dead, all bear witness to Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of the whole Old Testament. The term “the Law and the Prophets” was used to designate the entire collection of Old Testament books, and thus the fullness of the revelation of God to Israel. Jesus joins Moses and Elijah as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17). Jesus says in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”

The presence of Moses and Elijah also manifests the communion of the saints (Hebrews 12:1). Both men are immediately recognizable, and talk with the Lord. The disciples are able to understand Jesus’s words “Elijah has already come” (Matthew 17:12), referring to John the Baptist, who was the last of the prophets.

5. Finally, the Holy Trinity is manifest here, for Christ is transfigured (Matthew 17:2), the Father speaks from heaven testifying to Jesus's divine sonship (Matthew 17:5), and the Spirit is present in the form of a dazzling light surrounding Christ's Person, overshadowing the whole mountain (Matthew 17:5).
- Neither Matthew or Mark tell us what was discussed in the Transfiguration, but Luke 9:31 says "They spoke of His decease (exodus), which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."
 - In Matthew 17:4, Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Matthew uses the word "Lord", while Mark uses "Rabbi" as the form of address. "Lord" literally means "my great one", an address of respect to God, angels, and earthly sovereigns.
 - Peter is a master of understatement. No doubt he is making a reference to the Feast of Tabernacles, one of three yearly feasts for which all males of Israel were required to travel to the Temple and lived in tents (or booths). The feast occurred in September-October and lasted for eight days. The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated the sojourn of the Israelites on Mount Sinai while they received the revelation of the Law through Moses. This is not the revelation of another law, a greater reality is manifested here. Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets.
 - In Matthew 17:5, we read "While He was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him." This is the glory cloud, the divine presence, the cloud that occupied the tabernacle in the time of Moses. These words of God the Father are a revelation of the sonship of Jesus; Matthew repeats the words spoken at the Baptism of Christ (Matthew 3:17) and adds "Hear Him" (similar to Saint Mary's "do whatever he tells you" in John 2:5). Jesus is the Son and the revealer. The Israelites are commanded to hear and listen to a prophet like Moses whom God will raise up for them (Deuteronomy 18:15). As we read in Deuteronomy 18:15, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear."
 - In Matthew 17:6, we read, "And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid." This is their reaction to the divine command (Hear Him) rather than to the vision itself.

- In Matthew 17:7, we read, “But Jesus came and touched them and said, ‘Arise, and do not be afraid.’ Jesus’s touch overcomes their fear and perhaps consecrates them to further service.
- In Matthew 17:8, we read, “And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.” Moses and Elijah have withdrawn; diminished in significance before the fuller revelation in Jesus.
- And finally, in Matthew 17:9, we read, “Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.”
- There are several places in the Old and New Testaments that speak of Elijah’s coming in the end of the days to preach the Gospel before the second coming of Christ. In Malachi 4:5-6, we read, “Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” Also, in Mark 9:12 and Matthew 17:11, we read “Indeed Elijah is coming first and restores all things.”

Jonah and Christ

Introduction

- In the story of Jonah, the Lord gives us an illustration of His own death and burial, three days and three nights on the heart of the earth. Death is final, and flesh, which perishes and rots, is unable to pass through it. The Lord's resurrected life after three days was not the continuation of His previous life but was a new life in a new body, without the constraints of mortality, because He had overcome death by destroying its power in the old body.

Who is Jonah?

- The Bible tells us that Jonah, who lived between 850 - 820 BC was the son of Amittai, a Hebrew from the tribe of Zebulun, from the city of Gath-hepher within the borders of Zebulun.
- Tradition teaches us that he was the son of the widow who Elijah raised from the dead, so there was an important reason for this man to come back to life!
- Jonah predicted the reign of Jeroboam II, King of Israel, Amaziah, and Ezra, kings of Judah.
- He is considered to be a contemporary of Nahum and Obadiah, who called for the judgment of the peoples as nations.
- Zebulun's inheritance in the land of Canaan was in accordance with the prophecy Jacob gave before his death: "Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon" (Genesis 49:13). The prophecy was fulfilled during the days of Joshua, when he assigned this coastland to the tribe of Zebulun, from this we can conclude that Jonah lived by the sea.

Nineveh

- Nineveh, according to the book, was a great city, the capital of Assyria, nowadays Iraq. Assyria was founded by the Assyrians, the grandsons of Cush, the son of Ham, the son of Noah.
- That God should send Jonah as a prophet to warn Nineveh (a gentile city that did not know right from wrong) of its destruction if it did not repent, was an indication of God's purposes for the nations: He sent His Son to call to repentance the nations of the world that do not know right from wrong, that their sins might be forgiven. In the same way that Nineveh was brought to repentance through Jonah's preaching, so the nations now enter their period of opportunity for repentance in response to preaching in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But Nineveh's repentance was not without cost. Jonah paid the price (as Christ paid the price on the Cross) of his call by spending three days and three nights incarcerated in the belly of the whale.

The Story of Jonah

- The story of Jonah is references in the New Testament by Christ Himself in in Luke 11:29-30, when He said, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign; and no sign will be given to it, except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation." Also, in Luke 11:32, we read, "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here."
- What happened?
 - God was going to destroy Nineveh, a city of Assyria. Assyria was the nation that would, 40 years later, destroy Israel and make its tribes scatter.
 - Why did Jonah run and why didn't he want to give the message of repentance? Jonah, as a prophet and student of the scriptures, figured that if Assyria was destroyed then Assyria could not destroy Israel, and thus he ran. The Assyrians were the enemies of the Israelites. Therefore, he did not want them to repent but to be destroyed, so they could not destroy Israel in return.

- But God offers repentance and salvation to all, including the gentile city of Nineveh.
- To avoid God’s call to preach to the Ninevites, Jonah planned to go to Tarshish in Asia Minor, which was 250 miles away from Nineveh. It is amazing how God pursued him and repeated His commandment once the whale had vomited him out onto the beach. The Lord commanded that something be carried out on earth, and no one can go against Divine providence, whatever opportunity he may feel he has to escape it. To get to Nineveh, Jonah had to travel 250 miles on foot.
- When Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, he prayed a beautiful prayer (Jonah 2:2-10). This beautiful prayer is prayed in the Apocalypse prayers the day before Easter, because it is a prophecy of Christ descending into Hades. In this prayer,
 - it is important to note in verse 2, we read the word “Sheol”, which means “underworld”. Christ went into the underworld (Hades) to take the believers with Him to paradise.
 - We also read, “Yet You have brought up my life from the pit” (Jonah 2:6). This verse is symbolic of repentance and bringing back someone from the dead. Christ rose from the dead after descending into Hades, and thus this verse is a prophecy about Christ’s resurrection and descension into Hades.
- The repentance of the Ninevites is powerful. We read, “So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, ‘Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?’ (Jonah 3:5-9).
- This is one of the most humble, sincere, truthful, and courageous acts of repentance recorded in the entire Bible. It is the courage of one who, in facing death, casts his life to the ground in humility.

- It is the same courage shown in the victory over death at the cross, where death itself was trampled into dust. How great is this king of Nineveh, to whom God gave grace, courage and daring with which to face death.
- What great humility and wisdom this king of Nineveh had in the way he ordered even suckling babes to be removed from their mother's breasts so that their cries may reach the Lord of heaven, and that food and water be withheld from cattle in order that their lowing, louder than a man's cry, might be heard by the Lord of mercy.
- The king repented in great humility. He made himself equal to his serfs, stepping down from his throne to don sackcloth made from goats hair. He prostrated himself on the ground in full view of his slaves so that they might copy him by also wearing sackcloth, covering themselves in ashes, and make supplications to God. In accordance with a royal decree, their repentance was for injustice, deception, stealing, evil doing and inequity. Who has ever seen a king leading his people to cry out and call for repentance by wearing sackcloth and covering himself in ashes?
- Their fear was not fear of death, because through their actions they had overcome the pain of death; their fear was fear of God, who holds in His hands the power of death and life!

The Power of Jonah's Fast

- This fast was instituted by Pope Abraam, the 62nd Pope of Alexandria. He was the Pope who made the Mokkatam Mountain move: he understood the power of a three day fast.
- Jonah's fast is always exactly two weeks before the beginning of Lent.
- This fast is a great example of God hearing our prayers and repentance.
 - The people of Nineveh prayed and repented for three days, God immediately heard them and had mercy on them. Jonah prayed from the belly of the whale, God immediately heard his prayer and repentance and had mercy on him.
 - This fast is a great opportunity for us to do an intensive and powerful three days of repentance. We fast in preparation for the blessings and mercy of God, as the Ninevites did.

Some lessons to learn from this story

- Jonah was running away because he knew that if he delivered God's message to the Ninevites, that it would not result in good consequences for his own people, the Israelites. We should never put our own desires and our own will ahead of God's will, even if it's out of fear. We must trust in God that His way is best for our life.
- This story gives us hope. God is forgiving and merciful. He listens to the requests of people through their repentance.

Lying to the Holy Spirit

- During the Fast of the Apostles, we should focus our spiritual readings on the book of Acts.
- The book of Acts was written by St. Luke, who was also one of the 70 apostles.
- The first two Chapters of the book of Acts discuss the Ascension and the Pentecost.
- Pentecost marks the birth of the Church. It is the day when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples and believers in the form of tongues of fire.
- The first four centuries of the Church are often referred to as the period of the Early Church. The books of Acts records the Acts of the Apostles (Holy Spirit) in the Early Church.
- Pentecost in the Old Testament was also a feast, called the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus, 23:14-16) celebrating 50 days after the Passover.
- One of the first stories we encounter in the Early Church in the book of Acts is the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10).
- The story of Ananias and Sapphira is an excellent story about lying and shows us the consequences of lying.
- Lying is one of the worst sins we can do, since its originator and father is the devil. Jesus calls the devil the “father of lies” (John 8:44).
- The ninth commandment is about lying: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16).
- On the other hand, the Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of Truth” (John 16:13).
- Jesus also calls Himself the “truth” when He says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).
- Jesus says, “True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4: 23-24).

- Thus, the world is divided in two parts and two parts only: lies and truth, and Jesus makes it clear that lies are from the devil and the *only* source of truth is only Christ Himself.
- What is a lie? A dictionary definition is “an untrue statement with the intent to deceive.” Now we see why the devil is called the father of lies. Deception is his way of life!
- There is no middle ground in a lie. There is no such thing as a white lie, a half lie, a minor lie, a harmless lie, or whatever. A lie is a lie. Either we tell the truth or we lie. We must never think that lying is acceptable in order to avoid problems, conflicts, confrontations, nor is it acceptable for the purposes of helping others. It is never acceptable to lie, and lying, under any circumstances, is a sin.
- As for Ananias and Sapphira, God shows us that lying leads to spiritual death. The reason that their judgment was so harsh is that God had to set a clear and sharp example in the Early Church that such activity cannot be tolerated in order for the Church to grow and prosper.
- We read in Acts 5:11 that “So great fear came upon the church and upon all who heard these things.”
- The story of Ananias and Sapphira also teaches us a lot about God’s patience. God’s patience is not infinite with all people and God chooses when to let His patience run out on people as they are alive on this earth. God’s patience ran out on Ananias and Sapphira and they were struck dead.
- This does not imply that God is unloving or harsh, but rather it is a clear message of God’s sovereignty and His unpredictability. God hates lying. We should use this story as a wake-up call for our spiritual life, recognizing that God’s patience may run out on us at any time if we do not turn from our sinful ways and repent.
- There are many other examples in the Bible illustrating God’s patience running out. Recall in the book of Daniel, King Belshazzar, when he used the gold and silver vessels that were stolen from the temple. In the midst of the feast, the hand appeared on the wall with the writing “Mene Mene, Tekel, Upharsin” (Daniel 5:25). That very night, king Belshazzar was slain (Daniel 5:30).

- Why do kids lie?
 - Troubled relationships at home and/or church.
 - Lack of close relationships with parents and/or Sunday School servants.
 - Parental or Sunday School servants expectations of the kids are too high or unrealistic.
 - The punishment or discipline for the lie is too strong and exaggerated.
 - The kids fear their parents and/or Sunday School servants
 - The kids do not trust their parents and/or Sunday School servants. The parents and/or Sunday School servants are a bad example to the kids, lying themselves and living a life of dishonesty and taking pride in that lifestyle.
 - Broken promises by the parents and/or Sunday School servants.
 - Insincerity towards the kids by the parents and/or Sunday School servants.
 - lying is an easy short-cut to get what you want without having to work hard or earn anything.
 - The kids try to cover up their sins and bad habits and appear to be good through lying. They cannot face or deal with their sins.

- What are the solutions?
 - Developing loving, trusting, one-on-one relationships with the kids.
 - Tell kids what the Bible says about lying and how God views it.
 - Take time to listen to the kids and show them that you truly care about their problems and concerns. A kid who feels listened to will never go out of their way to get attention. Sometimes kids lie because they are begging for attention.
 - Try and recognize bad habits in the kids early on and correct them in a loving and caring way, without magnifying the habits unnecessarily.
 - Never create a relationship in which the kids fear you or one in which the kids feel that you are an untouchable authority figure. Do not have them ever feel your authority and use your authority only as a last resort to resolve situations, rather than as a first mode of action. Let your authority be transparent, and in this way, kids will feel comfortable talking to you as one of their peers.
 - Never break a promise to the kids.

- Deal with the kids in a humble attitude always. Never let them feel that they are bad or unworthy because of their mistakes.
- Do not over-react or exaggerate punishments for lying. Try to deal with the situation through loving discussions and reasoning with the child so that they become convinced of their faults rather than by force.
- Be a great role model to the kids. Never lie, and always live a life of honesty, integrity, and honor.
- Convince the kids that good things in life result only from hard work and we have to earn things through hard work, prayer, and discipline. Shortcuts will always result in spiritual and moral failure.
- Do not set expectations that are too high for the kids. Know the capabilities of each child and do not set unrealistic expectations or tasks for them. Do not be a perfectionist with the kids, and do not expect them to do things that you do not do. Set expectations low and show the kids the “perfect” way by example.
- Never give the impression to the kids that you are perfect because none of us are perfect. This kind of impression puts too much pressure on the kids and creates a discouraging environment as well as unrealistic expectations.
- *Never* compare children with each other. No servant should ever do this. This creates pressure on the kids that may ultimately lead to a dishonest life.

Bible verses on Lying

Leviticus 6:1-4, “And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD, and lie unto his neighbor? or has deceived his neighbor? and lies concerning it, and swears falsely; in any of all these that a man does, sinning therein: Then it shall be, because he has sinned, and is guilty,”

Leviticus 19:11, ”You shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.”

Job 11:3,5, ”Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when you mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed? But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee;”

Job 13:4, ”But you are forgers of lies, you are all physicians of no value.”

Job 24:25, ”...who will make me a liar, and make my speech nothing worth?”

Psalms 24:4-5, "He who has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD,"

Psalms 31:6, "I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD."

Psalms 31:18, "Let the lying lips be put to silence;"

Psalms 40:4, "Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies."

Psalms 52:2-4, "Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. You lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Selah. You lovest all devouring words, O you deceitful tongue."

Psalms 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies."

Psalms 59:12, "For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride: and for cursing and lying which they speak."

Psalms 62:3-4, "You shall be slain all of you?they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly."

Psalms 63:11, "...the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped."

Psalms 101:7, "He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight."

Psalms 109:2, "For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue."

Psalms 119:29, "Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously."

Psalms 119:69, "The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart."

Psalms 119:163, "I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love."

Psalms 120:2, "Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue."

Proverbs 6:16-19, "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination

unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”

Proverbs 8:7, ”For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips.”

Proverbs 10:18, ”He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.”

Proverbs 12:19, ”The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.”

Proverbs 12:22, ”Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.”

Proverbs 13:5, ”A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame.”

Proverbs 14:5, ”A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.”

Proverbs 14:25, ”A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.”

Proverbs 17:4, ”A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.”

Proverbs 17:7, ”Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince.”

Proverbs 19:5, ”A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.”

Proverbs 19:9, ”A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish.”

Proverbs 19:22, ”The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar.”

Proverbs 21:6, ”The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.”

Proverbs 26:28, ”A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth

worketh ruin.”

Proverbs 29:12, ”If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked.”

Proverbs 30:6, ”Add you not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and you be found a liar.”

Proverbs 30:8, ”Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:”

Isaiah 28:15,17, ”Because you have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement;?for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:?the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.”

Isaiah 30:9, ”That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD:”

Isaiah 32:7, ”The instruments also of the churl are evil: he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right.”

Isaiah 44:24-25, ”?I am the LORD?That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad;”

Isaiah 59:2-4, ”But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For?your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perverseness...they trust in vanity, and speak lies; ”

Isaiah 59:12-13, ”For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.”

Isaiah 63:8, ”For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour.”

Jeremiah 7:4, ”Trust you not in lying words,”

Jeremiah 7:8-9, ”Behold, you trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye?swear falsely?and walk after other gods??”

Jeremiah 9:3, "And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD."

Jeremiah 9:5, "And they will deceive every one his neighbor, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity."

Jeremiah 14:14, "Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart."

Jeremiah 15:18, "Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt you be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?"

Jeremiah 16:19, "...Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit."

Jeremiah 23:14, "I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies:"

Jeremiah 23:26, "How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart;"

Jeremiah 23:32, "Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD."

Jeremiah 27:10, "For they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and you should perish."

Jeremiah 29:23, "Because they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them; even I know, and am a witness, saith the LORD."

Ezekiel 13:8, "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because you have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord GOD."

Ezekiel 13:19, "And will you pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not

live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies?"

Ezekiel 13:22-23, "Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life: Therefore you shall see no more vanity, nor divine divinations: for I will deliver my people out of your hand: and you shall know that I am the LORD."

Ezekiel 22:28, "And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD has not spoken."

Ezekiel 24:12, "She has wearied herself with lies, and her great scum went not forth out of her: her scum shall be in the fire."

Daniel 11:27, "and they shall speak lies at one table; but it shall not prosper:"

Hosea 4:2, "By swearing, and lying?they break out and blood toucheth blood."

Hosea 7:3, "They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies."

Hosea 10:13, "You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped iniquity; you have eaten the fruit of lies: because you didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men."

Jonah 2:8, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy."

Micah 6:12-13, "the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins."

Nahum 3:1, "Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies"

Zephaniah 3:13, "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth:"

Zechariah 8:16, "These are the things that you shall do; Speak you every man the truth to his neighbor;"

Zechariah 13:3, "...You shall not live; for you speak lies in the name of the LORD: "

Malachi 2:6, "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips:"

Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts?false witness?These are the things which defile a man: "

John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

Acts 5:3, "...why has Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, "

Acts 26:25, "But he [Paul] said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness."

Romans 1:24-25, "through the lusts of their own hearts?Who changed the truth of God into a lie,"

Romans 9:1, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not,"

2 Corinthians 11:31, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not."

Galatians 1:20, "Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not."

Ephesians 4:25, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another."

Colossians 3:9, "Lie not one to another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds;"

1 Timothy 1:9-10, "the law is not made for a righteous man, but?for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;"

1 Timothy 2:7, "Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not)"

1 Timothy 4:2, "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;"

James 3:14, "But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth."

Titus 1:2, "...God?cannot lie, "

Hebrews 6:18, "...in which it was impossible for God to lie, "

1 John 1:6, "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:"

1 John 2:4, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

1 John 2:21, "I have not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth."

1 John 2:22, "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son."

1 John 2:27, "But the anointing which you have received of him abideth in you, and you need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in him."

1 John 4:20, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

Revelation 2:2, "you have tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars:"

Revelation 3:9, "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which do lie;"

Revelation 21:8, "and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone:"

Revelation 21:27, "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Revelation 22:14-15, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are?whosoever loveth and maketh a lie."

Between the Resurrection and the Ascension

1. There were 40 days after the resurrection that Christ spent with his disciples: “To them He presented Himself alive after His passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).
2. The Bible records at least 10 distinct appearances of Jesus after His resurrection and before His ascension: one to Mary Magdalene (John 20:15-16), one to the two Mary’s (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James) (Matthew 28:1-9), the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-17), James, Peter, the twelve disciples (twice), the apostles, the 500 brethren (1 Corinthians 15:4-7), and to some of the disciples when He had breakfast with them at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-10).
3. First Corinthians, Chapter 15, discusses the resurrection of Christ in detail and our resurrection and the spiritual body at our resurrection.
4. The period of time which Christ lived on earth in the body with which He passed through death and the tomb and rose alive, may be considered the greatest and most precious gift Christ granted to our human nature.
5. The possibility of resurrection from the dead and a new life in a body free of suffering, death, and corruption was not originally available to the nature of man. That man should live forever in a glorified body like Christ’s is Christ’s supreme and indescribable gift, which He granted to us when He rose with the body which He taken taken from us.
6. How do we live the resurrection of Jesus? How may a man live through the forty days after the resurrection not simply as forty days in the liturgical cycle, but as an experience of life completely free of the fear of death and its power, as post-resurrection life, a life that prepares one for ascension?
7. To answer this question, we turn to the Gospels, “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me,

even so I send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:19-23).

8. All that Christ could do for His disciples, that they might believe in His resurrection, was to show them His hand pierced by the nails, and His side wounded by the spear. For the disciples, even Thomas, this was quite enough to give them faith in the resurrection, but this was not enough to give them the power of the resurrection.
9. In order for man to believe in something beyond the bounds of his knowledge, imagination and experience, such as the resurrection from the dead, he must have evidence, but in order for him to receive what is beyond his nature and experience, beyond his perception and powers of logic, that is to attain to the power and nature of the resurrection, he must be granted a spiritual gift.
10. And so it was that Christ, after giving His disciples proof of His resurrection so that they believed in rejoiced, we find that He comes towards them and breathes upon them to bestow upon them what is beyond their own nature and capabilities, that is the power of the resurrection itself, the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of God!
11. This is not simply the resurrection from the dead, but resurrection in the Spirit of God with a new nature for man, that prepares him for a new and spiritual life, a life in the Spirit of God with God, where sin and death have no power and where there is no subjugation to ignorance or suffering.
12. This breathing of Christ upon the disciples reminds us of God’s breathing upon Adam at his first creation: “Then the Lord God formed man of dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). In both cases, the breathing is creative and life-giving.
13. The first breathing is a physical creation to a temporal earthly life. The second breathing (upon the disciples) is a spiritual creation to an everlasting heavenly life. The disciples, united in faith, thus received the second breathing from Christ as the Church, and so Christ became, for the Church, the source of the new spiritual creation, and this breathing of His has remained in the Church the source of a new, heavenly eternal life.

14. The Apostle Paul makes a clear comparison between these two lives: “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam (i.e., Christ) became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust (i.e., Adam), we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven (i.e., Christ)” (1 Corinthians 15:45-49).
15. Thus our own resurrection from the dead begins mystically now when we receive after our physical birth, a new birth of water and the Spirit, and receive the Spirit of the resurrection which the Church breathes into our being.
16. We have now experienced both births, and both lives are at work in us, life upon life. The spiritual being after the physical, but one is decreasing in order little by little to give way to the other. “Though our outer nature (the physical) is wasting away; our inner nature (the heavenly) is being renewed every day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).
17. While our physical life inevitably and automatically dwindles, whether we wish it or not, we find that the spiritual life, or the resurrection nature, only gains sway in us by our will and desire. This is why Christ, when He breathed the Holy Spirit upon His disciples so that He might endue them with the nature and power of the resurrection, said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The verb “receive” here is dependent on the extent of man’s readiness and desire.
18. Christ does not grant the Holy Spirit to our nature automatically or mechanically. Our human nature receives the gift of eternal life and the nature of the resurrection according to the depth of striving, desire, and the will in the whole soul, heart, and mind.
19. The first breathing at the physical creation was received with no response of the human will. The second breathing requires a desire and a response. Note that the Gospel says, “The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). Here, it is the joy of faith in the resurrection of Christ that prepared the disciples to receive the breathing of the Spirit of the resurrection.
20. So the Spirit and nature of the resurrection are not granted in a general way to every man whether he wills it or not. Those who believe and rejoice at the resurrection of the Lord

are they who are called to receive the Spirit of the resurrection. Joy is always the greatest evidence of the readiness of the will, whether it be the will to rise from the dead or the will to live with Christ, and this will is not a mere wish or dream or subject of meditation, but labor and striving and practical action. St. Paul says, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above" (Colossians 3:1).

21. How do we begin to now live a post-resurrection life, eternal life with God, while still alive in a body crushed under the weight of sin? The answer comes from the Gospels, for we find that Christ, after He breathed the Spirit of the resurrection upon His joyful disciples, immediately said to them, "It you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23).
22. Here for the first time in the history of mankind, sin comes under the power of man, who had formerly himself fallen under the power of sin. The breathing of the Spirit bestowed by Christ to His disciples here clearly has power to renew the very nature of man.
23. This new power, which man received by the breathing of the Holy Spirit from the mouth of Christ, clearly and surely reveals that the disciples had actually received resurrection, though mystically and invisibly, for who can forgive sin while he is dead or under the power of death?
24. If the disciples had received power to forgive people's sins, it must surely mean that by the breathing of the Holy Spirit, which they received from the mouth of Christ, they destroyed the power that sin had over them, and so overcame the power of death itself. That is, they rose from the dead, spiritually and supremely victorious.
25. Also, by the Holy Spirit, who took up His dwelling in them, they became able to destroy the power of sin wielded over others too, and consequently the power of death in them also. Thus, by their resurrection in Christ, they were able to impart the Spirit of the resurrection to others, if they were worthy.
26. So we see that the relationship between the Spirit of the resurrection, whom Christ breathed upon His disciples, and human life beyond the power of sin and death, becomes a reality in the mystery of forgiveness. It is the mystery of Christ in action after His resurrection from the dead, who by His death trampled down death and bestowed everlasting life on those in the tombs.

27. Is there a relationship between Christ's breathing the Holy Spirit upon the disciples after the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them on the Day of Pentecost? The relationship between them is a strong one, and each is linked with the other.
28. The breathing of Christ upon the disciples granted them resurrection and everlasting life, and so human nature attained to the power of resurrection from the dead and became the abode of everlasting life.
29. The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost imparted to human nature a spiritual power from on high that would bind and unite men to one another through the Holy Spirit. This unity might come about through a spiritual word, a moving of the heart, secret acts of service, wonders or miracles, or an attractive and effective living example.
30. The whole object was to form an integral human organism united with Christ and by Christ, by which human nature as a whole might be prepared, as the Church, for life with Christ in heaven.
31. So the breathing of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples after the resurrection was to grant human nature the Spirit and power of the resurrection, while the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, which is after the ascension, was to impart to man the Spirit and power of the ascension.
32. This is why Christ rose, as one firstborn, from the dead, and then ascended into heaven and entered into the holy places as our forerunner. For if Christ had not risen with our body, we could not have risen and man could have known nothing of eternal life. And if He had not also ascended into heaven with our body, it would never have been possible for man to ascend into heaven, even if he rose from the dead.
33. So Christ grants these two powers, of resurrection and ascension, through the Holy Spirit, who takes what is Christ's and gives it to us. As St. Paul says, "and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 2:6).
34. So we have now risen with Christ and live out our resurrection by the breathing of the Holy Spirit. And if the Holy Spirit of Pentecost has descended upon us too, we are also ready for our ascension, and nothing keeps us from heaven except our awaiting the coming of Him who is even now at the doors: "I will come again and take you to Myself" (John 14:3).

Beholding the Resurrection of Jesus

1. Introduction

- The following story comes from the early Christian hermits in the deserts of Egypt (the Desert Fathers):

“It seems that a young aspirant to holiness once came to visit the hermitage of an old holy man who was sitting in the doorway of his quarters at sunset. The old man’s dog stretched out across the threshold as the young spiritual seeker presented his problem to the holy man. ‘Why is it, Abba, that some who seek God come to the desert and are zealous in prayer but leave after a year or so, while others, like you, remain faithful to the quest for a lifetime of prayer?’ The old man smiled and replied. ‘Let me tell you a story:

One day I was sitting here quietly in the sun with my dog. Suddenly a large white rabbit ran across in front of us. Well, my dog jumped up, barking loudly, and took off after that big rabbit. He chased the rabbit over the hills with a passion. Soon, other dogs joined him, attracted by his barking. What a sight it was, as the pack of dogs ran barking across across the creeks, up stony embankments and through thickets and thorns! Gradually, however, one by one, the other dogs dropped out of the pursuit, discouraged by the course and frustrated by the chase. Only my dog continued to hotly pursue the white rabbit.

In that story, young man, is the answer to your question, said the old man.’ The young man sat in confused silence. Finally he said, ‘Abba, I don’t understand. What is the connection between the rabbit chase and the quest for holiness?’ ‘You fail to understand,’ answered the old hermit, ‘because you failed to ask the obvious question. Why didn’t the other dogs continue on the chase? And the answer to that question is that they had not seen the rabbit. For you see, unless you see your prey, the chase is just too difficult. You will lack all of the passion and determination necessary to perform all the hard work required to continue the chase!’”

- One of the prime prerequisites in our spiritual growth and in service in general is that we must “see the rabbit.” We must have a real experience of the Divine Mystery in

some form, if we are to keep up the pursuit for holiness and persevere in our service. Like the dogs in the hermits story we will drop out of the race if we only follow others - the saints and apostles who have “seen the rabbit”. Each one of us must “see the rabbit,” that is, we must behold and experience the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. How Can We Behold the Resurrection of Jesus?

- Following the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus appeared to several of His followers at the point of their deepest need.
 - Last week, He appeared to Thomas to help him cope with his doubt.
 - He appeared to Mary Magdalene in her great grief when she thought her beloved Master was dead. His appearance brought her unbounded joy (John 20:1-18).
 - He appeared to Simon Peter in his great sense of sorrow and shame for having denied Jesus three times. He appeared to him to assure him that he had indeed been forgiven and accepted (John 21:15-19).
 - He appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who were despairing and doubting, now that their great deliverer had been crucified. His appearance caused them to feel the warmth of God’s presence in their hearts (Luke 24:13-35).
 - He appeared to His disciples in the upper room (John 20:19-29), hiding behind locked doors for fear of the authorities. His appearance changed those broken men. It made them strong, confident, bold as lions. They sang, they rejoiced, they healed they taught, they suffered triumphantly, not for just a few days of passing enthusiasm but for the rest of their lives. This miraculous change occurred because Jesus had actually appeared to them.
- We behold the resurrection of Jesus by experiencing Him in our life, especially in our times of deepest need. We behold the resurrection of Jesus, as the disciples did, when we become spiritually strong, confident, bold as lions. We sing, rejoice, we heal, we teach, we persevere and suffer triumphantly, not for just a few days, but for the rest of our lives.

3. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever

- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

- If He came then, He comes now. If He appeared then, He appears now. If He revealed Himself then, He reveals Himself now.
- He comes to us now in our sense of grief to comfort us.
- He comes to us now in our sense of failure and sorrow for sin to forgive us and raise us to our feet.
- He comes to us now in our periods of doubt and disillusionment to instill new hope.
- He comes to us now in our sense of fear to uphold us.
- Jesus is not dead! He is not just a great teacher and beautiful example for us to follow. He is the Son of God, the risen Lord!
- He appears to us today, as he appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:15-16), the two Mary's (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James) (Matthew 28:1-9), the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-17), James, Peter, the twelve disciples, the apostles, the 500 brethren (1 Corinthians 15:4-7), and to some of the disciples when He had breakfast with them at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-10).
- He also appeared to St. Paul who writes "Last of all, He was seen by me also, as one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8). It was that appearance on the Road to Damascus that changed a fanatical persecutor into the greatest missionary who has ever lived.
- He continues to appear to us today by speaking to us in the Holy Bible, in our prayers, and we continue to touch Him like Thomas did, through the Holy Sacraments, especially Holy Communion.
- At no date in history is it possible to draw a line and say, "After this no one any more encountered the living Christ."
- Christ is risen! How do we know? We know not because of the story of the empty tomb or because of the declaration of the angels, "He is Risen. He is not here." We know because we have seen the rabbit.

Resurrection is Victory

- The resurrection of Jesus is victory over our final enemy: death.
- The person who "sees the rabbit" lives and leads a victorious spiritual life.

- Someone once said, “I went to the funeral home to choose a casket for my oldest sister. We were taken to a showroom in which there were many open caskets at various price levels. With the lids open it seemed as though they represented the very jaws of death. Then a few days later, we stood by an open grave and it seemed as though again, the jaws of death were open to swallow our loved one.” Indeed, death swallows up everyone! The young and the old, the strong and the weak, the holy and the unholy. It is always hungry. It is never satisfied, never gorged. It swallows up everyone. Death even swallowed up Jesus. But that is where death met its nemesis! Though death swallowed up Christ, it was unable to digest the Lord of Life. And the result is that life is now liberated. The result is that death itself, as St. Paul says, was “swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). And this is the greatest victory this universe will ever see. It’s the victory we proclaim every time we read the words of the Nicene Creed: “I await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come.” “For as by a man came death,” writes the Apostle Paul, “by a man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).
- St. Paul writes “For in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, we shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52).
- The resurrection of Jesus means:
 - There is no fear so great that there can be no calm.
 - And no death so final that there can be no life.
 - And no grief so deep that there can be no consolation.
 - And no injustice so insidious that there cannot be justice and truth.
 - And no sin so serious that there cannot be forgiveness.
 - And no war so fierce that there cannot be peace.
 - And no hatred so deep that there cannot be love.

The Spiritual Aspects of Nayrouz

1. Introduction

- Nayrouz is a word of Coptic origin from Niiaro-O-ouh, meaning “the rivers.”
- The month of September is the month of the rising of the Nile waters as a response to the prayers of the people. The ancient Egyptians “prayer” to ask their “god” to bless the rivers at the beginning of the Coptic year.
- This same blessing of the Nile river is said during the Divine Liturgy.
- When the Persians ruled Egypt from 525-405 BC, they adopted the word and incorporated it into their language to mean “the beginning of the year.”
- The Nayrouz feast is celebrated on the first of Tute (September 11).
- The Nayrouz feast is a joyful feast with joyful hymns in the liturgy, which continues until the Feast of the Cross (17 Tute, September 27th).

2. Diocletian

- Diocletian’s reign was from 284 AD - 305 AD. The Roman Empire was in control of Egypt at that time and he was the Roman Emperor for 21 years.
- Diocletian outlawed Christianity during his reign, and those who were found practicing their faith were martyred.
- Diocletian came and horrified the entire world, and Egypt in particular, with his violence and persecutions.
- It is estimated that he killed over 800,000 Copts during his reign.
- The Egyptian calendar goes back to 4240 BC. Copts restored the calendar with the beginning of Diocletian’s reign in 284 AD, to commemorate the millions of Coptic martyrs.
- His reign is considered a golden era in which the church offered true witnesses to Christ, when the souls of martyrs departed to paradise.
- Thus, the Coptic calendar started in 284 AD, and thus we are now in the year 2008 - 284 + 1 = 1725 A.M. (Anno Martyri, meaning year of the martyrs).

- In the Coptic Synaxarium, we often have dates recorded in terms of A.M.
- The Nayrouz feast is also known as the feast of the Martyrs, and the Coptic Church is often referred to as the Church of the Martyrs.
- The period from September 11 - September 27 is a very joyful one, and the church announces her joy and gladness with the martyrs through bearing the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the sufferings and martyrdom are turned into a source of joy.
- Several well known Coptic saints were martyred during Diocletian's reign, including Saint Demiana, Saint George, and Pope Peter I.
- Pope Peter I is known as the Seal of Martyrs since he was the last one martyred under the reign of Diocletian. He is mentioned in the Commemoration of the Saints in the Divine Liturgy.
- One of the Church Fathers writes, "If the martyrs of the whole world were put on one arm of the balance and the martyrs of Egypt on the other, the balance would tilt in favor of the Egyptians."

3. Being a Witness for Jesus Christ

- The best characterization and definition of the martyrs of Christ is that they were true witnesses for Jesus. Are we witnesses for Jesus Christ?
- Our Lord Jesus Christ commands us to be His witnesses of Who He is and what He has done for us (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:48, 1 Peter 3:15, Mark 5:18-19). Not to do so would be a deliberate act of disobedience.
- Being a witness is to testify of what we know and have experienced of the reality of Christ in our life.
- How can we be an effective witness for Christ?
 - (1) **By the Life We Live** - Jesus said that we are to be the salt of the earth and the lights of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Our example of the transformed life acts the like the salt which gives taste to food and makes people hunger for Christ. Our good deeds are like the light that shows the way to true life in the darkness. The Apostle John calls this walking in the light and walking in the truth (1 John 1:7; 2 John 4).

- (2) **By the Things We Say** - What we speak goes a long way to witness for Christ. Paul tells us to ensure that whenever we open our mouth, it should be seasoned with salt, especially to non-believers (Colossians 4:6). There is the power of life and death in our tongue (Proverbs 18:20-21). So be careful what you say to yourself and to people.
- (3) **By the Attitude We Adopt** - Our attitude often reveals our worldview and values. It also shows our true character. That's why the Bible says we must be renewed in our mind (Romans 12:2). This attitude is seen in the way we conduct ourselves and in our lifestyle. People watch our behavior and evaluate our value system. Your attitude towards work and study, social responsibility, relationships and family values, etc. will make people judge your faith. We must not be ashamed of the Gospel and we must not deny Christ before others (Luke 12:8, Romans 1:16, 2 Timothy 1:8).
- (4) **By the Actions We Display** - More often a person is judged by his reactions rather than actions. How do you react when people are rude to you, or when they speak unkindly to you or of you? Do you lose your temper and act rudely? Do you show bitterness and unforgiveness? How will they judge you? See how our Lord reacted to unkind treatment and slander in 1 Peter 2:21-23.
- May we learn to be like Him in our witness.

Palm Sunday

Yesterday, which is called Lazarus Saturday, marks the beginning of the Holy Week, where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and Mary, his sister anointed the feet of Jesus with the fragrant oil with the hair of her head in Bethany.

During this Holy Week, Jesus is going back and forth between Bethany and Jerusalem. The Jews had rejected Jesus in Jerusalem and Jesus told them that "you would not see me until you say blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." Jesus did not spend the night in Jerusalem the entire Holy week until His arrest on Thursday night in the Garden of Gethsamene.

Holy Week marks a spiritual battle in which death and sin are conquered and victory is assured through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday, which is the day that Jesus rode through Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowd cheered Him on chanting, "Hosanna in the Highest." It is one of the 7 major feasts of our Lord, and it is a most joyous occasion. The Psalms are sung in the Singarian tune and the Liturgy is sung in the Hosanna tune, which is the most joyous tune in the Coptic Church.

We want to talk briefly about the lessons and themes we learn and take home from this great event?

1. **The Humility of Jesus** - The most noticeable thing that we immediately observe is the humility of Jesus on this day. Jesus, the King of us all and Son of God, rides humbly through Jerusalem on a small donkey wearing a tunic. He does not ride through Jerusalem on a white horse wearing armor or a purple robe or a crown. So one of the great things that Jesus teaches us here is the importance of humility in our spiritual life, because we're never going to get to heaven without it.

In fact, of the 7 major Lord's feast, most of them the main theme is indeed humility: Epiphany, Incarnation, Palm Sunday, and the Annunciation (April 7th). The most noticeable feature in all these feasts is humility. Pentecost, Ascension, and Resurrection, we see God's Divine power. Humility is the spiritual power that God gives us on this earth: God demonstrates his spiritual and divine power on these 7 feasts.

The people of Israel expected the Messiah to come on this great white horse in armor and sword wage war on the Romans and take back the kingdom of Israel. They were looking for an earthly king, not a heavenly king, and this is why despised Jesus so much when He came. They felt that Jesus let them down, they felt He was an embarrassment to them. How could a king come riding on a donkey? They felt this way because they were out of touch with their own sins and spiritual matters, and thus could not comprehend or live this spiritual notion of humility.

A monk once wrote, “Everyone who gets to heaven will be surprised by three things. First he will be surprised to see many he did not think would be there. Secondly, he will be surprised that some are not there whom he expected to see there. And finally, he will be surprised that he himself is there.” Now that’s humility!

So one of the major themes of Palm Sunday is Jesus teaching us the life of humility. The church fathers say that the pillar of Christianity is humility, and every other virtue, including love, emanates from this great virtue of humility.

It is interesting to note here that right after Jesus rode through Jerusalem in this great event, the mother of James and John approaches Jesus and asks Him if one of here sons can sit on His left and the other sit on His right. In fact this is the reading of the 11th hour Pascha reading of today that we will do right after the funeral prayers. So we see here the great lack of humility in the disciples of Jesus at the time, and after this great event, who do they think about? Themselves. The person who lacks humility is like that. They are so absorbed in themselves that the greatest spiritual event can pass them right by. Put another way, they can go through life ignoring the important spiritual aspects of their life due to their self-centeredness , pride, and lack of humility that they lose their salvation.

It is also interesting to also note that one of the other events that occurred on Palm Sunday at night is the Greek visitors, who had come to see Jesus and had heard about Him. This is read in the evening Pascha on Palm Sunday in 1st hour. When Philip and Andrew told Jesus that the Greeks wanted to see Him, Jesus gave the obscure response “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified,” referring to the cross. The Greek visitors wanted to see Jesus so that perhaps Jesus could dazzle them with His words or miracles, but Jesus knows that to truly follow Him, one must give up the earthly ways, become humble and follow Him to the Cross.

So this extreme humility of Jesus ultimately led Him to the cross and one *cannot* be any more humble than this as Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). Here we see how far God humbled Himself to show us His love. So humility is indeed God’s way to heaven.

2. **The Superficiality of Man** - Another great lesson that we learn on this Palm Sunday is the how fickle, inconsistent, superficial, and unfaithful man is and how consistent and faithful God always is. Notice it was this same crowd that was laying their garments and palm branches on the ground as Jesus rode through Jerusalem that was crying out a few days later “crucify Him, crucify Him.”

This drastic shift in mood is also exemplified by the church in that we go from a most joyous occasion in which the joy and respect paid to Jesus reach their zenith and the liturgy is sung in the Hosanna tune, to a somber and sad melody in the funeral prayers where we turn to a mournful tune.

This shift also occurs on Good Friday, where until the end 6th hour, where we mourn and then at the beginning of the ninth hour, we occasion becomes more joyous as now Jesus is dead and we are cheering Him on to complete his plan of salvation, and this why the procession on Good Friday is just as joyful as on Palm Sunday.

What a shame it is when a person just goes with the flow, has no real depth, doesn’t stand up for what’s right, and is willing to go with the crowd just to save themselves for whatever reason or purpose, whether it be for money, prestige, positions, or fear. Often times, we do that. We are willing to go with the attitudes of the crowd just to save ourselves from possible ridicule, rejection, or alienation. We just move along like a jelly fish in the ocean. The person who has real depth never acts this way. They hold fast to the truth, their faith has roots and cannot be shaken. David says in Psalm 56:11, “In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

This shows that should not put our total trust in man but always rather in God, because our fellow man will always disappoint us and often turn against us. In Psalm 118:8, we read “It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man”

3. **Cleanse Your Temple** - The last and final theme we will discuss today is the cleansing of the temple, where Jesus overturned the tables of the merchants who were using the house of God as a market for business rather than prayer. This is the 9th hour Pascha reading of today, and will also be read tomorrow morning.

In 1st Corinthians, St. Paul refers to our body as a Temple of the Holy Spirit. One of things that we must examine this Holy Week is our own temple and ask for God to cleanse our temple.

We must cleanse ourselves of

- materialism and money
- the cares of this world - our Holy Week should be focused on the Passion and Sufferings of Jesus
- impure thoughts and actions
- envy, jealousy, anger, indifference, lukewarmness, and pride

4. **There is Victory** - An important element of the Holy Week is that we must realize that we are on the road to victory. Our first victory over the world is achieved with humility, and our final victory over the world is achieved with the resurrection of Jesus. It is a week of victory's. We must not think for a moment that the cross is a sign of defeat or weakness. It is a sign of strength and victory.

The first Christians in the book of Acts didn't explain the resurrection of Jesus because only God can explain it. But they proclaimed it with an uncontrollable ecstasy of joy. And this is precisely what the Coptic Church does in the Divine Liturgy of the Resurrection on Easter Eve. During the liturgy, the church lights are turned off and the church becomes completely dark. Then the priest and the deacon "act out" the resurrection of Jesus, and the church lights come back on after a big bang signifying the resurrection of Christ. Thus, the church literally acts out the resurrection of Jesus during the liturgy, and the deacons chant the beautiful hymns of the resurrection in the procession which follows.

The resurrection is indeed a great victory and this is one of the things we should focus on during this Palm Sunday and this Holy Week.

The resurrection of Jesus means:

There is no fear so great that there can be no calm.

And no death so final that there can be no life.

And no grief so deep that there can be no consolation.

And no injustice so insidious that there cannot be justice and truth.

And no sin so serious that there cannot be forgiveness.

And no war so fierce that there cannot be peace.

And no hatred so deep that there cannot be love.

Someone once said, "I went to the funeral home to choose a casket for my oldest sister. We were taken to a showroom in which there were many open caskets at various price levels. With the lids open it seemed as though they represented the very jaws of death. Then a few days later, we stood by an open grave and it seemed as though again, the jaws of death were open to swallow our loved one."

Indeed, death swallows up everyone! The young and the old, the strong and the weak, the holy and the unholy. It is always hungry. It is never satisfied, never gorged. It swallows up everyone. Death even swallowed up Jesus. But that is where death met its nemesis! Though death swallowed up Christ, it was unable to digest the Lord of Life. And the result is that life is now liberated. The result is that death itself, as St. Paul says, was "swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). And this is the greatest victory this universe will ever see. It's the victory we proclaim every time we read the words of the Nicene Creed: "I await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come." "For as by a man came death," writes the Apostle Paul, "by a man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Grief stricken widow, weep no more for your husband if he died in the Lord. And heart-broken mother, weep no more for your child snatched so soon from your embrace. "For in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, we shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Life after death, eternal life, is indeed a gift that God gives to all who believe in His name and are baptized. But the existence of life after death is *not* based on the gift of deathbed visions of angels or brilliant light, or oil, rumors of miracles, or whatever. Our faith in eternal life is based rather on the *solid rock* of the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus! These things are given to us by God as a bonus of His grace to help bolster our faith in life after death. What we need to remember is that for those who live in faith and surrender themselves to the will and love of God, the resurrection becomes a daily reality: souls are quickened and sins are forgiven, and the mind is illumined and the heart is purified every day as the Holy Spirit forms the mind of Christ in each one of us.

In conclusion, we must remember these themes of Palm Sunday: humility, to put our total trust in God and not man, to cleanse ourselves and to live the life of spiritual victory in the resurrection of Jesus.

Pentecost

Today is the major Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost, of course, is the day that the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples 50 days after the resurrection, and this day marks the birth of the Church.

The Gospel reading for today is from the gospel of John, where Jesus tells the disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit after His ascension, and really defines for the first time to the disciples who the Holy Spirit really is.

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. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your 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. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.

As Jesus has titles as we spoke about two weeks ago, the Holy Spirit also has titles. We want to talk about some of these today and discuss how these titles of the Holy Spirit apply to our every day life.

1. **The Spirit of Truth** - The Holy Spirit guides the use of our tongue.

A famous preacher delivered a fiery sermon once on what he called “That tiny piece of flesh, the most dangerous appurtenance of a man’s body.” Gentleman when they heard this blanched and ladies blushed as he elaborated on all of the horrendous consequences of its misuse. And his piercing eyes were like shooting sparks as he expounded on and on. And towards the end of the sermon he leaned over the pulpit and asked, “Shall I show you that tiny piece of flesh?” There was paralyzed silence. Horrified silence. Smelling salts were extracted from ladies handbags. Then with a sly smile on his face the preacher said, “Ladies and gentleman, behold the source of our sins.” And he stuck out his tongue!

Jesus tells us in Matthew 12:36-37 that we must answer for every idle word we have spoken. He says, “I tell you on the day of judgment, men will render account for every careless word they utter. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).

How true that verse is in Proverbs, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21).

The tongue in our mouth is really bilingual. Each person can speak two languages: the language of the put-down and the language of praise. When we speak the put-down language, words can wound, words can hurt, words can make enemies, and words can start quarrels. But when we speak the language of praise, words can charm, words can bless, words can make amends, words can comfort, and words can fill us with hope. How beautiful that verse is in Proverbs, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

Words are our most prized possessions. And they really set us apart from the whole of creation because plants, rocks, and animals cannot speak. Words show us to be made in the image and likeness of God. Through words, we can communicate with God and with each other. And we sing His praises and teach His ways. And this is precisely the reason why the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost appeared in the form of tongues! (Acts 2:3). For it is the office of the tongue to proclaim the Good News and glorify the Almighty.

2. **Helper and Counselor** -

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to help and counsel us in remembering our sins, feeling Godly sorry for our sins and to confess and to repent. The Holy Spirit also helps us to repent and to overcome our sinful past and to move forward.

St. Paul writes about his own life, “But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Philippians 3:13). St. Paul is telling us here to use the past wisely. To learn from our mistakes, but to never, never let the past hold us back. He is telling us to claim God’s forgiveness and move forward. So St. Paul tells us here to use the past as a springboard and not as a sofa. One of the major flaws with psychology and psychiatry today is that they often spend too much time dwelling on a person’s past, and not enough time on the present and the future. Note that Jesus warns us about spending too much time dwelling on the past when He says, “No one, having put his hand on the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). If, for example, while driving our car, we keep looking in the rearview mirror, we will probably get into an accident and never make it to our destination.

The prophet Micah once said to God, “You will cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19). This verse means that God has hurled all of our sins away from Him, burying them in the deepest, deepest waters. And into the surrounding land, His mighty arm of victory has hammered a sign which reads “No Fishing Allowed.” That which has been swallowed up in the vast sea of God’s forgiveness will never, never surface again. Now the devil may attempt to dig up the past and try to hold those old sins against us. But he cannot succeed. God ignores the devil’s accusations about the past. And when the devil points to our sins of the past, God points to His Son on the cross and only sees His Son’s blood. He has forgiven us of the sins of the past and has no intentions of uncovering that which has been covered by the blood of His Son. For when we repent, Christ puts our sins in the deepest, deepest, waters! And this is why St. Paul says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). So when we confess our sins and repent, the past is buried deep in the love of God, and He says, “No Fishing Allowed.”

3. the Comforter

The Holy Spirit dwells within us to give us comfort, peace, and security. When the Holy Spirit is active within, we feel the presence and love of God within. we feel a presence within. Only when the Holy Spirit is active within, do we not feel anxious, lonely, or empty within. One of the greatest feelings of emptiness comes when the Holy Spirit is dormant and not active in our life.

There is one specific type of anxiety that comes from the Holy Spirit being inactive in our

life. It may seem like a strange one at first, but it's not once we understand it. It is called *endological anxiety*. The prefix "endo" is commonly used in science and medicine, which means inner or within. For example, such words include endocrine gland, endogenous, endoscope, and so on. The word endological comes from the Greek word which means being. Thus, *endological anxiety* is an anxiety that comes from our being, that is, being made in the image and likeness of God. You see, God has placed a longing for Himself in each and every one of us. This longing is a homesickness and a yearning of the soul for God. If we do not seek to satisfy this longing for God by coming to Christ, accepting Him, and developing a personal relationship with Him, we shall never be able to remove this endological anxiety from within us. It will be there constantly hounding us and haunting us until we hear God's call to go to Him. St. Augustine expressed this beautifully when he wrote, "Our souls were made for Thee O Lord, and they are restless, *anxious*, until they find their rest, their peace, in Thee."

We mention here an example of endological anxiety. Bertrand Russell was a famous British philosopher. He was knighted and received the title of lord Russell in England. Russell was also an atheist. He was born into a Christian home and he was taught to believe in God, but he rejected God and became an atheist. And his daughter said about him after he died these words: "Somewhere in the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that once had been filled by God. And he never found anything else to put in it." It is precisely this inner emptiness that haunts us and produces this endological anxiety within. *Only* when Jesus is invited to occupy this space within, only when the Holy Spirit is invited to be active in our life, will this endological anxiety be replaced with the "peace of God which surpasses all understanding".

This is precisely why St. Paul says, "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7).

So on this day of Pentecost, we must let the Holy Spirit become active in our spiritual life and let Him claim His titles of Spirit of Truth, Helper and Counselor, and Comforter, and let Him guide us in our daily life, because life has no meaning or purpose without Christ.

Pascha Monday

The primary theme of the Monday of Holy Week concerns the unfruitful tree that Jesus cursed on His way to Bethany with His disciples. A related event is the overturning of the tables of merchants who were selling goods in the temple. The reading for this occurs in Mark 11:12-14, and this corresponds to the reading of the first hour of Monday morning.

1. The unfruitful fig tree is a symbol of the Jewish nation (Israel), which has now rejected Christ. Christ refers to this rejection in the third hour reading of Monday evening, when Jesus laments, "O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wing, but you were not willing." (Luke 13:31-35).

Christ here tells us the importance of being fruitful in our spiritual lives. One of the worst attributed of man in his spiritual life is mediocrity, although he strives very high in everything else. That is, we become content with mediocrity in our spiritual life and do not achieve our potential in Christ. When we do this, it is a rejection of Christ Himself. Christ tells us here that this is unacceptable and will result in ultimate rejection and condemnation by Him as the fig tree was condemned. We also read about not achieving one's potential in Christ in the parable of the talents and the Rich man and Lazarus, both of which were condemned. So Christ will not accept mediocrity. On the contrary, Christ calls on us to be perfect. He says in Matthew 5:48, "be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Thus, an important lesson for this Monday night is that we must achieve our potential in Christ and be fruitful. Christ tells the disciples how to do this. When Peter on the next day points out that the fig tree had withered, Christ answered and said, "Have faith in God." So Christ tells us here that the way to bear fruit is through faith and repentance.

2. The consequences of bearing fruits are obvious. We draw closer to Christ, lead others to Christ, and ultimately be lead to eternal life. We bear fruits by faith, prayer, and repentance.

The consequences of not bearing fruit are also obvious. When one lives a spiritually mediocre life, they take shortcuts in their fruit bearing by having an outward appearance of bearing fruits, like the Pharisees. The Pharisees outwardly appeared to bear fruits but

inwardly they were withered. We read about this in the ninth hour reading of Monday evening when Jesus dines at the Pharisees house and there he curses them for their outward appearance. The modern day Pharisee is a “religious” person whose religion has gone sour!. St. Paul says, ”They have a form of religion, but they deny the power thereof.” (1 Timothy 3:5).

Christ here wants to draw out attention to this point that the bearing of fruits is internal, and he curses the external appearance of bearing of fruits. He curses the person who is caught up in external appearances and neglects the weightier matters of the law, ”justice, mercy, and faith”. (Matthew 23)

Another consequence of the lack of bearing fruit is a deeper life of sin. A life that turns the church into a business or a social ground like the merchants. A life that uses the church for worldly gain. Christ makes it clear here that such behavior will be overturned. The merchants selling in the temple is a further evidence of the rejection of Christ.

3. As a result of Israel’s rejection of Christ - the fig tree not bearing fruit, Christ himself rejects the Jewish nation by making the fig tree wither. Thus, Christ’s curse is a symbol of the judgment of Israel. As a result, Christ opens his Kingdom to everyone. He mentions this in the first hour of Monday evening when he says ”They will come from the East and the West, and the North and and the South

Christ makes sure that his disciples see this and need to understand here that Israel is being rejected and now the kingdom is open for everyone.

4. The last point we make here is that Christ warns us to watch and be alert, for we do not know when our time will come to depart from this earth. These readings occur in the 1st, 6th, and 11th hour on Monday evening. Christ here makes it clear that the time for repentance is limited, that our time to bear fruits is limited, and we never know when he will call us to give an account of our fruit-bearing. He says, take heed of ourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.” That day came unexpectedly for the fig tree, as Jesus called upon it and it had no fruits to show.

It is interesting to note here that Jesus visited the fig tree out of season, that is He visited it at an unexpected time. This is a symbol for the unexpected arrival of Christ in our life, and this theme is continued in the Pascha Tuesday Gospel readings. Thus Jesus makes

it clear to us here in the beginning of the Holy Week to be alert and to watch, and to repent so that the cares of this life do not overtake us, like they did the merchants and the Pharisees, and the rich farmer in the parable of the rich fool. for our time here is very limited and the time to repent and bear fruits is now, and not tomorrow.

Pascha Tuesday

The theme in the Monday evening Gospel readings dealt with the unfruitful fig tree, and the consequences of being unfruitful. It is interesting to note here that Jesus visited the fig tree out of season, that is He visited it at an unexpected time. This is a symbol for the unexpected arrival of Christ in our life, and this theme is continued in tonight's Gospel readings.

Most of tonight's (Tuesday's) Gospel readings are based on several parables of Christ, and sometimes the Tuesday of Holy Week is referred to as the day of parables. In some of tonight's Gospel readings (11th hour of the morning, 1st, 3rd, and 6th hours of Tuesday evening), the readings focus on Christ's second coming, how we should prepare for His coming, a description of the Kingdom of God, and the element of surprise in His coming. Christ is so serious about the description of His coming and the Kingdom that He used four different parables to describe these events in detail.

Thus, we want to talk about these parables, and in particular how do we make the Kingdom of God a reality for us in our lives.

1. For the Kingdom of God to become a reality for us, we must first repent. Jesus said, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." (Matthew 4:17). Repentance is Godly sorrow for the sins we have committed. Godly sorrow is not like the worldly sorrow, which leads to despair, panic, sin, and often suicide. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, and repentance leads to forgiveness, and forgiveness leads to salvation, and salvation establishes the Kingdom of God in our life.

The 1st hour of tonight's Gospel reading, we read about a wedding feast of the son of a king, in which one of those present did not have a wedding garment on, and hence was cursed and thrown out from the wedding feast. This wedding garment is the garment of baptism, and the garment of faith, and the garment of repentance and righteousness.

2. For the Kingdom of God to become a reality in us, we must also do God's will. This is why when we pray in the Lord's prayer, we say, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done." That is, the Kingdom of God comes, when His will is done. Thus, Kingdom of God and will of God are tied together. The one does not come without the other.

3. For the Kingdom of God to become a reality in us, we must also be fruitful Christians and servants. We must bear fruit and be spiritually productive in our life. This is why Jesus talks about the parable of the talents in the 11th hour Gospel reading of Tuesday morning. In addition, Jesus talks about the ten virgins in the 6th hour of this evening. Jesus expects us to be fruitful and spiritually productive in our life, and the five virgins who had oil in their lamps were the ones who were fruitful in their spiritual life. They had the spiritual fire and the light of the world, Jesus, in their hearts.

A more general theme of this Holy week that begins to develop in the Gospel readings of today (Tuesday) is the growing hostility, malice, envy, and jealousy towards Jesus by the pharisees, as well as the totally unjust suffering, punishment, humiliation, and psychological torment that Jesus was subjected to. This Holy week, one of our main goals is to focus on the Passion of Jesus in our life, and in particular forget about our own problems and daily affairs, and meditate and fix our eyes on the unjust pain and suffering that Jesus underwent.

It is important to note here that the Coptic Orthodox Church most wisely set forth Palm Sunday as the beginning of the Passion Week. It is a major feast and a most joyful day, where the Psalms are sung in the Singarian tune. It is on this particular day that the respect, honor, and welcome paid to Jesus in the Gospels reach their zenith, and the Church cries out “Hosanna in the Highest.” In contrast, tonight, the hostility and malice towards Christ emerge in the Gospels, they continue to rise throughout the week, and reach their climax on Good Friday with the crucifixion of Jesus.

1. In the 1st and 6th hour Gospel readings of this morning, as well as the 9th and 11th hour Gospel readings of this evening, we start seeing the chief priests and pharisees aggressively questioning the authority of Jesus, and their hostility towards Him increases all the more. In these readings, Jesus uses some very harsh words to counter their ongoing hostility. For example, in the 1st hour Gospel reading of this morning, Jesus says to the pharisees “You are from beneath, I am from above,” and in the 6th hour of Tuesday morning Jesus tells them, “you bear witness of yourself, and your witness is not true.”

It is here that the chief priests, the scribes, the pharisees, and all those who used religion for earning their livelihood, were laying in wait, hunting for words and deeds of Jesus that they might use against Him. What is clear here is that the reason for the ongoing hostility towards Christ, their direct stance and resistance against Him, and His crucifixion could be summed in one phrase: The dazzling success of Christ. His success in elevating the spirits of the people and their understanding of the scriptures and the Law, in infusing joy and hope among the people in general, and in particular among the sinners, the discarded, the humiliated, the rejected, the crushed, the sick who were suffering from hopeless diseases, and those possessed by diabolic powers. Unfortunately, today, this same kind of hostility, envy, jealousy, malice, folly, hatred, and blind fanaticism that was taken against Christ, always finds a target in anyone bent on witnessing and tracking Christ in his own life.

2. For Christ, the mystery of the cross is the mystery of His own glory. The overwhelming suffering the Lord underwent, His psychological torment at the injustice and crookedness of His trial, the desertion of His disciples, the treachery of Judas, and His knowledge that the high priests had agreed with one of His disciples to put a value of just thirty pieces of silver on His life - all this was a path for Him to leave the world of passing trivialities and enter into the glory of the Father. We must also tread the same path in our life. We must share in the suffering of Jesus. The cross with its enormous suffering cannot be compared with the glory it brought forth. This is why in the evening prayers during this period of lent, we read from the Pauline Epistle this great verse from St. Paul, "For I consider, that the sufferings of the present time, are not worth comparing, to the glory that will be revealed in is" (Romans 8:18). The cross did not come by chance in the life of Christ. He was born for it, as He says in John 12:27, "For this purpose I have come to this hour." Likewise man is born for suffering and suffering is born for man.

The suffering of Jesus is not a popular topic in this world. Whenever this topic comes up, people say, "stop right there. I don't want to talk about it or hear about it." People instead say, "entertain me, let's do something fun, or tell me something funny." The fact is, people don't want to talk about the suffering of Jesus because it reveals and unveils the shame of our sin. It is a topic that demands accountability and responsibility for our actions and behavior in life, and that's something most people like to avoid.

Christ abolished sin by His suffering, and reconciled and brought us to life. In doing so, He broke the fearful link that bound our suffering to sin. For our suffering is no longer a participation in the sin of Adam, but rather a participation in the love of Christ. Therefore, if we are in Christ, no matter how much we suffer, and no matter how severe our pain, our suffering is in no way related to whether we deserve that pain. Suffering in our life is no longer a penalty for anything, nor is it a means for atoning for anything, or a punishment for anything. It was sin that decreed that suffering should be a form of penalty or atonement or punishment, and Christ eliminated sin after paying its penalty, atoning for it, and bearing its punishment on the cross.

3. We must not think that the unjust suffering, punishment, humiliation, slander, and blasphemy that eventually led to the crucifixion of Christ was some kind of defeat that Christ suffered in the hands of Satan. It's important to note that Christ was never defeated in anything He did. In fact, He was always in control of every event that happened in His

life and was victorious in everything He did.

An example of Christ's total control in the events leading to His crucifixion is in His encounter with Pilate which we read in the 3rd hour Gospel reading on Good Friday. Recall it was here that Christ told Pilate, "you would have no power over me unless it had been given to you from above," (John 19:11). Pilate actually thought that it was within his authority to release Jesus and not crucify Him. But it was precisely here that Christ checked him, for this was nothing but sheer delusion for Pilate. Jesus regulated for Pilate the course and outcome of His whole trial. Pilate actually articulated what Heaven dictated to him to the letter. This also tells that Christ is always in control in our lives, regardless of the tribulations we encounter.

Though Christ was always in control in every event, the crucifixion of Jesus does show us the dark powers of Satan that are manifested in the people of this world.

The crucifixion of Jesus means:

There is envy and jealousy so serious that it leads to malice and total injustice.

There can be disrespect so fierce that it leads to humiliation.

That greed can be so insidious that it leads to blindness of truth and false witness.

That a conscience can become so twisted that it leads to falsehoods and lies.

That sin can be so serious that it leads to no repentance.

And hatred can be so deep that it leads to murder.

4. The Gospel readings of tonight and the crucifixion of Jesus really make us think about death in our own life. Death is not only relevant for the aged and the weak. It's relevant for everyone, because death takes the life of everyone.

Someone once said, "I went to the funeral home to choose a casket for my oldest sister. We were taken to a showroom in which there were many open caskets at various price levels. With the lids open it seemed as though they represented the very jaws of death. Then a few days later, we stood by an open grave and it seemed as though again, the jaws of death were open to swallow our loved one." Indeed, death swallows up everyone! The young and the old. The strong and the weak. The holy and unholy. Death swallows up everyone. It is always hungry. It is never satisfied. Death even swallowed up Jesus. But that's where death met its nemesis. Though death swallowed up Christ, it was unable

to digest the Lord of Life. Rather death itself, as St. Paul says, was “swallowed up in victory,” (1 Corinthians 15:54). And this is the greatest victory this universe will ever see. It’s the victory that we will celebrate this Sunday, and the victory that we proclaim every time we read the words of the Nicene creed: I await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. “For since by man came death”, writes St. Paul, “by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

5. So in closing, we are on a journey in this lent to prepare for the Kingdom of Heaven, and that through fasting, we are led to the stage of the cross. In this Holy week, we are on a journey to Gethsemane, where we will meet Jesus. We will meet Him not only to share in His suffering, but also to hand Him our sins so that we may have eternal life. The crucifixion of Jesus opens the door for us to come as welcomed guests to the wedding feast of the king and his son, so that we might no longer be strangers or foreigners, but rather fellow citizens with the saints in heaven. St. Paul summarizes this beautifully in Ephesians 2:19, as he says, “Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

Pascha Thursday

Introduction

- The main theme of today is of course the Last Supper, where Christ washed the disciples feet, ate the Passover meal with them, instituted the Eucharist. This is also the night that Judas led the Roman soldiers to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, where then Jesus was arrested and was tried all night long. He was slapped, spat on, mocked beaten and severely punished at His trial. He underwent tremendous punishment and pain.
- A more general theme of this Holy week that began on Tuesday is the growing hostility, malice, envy, and jealousy towards Jesus by the pharisees, as well as the totally unjust suffering, punishment, humiliation, and psychological torment that Jesus was subjected to at His trial.
- Tonight, we want to discuss a couple of themes that emerge from the Gospel readings of Holy Thursday: i) the hostility towards Christ, ii) the meaning of the cross and suffering in the life of Jesus and in our life, iii) the ultimate victory in the resurrection of Jesus and our resurrection.

1. The Hostility Towards Christ

- It is important to note here that the Coptic Orthodox Church most wisely set forth Palm Sunday as the beginning of the Passion Week. It is a major feast and a most joyful day, where the Psalms are sung in the Singarian tune and the Coptic hymns and chants are sung in the Hosanna tune, the most joyous tune in the Coptic Church.
- It is on this particular day that the respect, honor, and welcome paid to Jesus in the Gospels reach their zenith, and the Church cries out “Hosanna in the Highest.”
- In contrast, tonight, the hostility and malice towards Christ begin to reach their climax with His trial followed by His severe beatings and finally with His crucifixion on Good Friday.
- The chief priests, the scribes, the pharisees, and all those who used religion for earning their livelihood, were laying in wait, hunting for words and deeds of Jesus that they might use against Him.

- What is clear here is that the reason for the ongoing hostility towards Christ, their direct stance and resistance against Him, and His crucifixion could be summed in one phrase: The dazzling success of Christ. His success in elevating the spirits of the people and their understanding of the scriptures and the Law, in infusing joy and hope among the people in general, and in particular among the sinners, the discarded, the humiliated, the rejected, the crushed, the sick who were suffering from hopeless diseases, and those possessed by diabolic powers.
- Unfortunately, today, this same kind of hostility, envy, jealousy, malice, folly, hatred, and blind fanaticism that was taken against Christ, always finds a target in anyone bent on witnessing and tracking Christ in his own life.

2. The Cross and Suffering

- Let us now discuss the cross and suffering.
- For Christ, the mystery of the cross is the mystery of His own glory. The overwhelming suffering the Lord underwent, His psychological torment at the injustice and crookedness of His trial, the desertion of His disciples, the treachery of Judas, and His knowledge that the high priests had agreed with one of His disciples to put a value of just thirty pieces of silver on His life - all this was a path for Him to leave the world of passing trivialities and enter into the glory of the Father.
- We must also tread the same path in our life. We must share in the suffering of Jesus. The cross with its enormous suffering cannot be compared with the glory it brought forth.
- This is why in the evening prayers that Abouna does at the homes during this period of lent, we read from the Pauline Epistle this great verse from St. Paul, “For I consider, that the sufferings of the present time, are not worth comparing, to the glory that will be revealed in is” (Romans 8:18).
- The cross did not come by chance in the life of Christ. He was born for it, as He says in John 12:27, “For this purpose I have come to this hour.”
- Likewise man is born for suffering and suffering is born for man.
- The suffering of Jesus is not a popular topic in this world. Whenever this topic comes up, people say, “stop right there. I don’t want to talk about it or hear about

it.” People instead say, “entertain me, let’s do something fun, or tell me something funny.”

- The fact is, people don’t want to talk about the suffering of Jesus because it reveals and unveils the shame of our sin. It is a topic that demands accountability and responsibility for our actions and behavior in life, and that’s something most people like to avoid.
- Christ abolished sin by His suffering, and reconciled and brought us to life. In doing so, He broke the fearful link that bound our suffering to sin. For our suffering is no longer a participation in the sin of Adam, but rather a participation in the love of Christ.
- Therefore, if we are in Christ, no matter how much we suffer, and no matter how severe our pain, our suffering is in no way related to whether we deserve that pain. Suffering in our life is no longer a penalty for anything, nor is it a means for atoning for anything, or a punishment for anything. It was sin that decreed that suffering should be a form of penalty or atonement or punishment, and Christ eliminated sin after paying its penalty, atoning for it, and bearing its punishment on the cross.
- We must not think that the unjust suffering, punishment, humiliation, slander, and blasphemy that eventually led to the crucifixion of Christ was some kind of defeat that Christ suffered in the hands of Satan. It’s important to note that Christ was never defeated in anything He did. In fact, He was always in control of every event that happened in His life and was victorious in everything He did.
- An example of Christ’s total control in the events leading to His crucifixion is in His encounter with Pilate which we read in the 3rd hour Gospel reading on Good Friday. Recall it was here that Christ told Pilate, “you would have no power over me unless it had been given to you from above,” (John 19:11). Pilate actually thought that it was within his authority to release Jesus and not crucify Him. But it was precisely here that Christ checked him, for this was nothing but sheer delusion for Pilate. Jesus regulated for Pilate the course and outcome of His whole trial. Pilate actually articulated what Heaven dictated to him to the letter. This also tells that Christ is always in control in our lives, regardless of the tribulations we encounter.
- Though Christ was always in control in every event, the crucifixion of Jesus does show us the dark powers of Satan that are manifested in the people of this world.

- The crucifixion of Jesus means:

There is envy and jealousy so serious that it leads to malice and total injustice.

There can be disrespect so fierce that it leads to humiliation.

That greed can be so insidious that it leads to blindness of truth and false witness.

That a conscience can become so twisted that it leads to falsehoods and lies.

That sin can be so serious that it leads to no repentance.

And hatred can be so deep that it leads to murder.

- The Gospel readings of tonight and tomorrow really make us think about our own suffering and death. Let us elaborate briefly on this.
- In speaking of suffering, let me tell you the following story. Turner stopped believing in God when he was 20 years old. Ted Turner, as we all know, is the founder and owner of CNN, owner of the Atlanta Braves professional baseball team, and is one of the richest men in the world. He has also won several awards including Time Magazine's Man of the Year.
- During his youth, Ted Turner considered himself a Christian, and at age 17, he even thought about becoming a missionary. But by the time he was 20, Ted Turner found it impossible to believe in God any longer. What happened? When Turner was 20, his 17 year old sister Mary Jane, died after having suffered for 5 years from a horrible disease. As Turner watched Mary Jane suffer and finally die despite countless prayers to God for healing, he decided that there was really no God. "How could such a thing happen if an all powerful and loving God is in control of the universe," said Turner. If God could not answer prayers or prevent suffering figured Ted, then there was no God.
- Like Ted Turner, many people have watched excruciating suffering among their loved ones. Far from losing their faith however, the faith they already had was strengthened in their suffering, because it was not meaningless suffering, but suffering that was filled

with the presence of God. Where is God when we suffer? The answer to that question is that God is exactly where He was when His own Son suffered excruciating pain on the cross. He is supplying His suffering children with much needed strength each day, even as He is preparing a resurrection for them, whereby, He will replace these weak bodies, ravished by pain, with new spiritual bodies not susceptible to pain any more.

3. Suffering Leads to Ultimate Victory: The Resurrection

- Let us contrast Turner's story with a testimony of a young man in his early 20's whose mother died of cancer at age 51. The young man said, "When I looked at her body in the casket lying there, I was filled with the overwhelming feeling that it wasn't her. Yes, it was her body, and yes she was wearing her clothes, but that was not my mother. She was not there. Like Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome in the Gospel of St. Mark, it was as if I heard these same words those three women heard that morning nearly 2000 years ago. 'You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here' (Mark 16:6). Now these words are spoken to all of us. They are words that fill us with hope because we know that God does not abandon us, even in death. We belong to Him both for now and all eternity. We can be filled with hope because we know that death is not the final page of our story. God continues to write our story with the words of the angel, 'He is risen! He is not here.' We can be filled with hope because we know that death will be transformed into new life. No we won't avoid the heartaches and the suffering and the pain, and we cannot avoid death, yet we have hope because we know that God transforms death into new life." The young man concludes by saying, "When I hear the Easter story now, the story of the women who have come to anoint death, and instead find resurrection, I think of my own experience at the empty tomb of my mother. And I am not alone. I stand with many others who have heard the same words in the midst of their grief: 'He is risen! He is not here'."
- The darkness is still with us. But it is now an inhabited darkness, inhabited by Him who is the joyful light, the "light of the world" (John 8:12). "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it," says the Apostle John (John 1:5). The glorious and resplendent light, emanating from the empty tomb dispels the darkness and replaces it with a resplendent light.
- The first Christians in the book of Acts didn't explain the resurrection of Jesus

because only God can explain it. But they proclaimed it with an uncontrollable ecstasy of joy. And this is precisely what the Coptic Church does in the Divine Liturgy of the Resurrection on Easter Eve. During the liturgy, the church lights are turned off and the church becomes completely dark. Then the priest and the deacon “act out” the resurrection of Jesus, and the church lights come back on after a big bang signifying the resurrection of Christ. Thus, the church literally acts out the resurrection of Jesus during the liturgy, and the deacons chant the beautiful hymns of the resurrection in the procession which follows.

- The resurrection of Jesus means:

There is no fear so great that there can be no calm.

And no death so final that there can be no life.

And no grief so deep that there can be no consolation.

And no injustice so insidious that there cannot be justice and truth.

And no sin so serious that there cannot be forgiveness.

And no war so fierce that there cannot be peace.

And no hatred so deep that there cannot be love.

- Death is not only relevant for the aged and the weak. It’s relevant for everyone, because death takes the life of everyone.
- Someone once said, “I went to the funeral home to choose a casket for my oldest sister. We were taken to a showroom in which there were many open caskets at various price levels. With the lids open it seemed as though they represented the very jaws of death. Then a few days later, we stood by an open grave and it seemed as though again, the jaws of death were open to swallow our loved one.”
- Indeed, death swallows up everyone! The young and the old. The strong and the weak. The holy and unholy. Death swallows up everyone. It is always hungry. It

is never satisfied. Death even swallowed up Jesus. But that's where death met its nemesis. Though death swallowed up Christ, it was unable to digest the Lord of Life. Rather death itself, as St. Paul says, was "swallowed up in victory," (1 Corinthians 15:54).

- And this is the greatest victory this universe will ever see. It's the victory that we will celebrate this Sunday, and the victory that we proclaim every time we read the words of the Nicene creed: I await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come.
- "For as by man came death", writes St. Paul, "by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive," (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).
- Grief stricken widow, weep no more for your husband if he died in the Lord. And heart-broken mother, weep no more for your child snatched so soon from your embrace. "For in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, we shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52).
- We shall see again the eye that has just now been closed. And we shall grasp again the hand that just now fell motionless at the side. And we shall touch again the cheek that just now is clay cold and white. And we shall hear again the sweet voice that is now silent in the tomb.
- The dead shall live again. And those who fear death, why fear to die? Jesus died before us, and He has already passed those iron gates. And since He has passed before us, He will be there to meet us. "For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him" (Luke 20:38).
- Why should we weep? For as Jesus rose from the dead, so shall we, and He tells us to "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).
- In speaking of death, we give here an example of one of the many deathbed testimonies that speak so powerfully of life after death, that is, eternal life. A well known oncologist and professor of pediatrics at Yale University said that for nearly 25 years she has stood at the deathbeds of children and listened to the calm hopeful visions of their dying moments, which she says echo the stories told by other children who have had near death experiences. Early in her medical career, she (the doctor) sat with a family beside their 7 year old daughter who was in the last stages of leukemia. The

little girl had the final energy to sit up in bed and say to her parents, in the presence of the doctor, “The angels. They’re so beautiful. Mommy, can you see them? Can you hear their singing? I’ve never heard such beautiful singing.” Then the child died.

- After witnessing this, the doctor said, “The word that most closely described what I felt is the word *gift*. It wasn’t just that the child was given the gift of peace in the final moment of her life, but this was a gift to her parents and to me personally.”
- Life after death, eternal life, is indeed a gift that God gives to all who believe in His name and are baptized. But the existence of life after death is *not* based on the gift of deathbed visions of angels or brilliant light, or oil from icons, or whatever. Our faith in eternal life is based rather on the *solid rock* of the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus! Such beautiful deathbed testimonies, and there are many of them, are given to us by God as a bonus of His grace to help bolster our faith in life after death.
- What we need to remember is that for those who live in faith and surrender themselves to the will and love of God, the resurrection becomes a daily reality: souls are quickened and sins are forgiven, and the mind is illumined and the heart is purified every day as the Holy Spirit forms the mind of Christ in each one of us.
- We are now on our final journey in this period of Lent to prepare for the Kingdom of Heaven, and that through fasting, we are led to the stage of the cross. In this Holy week, we are on a journey to Golgotha, where we will meet Jesus. We will meet Him not only to share in His suffering, but also to hand Him our sins so that we may have eternal life. The crucifixion of Jesus opens the door for us to come as welcomed guests to the wedding feast of the king and his son as we read this Pascha Tuesday, so that we might no longer be strangers or foreigners, but rather fellow citizens with the saints in heaven. St. Paul summarizes this beautifully in Ephesians 2:19, as he says, “Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”
- We close here with words placed rhetorically in the mouth of Jesus by one of the saints in a 15th century Paschal homily:

“Come to Me all you families of humankind sullied by sin and receive the forgiveness of your sins. For I am your forgiveness. I am the Pascha of salvation. I am the Lamb sacrificed to you. I am your redemption. I am your life. I am your resurrection. I am your light. I am your salvation. I am your King. I lead you to the heights of heaven.

I show you the Father eternal. I will raise you by My right hand.”

Tradition and Christianity

We want to discuss four aspects of tradition. These are

1. What is tradition?
2. Impact of tradition on Christianity
3. Role of tradition in Orthodox Christianity
4. Importance of tradition in service

What is tradition?

1. The word tradition in Greek, as is mentioned in the New Testament is “Paradosis,” does *not* mean imitation. It comes from the verb “paradidomi” which means “handing over or delivering something by hand.” It is also closely related to the verb “paralambano” which means “receiving a thing or taking it.”
2. Tradition is that which guides our today based on yesterdays.

Impact of Tradition on Christianity

There are four aspects of the impact of tradition on Christianity. These are, i) tradition and the Bible, ii) tradition and the councils, iii) tradition and the sacraments, and iv) tradition and the Church.

Tradition and the Bible

1. The Bible is the written part of tradition. Tradition, in its totality, is the Bible plus what the church kept as teachings and practices from Apostolic teachings.

2. The Orthodox Church offers me the Bible in the prayers of the seven daily Agpeya prayers, during raising of incense, and in the Liturgical services.
3. Through tradition, the Orthodox Church teaches me the practical spirituality of the Bible, not from a philosophical point of view. St. Augustine once said, “As for me, I would not believe in the Gospel if the authority of the Church did not move me to do so.”
4. The Apostolic teachings are reflected in the Bible according to the gifts given to each.
 - **St. John and Love** - St. John speaks of salvation through *love*.
 - “The one who does not love has not known God. For God is love” (1 John 4:8).
 - “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16).
 - “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:11).
 - “If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12).
 - **St. Paul and Faith** - St. Paul speaks of salvation through *faith*.
 - “Even the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ, toward all and upon all those who believe” (Romans 3:22).
 - “Then where is the boasting? It is excluded. Through what law? of works? No, but through the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the works of the Law” (Romans 3:27-28).
 - “For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Romans 4:13).
 - “Not having my own righteousness, which is of the Law, but through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9).
 - **St. James and Works** - St. James speaks of salvation through *works*.
 - “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).
 - “My brothers, what profit is it if a man says he has faith and does not have works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14).
 - “Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith from my works. You believe that there is one God, you do well; even the demons believe and tremble” (James 2:18-19).

- “You see then how a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24).
- **St. Peter and Hope** - St. Peter speaks of salvation through *hope*.
 - “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).
 - “By the power of God, having been kept through faith to a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5).
 - “Therefore girding up the loins of your mind, being sober, perfectly hope for the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13).
 - “He who raised Him up from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope might be in God” (1 Peter 1:21).
 - “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason of the hope in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

5. The Gospels and Epistles

- The Gospel according to St. Matthew is in harmony with the Epistle of St. James.
- The Gospel according to St. Mark is in harmony with the Epistles of St. Peter
- The Gospel according to St. Luke is in harmony with the Epistles of St. Paul
- The Gospel according to St. John is in harmony with the Epistles of St. John

Tradition and the Councils

1. The role of the Councils was/is not to establish new rules in the church, but to explain and clarify the rules already established by the apostolic tradition.
2. The Orthodox Creed was initially established by the apostles themselves as they received it from Christ, when He told them, “Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”
3. It was the apostolic traditions of the Orthodox Church that guided it through the three councils to maintain the faith until today.

Tradition and the Sacraments

1. The orthodox faith which we received from the apostles was given to us in two parts: the first is the oral message that renews us and revitalizes the dynamics of our spirituality through faith in Jesus Christ, and the second is the personal unity with Christ Himself, which can only be fulfilled in Secret (hence the sacraments).
2. A prerequisite to our unity with Jesus Christ is that we must be living spiritually.
 - “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).
 - “God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).
3. Our new birth and fellowship are given to us in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist which Jesus Christ established and gave to the apostles.

Tradition and the Church

1. The church was established by Christ Himself:
 - “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).
 - “And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Of whomever sins you remit, they are remitted to them. Of whomever sins you retain, they are retained” (John 20-22-23).
2. The Orthodox Church today is nothing but the continuation of that first church, through the ordination of bishops, priests, deacons, and all its rites through tradition.
3. The earthly church (church repentant) is one with the heavenly church (church triumphant) whose chorus offers prayers and intercessions on behalf of the earthly church.

Importance of Tradition in Service

1. Tradition is the guide that leads the church to her final destination.
2. It is through tradition that we carry the torch of love, faith, deeds, and hope from one generation to the next.
3. Tradition is the dynamism of the Bible manifested in our lives.
4. We must embrace the Orthodox tradition in carrying the message of salvation to the world.
5. We must acknowledge the importance of the responsibility we have been given in delivering what we have received from the fathers of the church.

Fasting

- The most important aspect of fasting is a spiritual one. We grow spiritually and get closer to God through fasting and prayer. We read in the Gospels, “However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29).
- Fasting weakens the body and elevates the soul. It is a battle against the flesh. A weakened body is less susceptible to sin and more susceptible to an awakened soul. “My knees are weak through fasting, And my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness” (Psalm 109:24). Fasting is the first response to the act of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Fasting on the Mount was the first act of Christ to begin His ministry.
- Fasting removes the “lust of the flesh”, “the lust of the eyes”, and “the pride of life” (1 John 2:16).
- The Coptic Orthodox Church designates 210 days per year for fasting.
 - The Holy Nativity Fast - It is 43 days, from November 25 - January 6, with fish and seafood. No other animal products are allowed. We prepare for Christ coming into the world and in our hearts through fasting.
 - Jonah’s Fast - 3 days, no fish or seafood, and no other animal products, and it is always 2 weeks before the beginning of the Great Lent.
 - Great Lent - 55 days, no fish or seafood, and no other animal products. It represents the fast of Christ on the Mount of Temptation (40 days), plus 7 days of preparation, plus the Holy Week (8 days).
 - The Apostles Fast - fish and seafood are allowed. No other animal products are allowed. Always ends July 12th. July 12 commemorates the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul.
 - St. Mary’s Fast - 15 days, from August 7 - 21. Fish and seafood are allowed but no other animal products. August 22 is the feast of the Assumption of St. Mary.
 - We fast every Wednesday and Friday throughout the year, except in the Holy Fifty days. These fasts are without fish, seafood, or other animal products. Judas betrayed Jesus to the chief priests on Wednesday and Friday is the day Jesus was crucified.

- Paramouni fasts are always without fish, seafood, or other animal products. Paramouni is the day before the feasts of Nativity and Epiphany. The Paramouni days are fasted to compensate for the feast days falling on a Wednesday or Friday, so that we may have the blessings of the fast and of the feast.
- Why can we eat fish and seafood in some fasts and not in others?
 - Fasting without fish or seafood - Man's original state involved eating only fruits and vegetables. Adam only ate fruits and vegetables in the Garden of Eden. We fast without fish or seafood to go back to our original state, resembling Adam's original state. Christ fasted on the mount without food and water to undo Adam's sin, so that He could correct the sin of Adam, and this is why in Lent for example, we fast without fish - to return to the original Adam.
 - There are many examples in the Bible demonstrating a way of life eating only fruits and vegetables.
 - * God told Adam to eat fruits and vegetables. "And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food'" (Genesis 1:29).
 - * God commanded Adam to eat fruits and vegetables after his fall, "Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field" (Genesis 3:18).
 - * The Israelites ate manna in the wilderness. "Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil" (Numbers 11:7-8).
 - * Daniel and his three friends (Shedrach, Meshach, Abednego) only ate vegetables in the house of Nebuchadnezzar. "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants. So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies" (Daniel 1:12-15).

- * As God spoke to Ezekiel, He told him what to eat: “Also take for yourself wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt; put them into one vessel, and make bread of them for yourself. During the number of days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat it. And your food which you eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day; from time to time you shall eat it. You shall also drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin; from time to time you shall drink” (Ezekiel 4:9-11).
- So man’s original state was to eat only fruits and vegetables. Meat was introduced to man only after the flood. God told Noah in Genesis 9:1-6, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man” (Genesis 9:1-6).
- God approves of man eating meat, as He told Noah, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.” There are many other examples in the Bible in which we see God’s approval of meat. For example, God nourished Elijah by providing him bread and meat: “And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook” (1 Kings 17:4-6).
- Thus we do not eat meat and dairy products in fasts because
 - We return to our original state in Adam in Paradise.
 - Meat and other dairy products weigh the body down, giving it too much energy and fat. As a result, carnal and bodily desires escalate and thus we become more susceptible to sin.
 - After a long abstinence, eating meat and animal products often creates the desire for eating more and more, thus defeating the purpose of a fast. Fruits and vegetables, on the other hand, and even fish, curb the desire to eat, even after a long abstinence.

- We are allowed to eat fish and seafood in some fasts because
 - it makes fasting easier, more practical, and more feasible. If the Church imposed a no animal product and no fish or seafood fast for all of the fasts, very few people would be able to do it, thereby defeating its purpose. The allowing of fish and seafood by the church is a practical compromise.
 - Fish and seafood does not create the same bodily energy, fat, and carnal desires that meats and other animal products create.
 - Christ ate fish with the disciples when He had breakfast with them by the sea after His resurrection (John 21:13).
 - The sign of the fish is widely used today as a symbol of Christianity. Many of the events in the Bible involved fish in some way. Four of the disciples were fisherman (James, John, Peter, and Andrew). Jesus made the disciples “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). Jesus cites Jonah as an example. Jesus feeds five thousand. Jesus feeds four thousand. A fish with a coin in its mouth. Jesus feeds his disciples by the Sea of Galilee after his resurrection. “Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken” (John 21:11).

- The issue of internal vs. external fertilization: some church fathers write and say that we can eat fish in some fasts and not other animal products because fish reproduce externally, whereas mammals reproduce internally. The notion then is that internally reproductive animals give us greater carnal and bodily desires. This statement is not quite true in at least two respects: i) we are allowed to eat seafood during fasts that allow fish. Shrimp, crab, and other seafood all reproduce internally and so the argument of external fertilization breaks down here, ii) it is not the animal itself or the behavior of the animal that makes us more carnal, it is the meat itself which contains much fat and protein that gives our bodies excess energy and bodily desires, which makes us more susceptible to sin.

- How long do we fast before communion? The church says that must fast at least nine hours before Holy Communion. Also, once Communion is given on a Church altar, at least 9 hours must pass before that altar can be used again. There are three occasions in the church year in which the altar is used on the same day, 9 hours apart. These are Christmas, the Resurrection, and Epiphany.

- What is the significance of the 9 hours?
 - The 9 hours also symbolize the time of the third hour to the 12th hour for Jesus on Good Friday. In the third hour, Jesus was scourged, beaten, and delivered to be crucified. In the twelfth hour, He was buried in the tomb.
 - The nine hours also corresponds to the hours of the Agpeya from sunrise (Prime) to the end of the ninth hour (None). Vespers are the Agpeya readings for sunset and come after the ninth hour readings.

Understanding the Coptic Orthodox Divine Liturgy

References

1. How to Benefit from the Holy Liturgy, by Bishop Mettaous
2. The Spirituality of the Rites of the Holy Mass, by Bishop Mettaous
3. St. Basil Liturgy Reference Book, by Father Abraam Sleman
4. Understanding the Liturgy, by Father Athanasius Iskander

Introduction

The word “Liturgy” means the corporate service of worship of the assembled church, or in short, group public worship. The word “litany” means group praise. The Divine liturgy in the Coptic Orthodox Church is very spiritually rich. It is very important to understand the liturgy so that we can benefit from it and explain it to others. The Divine liturgy in the Coptic Orthodox Church is the essence of prayer and group worship. The church, where the liturgy is performed, is the house of God, the door to heaven, the house of the angels and the saints.

During the prayers of the Divine Liturgy, the angels, archangels, the Cherubim, the Seraphim, and all the heavenly host are present around the altar with great glory. During the sacred moment when the priest asks the Holy Spirit to descend, the Holy Spirit comes amid the joy of the angels and changes the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in an incomprehensible mystery. Thus, the time we spend in church during the Divine Liturgy is a moment of the heavenly life on earth.

The Liturgy of St. Basil has three major parts: i) The Offertory, ii) The Liturgy of the Catechumens, and iii) The Liturgy of the Faithful. The outline of the Coptic Orthodox Liturgy is as follows:

1. Part I: The Offertory

- The Preparation

- Putting on the Vestments
- Preparing the Altar
- The Canonical Hours
- The Hand Washing
- The Orthodox Creed

- **Choosing the Lamb**

- The Bread
- The Wine
- The Rite of Choosing the Lamb
- Baptizing the Lamb
- The Procession of the Lamb

- **The Litany of Offerings**

2. **Part II: The Liturgy of the Catechumens**

- **The Absolutions**

- Absolution to the Son
- Absolutions to the Ministers

- **The Readings**

- The Pauline Epistle
- The Catholic Epistle
- The Praxis: The Acts of the Apostles
- The Synaxarium
- The Psalm and the Gospel
- The Sermon

- **The Prayer of the Veil**

- **The Three Major Litanies**

- The Litany of Peace
- The Litany of the Fathers
- The Litany of the Congregations

3. Part III: The Liturgy of the Faithful

- **The Orthodox Creed**
- **The Pre-Anaphora**
 - Washing the Hands
 - The Prayer of Reconciliation
 - The Apostolic Kiss
- **The Anaphora (Eucharistic prayers)**
 - The Lord be with You
 - Worthy and Just
 - The Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy)
- **The Consecration**
 - The Institution Narrative
 - The Anamnesis
 - The Epiclesis: The Invocation of the Holy Spirit

The Seven Minor Litanies

- The Litany of Peace
 - The Litany of the Fathers
 - The Litany of the Ministers
 - The Litany of Mercy
 - The Litany of the Places
 - The Litany of the Waters, Sowing, and Harvesting
 - The Litany of the Oblations
- **The Commemoration of the Saints**
 - **The Diptych**
 - **The Fraction**
 - Introduction to the Fraction
 - Prayer of the Fraction
 - The Lord's Prayer

- Inaudible Prayers

Note: There are different fraction prayers for the various occasions, including the Nativity and Christmas Eve, Theophany, The Great Lent, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Great Saturday, Easter through Pentecost, The Lords feasts, The Apostles, The Holy Virgin and the Angels, and several others.

- **The Confession**

- Prayers Before the Confession
- The Prayer of Confession

- **The Holy Communion**

- Distributing the Holy Body
- Distributing the Honored Blood
- Communion Praises
- Thanksgiving Prayer After Communion

- **The Dismissal**

- Dismissing the Angel of the Sacrifice
- Dismissing the Congregation
- The Code of Benediction
- Washing the Hands
- The Distribution of Eulogia: Morsel of Blessing

Part I: The Offertory

We have to be well prepared for our journey from the earthly to the heavenly in the Orthodox Liturgy. To receive the Law, Moses was ordered that all the people should be sanctified for three days. The church commands the priests and the people to be prepared for receiving Holy Communion. Repentance, confession, and contrite hearts praising God is the key to preparation for the Liturgy.

- **The Preparation**

- **Putting on the Vestments** - The priests and deacons wear clothes sanctified by the prayer of the Bishop and dedicated for the service of the Lord. The vestments of the priest are based on the way the high priests dressed in the Old Testament (Exodus 28:3-37). Their white garments resemble “honor and beauty” (Exodus 28:40). The priest recites Psalms 29 and 92 while putting on his vestments. Psalm 29 talks about the clothes as those of an eternal wedding and Psalm 92 declares God’s kinship with the Church.
- **Preparing the Altar** - Preparing the altar is symbolic of the preparation of the upper room where the Lord met with His disciples to eat the Passover meal. “Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us” (Mark 14:15). The priest prays a preparation prayer. He then opens the vessel pack which is wrapped in the prospherine, and arranges the sacred vessels which are used in the service.

These are

- * The Cup (Chalice) - which holds the wine that will become the Holy Blood of Christ
- * The Paten - which is for the bread that will become the Holy Body of Christ
- * The Spoon (Mastear) - which is for serving the communion at the end of the Liturgy
- * The Dome - which is used to hold the veils above the paten

The priest blesses the sacred vessels then wipes the Cup, the Paten, and the Spoon. Then the priest covers the altar with the veils and puts the vessels in their proper places.

- **The Canonical Hours** - These are Psalm readings from the Agpeya. The Psalms contain prophecies about the Lord’s life and redemption. Therefore, the bread and wine should be present during the the Agpeya prayers. The third and sixth hours are read during non-fasting days, and the ninth hour is added during fasting days. During the great lent, the third, sixth, ninth, eleventh, and twelfth hours are read. The priest says the first Psalm of the 3rd hour, Psalm 19, Psalm 29, 44, and 46. The priest says the first Psalm of the sixth hour, Psalm 84, Psalm 92. The third

hour reminds us of three things: i) The Lord's trial, ii) the Ascension, and iii) the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of the 3rd hour is about the Holy Spirit. The sixth hour reminds us of the crucifixion of Christ. Psalms 52, 56, 68, 92 refer to the crucifixion of Christ. The Gospel of the 6th hour refers to the blessings for those who participate in the sufferings of the cross. The litany is appropriate for the crucifixion also. The ninth hour is the hour of the death of Christ.

- **The Hand Washing** - The priest washes his hands three times while saying two Psalms: Psalm 50 and Psalm 25. "You have sprinkled me with hyssop and I shall be made clean; you shall wash me and I shall be made whiter than snow" (Psalm 50). "I will wash my hands in innocence and I will go about Your altar, O Lord that I may hear the voice of Your praise and tell of all Your wondrous works" (Psalm 25). These Psalms refer to washing ourselves from sin. Then the priest wipes his hands with a white towel.
- **The Orthodox Creed** - The Nicene Creed is recited from the Agpeya. As we recite the creed, we should remember the Lord's plan for our salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit in us. After the creed is recited, the deacons and the people sing Kyrie-leyson 41 times asking God fervently for His mercy. Forty one times refer to the 39 scourges with which the Lord Jesus was whipped, one for the crown of thorns, and one for His bleeding side from the spear.

- **Choosing the Lamb**

- **The Bread** - The bread is round, in the shape of a circle, having no beginning and no end to symbolize the eternity of our Lord. It is stamped in the center with a large cross representing Christ surrounded by twelve small crosses representing the twelve disciples. Around the crosses appears the stamp of the Trisagion: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal." The bread is pierced in five places around the central crosses in reference to the three nails that held Jesus on the cross, the crown of thorns, and his pierced side. The bread is made from pure wheat, leavened but unsalted, because Jesus is the salt of the earth. The leaven symbolizes our sins which Christ bore for us. The bread must be freshly baked.
- **The Wine** - The wine must be grape wine, pure and red in color. The priest must smell the wine to see that it has not soured. The wine is mixed with water, which

symbolizes the mixture of blood and water that came out of the side of Jesus when he was pierced with a spear on the cross.

- **The Rite of Choosing the Lamb** - This rite speaks of the salvation events united together as if they were one event and beyond the limits of time. After the priest dries his hands on a clean white linen towel, he then takes a veil from the paten and puts it inside his sleeve on his left arm or on his head. He then holds the cross with his right hand and stands by the sanctuary door facing the West as the Lamb and the wine are presented to him. The holy bread, which is to become the Lamb, should be presented by the highest-ranking deacon present as an Honor to the Lamb.

The priest puts the decanter of wine on the nearest bread loaf and does the sign of the cross on the deacon carrying the holy bread, saying, “In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.” He then does the sign of the cross on the bread and wine three times saying, “Blessed be the Father, God Almighty, Amen. Blessed be His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, Amen.” He then does the sign of the cross on the bread with the decanter of wine saying, “Glory and honor, honor and glory to the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore Amen.”

Next the priest examines the bread to choose the most suitable one for offering. Standing to the left of the priest is the deacon holding the pitcher of water, and on the right of the priest is the deacon holding the decanter of wine. In front of the priest is the deacon holding the basket of bread. Then the priest and the three deacons smell the wine to make sure that it is pure and not vinegary and is not distilled wine. If the wine is good, the deacon responds by saying “pure and precious.” The priest then hands the decanter to the deacon. When choosing the most suitable bread which is to become the Lamb, the priest places his right hand on top of his left, placing his hands over the tray in the shape of a cross, as Jacob did when he blessed the sons of Joseph (Genesis 48:8). While Doing this the priest says, “May the Lord choose a Lamb without blemish.” He holds each bread in his hands and examines them carefully to choose the best. If the one in his right hand is the best, he puts the one in his left hand back in the basket. Then he takes another one in his left hand and compares it with the one in his right. If the one in his left is best, he takes it in his right hand and holds the other bread in his left hand. He must ensure that the best bread is always on top, putting the other bread back in the tray and picking another one to

compare with the one in his right hand. He compares all of the bread in the basket until he finds the best one, being the best in appearance, with a perfect Spadikon, and the right number of pierced holes. Nothing should be sticking to it and it should not have cracks; it should be without blemish, just like the Passover lamb (Genesis 12:5).

The priest then touches each of the other breads in the basket with the back of the chosen bread, which is still in his right hand, and places them back in the basket. He then wipes the chosen bread carefully with the small veil, taking care not to turn it upside down. Holding the chosen bread in his left hand so that the three pierced holes are on the right side of the bread, he then dips his right thumb into the wine decanter which the deacon is holding and makes the sign of the cross, once on the face of the chosen bread in his left hand while saying, "Sacrifice of Glory", and then on the rest of the bread in the basket, saying, "Sacrifice of blessing...Sacrifice of Abraham...Sacrifice of Isaac...Sacrifice of Jacob." He again signs over the chosen bread, and says, "Sacrifice of Melchizedek." Then the priest bows, asking for absolution from those around him, before entering the sanctuary.

Touching the remaining breads with the chosen bread symbolizes that all the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to the Sacrifice of the Cross, and that the Sacrifice of the Cross was in turn the aim and the objective of all the Old Testament sacrifices. Holding the chosen sacrifice in his right hand, keeping it on top while touching the other breads, and making sure it is never upside down emphasizes the superior honor and glory that the sacrifice of the New Testament had over those of the Old Testament. The final sign of the cross is done over the chosen bread with the intention of revealing that the sacrifice of the New Testament resembles, to a great extent, the sacrifice of Melchizedek which was a sacrifice of bread and wine and not a sacrifice of blood. The sign of the cross is done firstly and lastly on the chosen bread as it will be transformed into the real Body of the Son of God, who said about Himself, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Revelation 22:13). The bread is round in shape and around its circumference is imprinted in Greek 'Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal'. It is as round as the sun to symbolize the True Lamb, the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2), Jesus Christ, having no beginning or end as Christ is without beginning or end; the Alpha and the Omega, the Eternal Son of God. The imprint on the bread has twelve small squares, a square for each of the

twelve disciples, and within each square is a cross. Encircled by these twelve small squares is a large square with a large cross inside of it. This middle part is called the 'Spadikon', a Greek word meaning 'The Lord'; the large Center Square symbolizing Jesus Christ, Glory is to Him. Around the Spadikon are five holes, which have been pierced into the bread, representing the sufferings of our Lord: three nail wounds, the crown of thorns, and the piercing of His side. These holes should be placed so that three holes are on the right side of the Spadikon and two holes are on the left. Whenever the priest holds the Bread the three holes should be on the right side. The number of holy breads in the basket from which the priest chooses the Lamb should always be an odd number (for example 3, 5, 7). The spiritual significance of this is that the number three signifies the Holy Trinity and choosing one of them reminds us that the Eternal Word was Incarnate to forgive the sins of the world. It also declares that the three Hypostasis - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - are all sharing in the salvation process. The number five signifies the five sacrifices of the Old Testament: the burnt offering, the sin offering, the iniquity offering, the peace offering, and the bread offering,

These sacrifices were performed using one of five pure living creatures; sheep, cows, goats, pigeons or turtle doves (Leviticus 10:14). The number seven represents the five types of sacrifice, as stated above, plus the two birds that were sacrificed to purify the leper (Leviticus 14:4). All of these sacrifices were archetypes of the sacrifice of the cross and therefore also of the sacrifice of the Holy Liturgy.

Since our Master, Jesus Christ carried our sins within His Body on the cross as He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin, so the bread offered in the Holy Liturgy should be made with yeast (leavened bread) to symbolize these sins that Christ bore. The Coptic Orthodox Church, led by the Holy Spirit, makes its holy bread with yeast, which should then be baked so that the yeast perishes just as sin perished in the Resurrected Body of Christ. The yeast is still present in the bread but is dead because of the fire. As the fire spoiled the effect of the yeast, so Christ had ended the effect of sin through offering His Body as a sacrifice; "God, by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh on account of sin, He condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).

- **Baptizing the Lamb** - After putting the veil on the altar, the priest then carries the Lamb and wets his right index finger and makes the sign of the cross on the bread

from the top of the bread to the bottom, then around the bread from the left side to the right. This action symbolizes the baptism of Christ by St. John the Baptist in the River Jordan. While doing this, the priest prays “Let our sacrifice be accepted before You Lord for the forgiveness of my sins, and the ignorance of Your people.” The priest then kneels over the selected Lamb asking the Lord to accept this sacrifice as a sacrifice for his own sins in particular, and also for the ignorance of the congregation. He places all the burdens of his congregation, the Church and the whole world on this Lamb which carries the sins of the whole world. Then he prays silently a deep prayer called the Prayer of Commemoration. He places upon the Lamb that is about to be slain for us, all the hardships, tribulations and diseases of His people. The priest pleads for forgiveness for the sinners, the raising of the fallen, steadfastness for the righteous, healing for the sick, relief for the troubled, a safe return for the travelers and reposal for those who have slept. With these remembrances the priest mentions people by name, which have often been written on a piece of paper and placed on the Altar in front of him.

The priest then prays for all Christians in general and for the Orthodox Christians and his relatives in particular, saying, “Remember O Lord, Your servants, the Orthodox Christians, everyone in his name, remember, O Lord, my father, my mother, my brothers and my relatives in the flesh. My spiritual fathers, guard the living with Your angel of safety, and repose those who have slept.” After giving priority to everyone else by praying for them first, he then mentions himself last, saying, “Remember, O Lord, my weakness, I, the poor, and forgive my many sins.”

The priest mentions himself last as an act of self-denial, as if he says with the Apostle Paul, “Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me. For I am the least of the Apostles, unfit to be called an apostle” (1 Corinthians 15:8-9). The priest prays these remembrances and pleadings for his people, for if he succeeds in accomplishing his mission with the Lord as an advocate and intercessor, he can heal the sick, solve the problems, eliminate the hardships of the people, and can then rejoice with his congregation like a father does with his children, saying with the Apostle, “Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me” (Philippians 2:17-18). The priest then briefly says the three Major Litanies; “Remember, O Lord, the peace of Your One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic

Church...” “Remember, O Lord, our Pontiff Pope Abba Shenouda III, “Remember O Lord our gatherings, bless them...”

- **The Procession of the Lamb** - The priest wraps the Lamb in the same veil he used during its selection. He puts the cross on top of the Lamb in a slanted fashion, as Christ bent while holding the Cross going to Golgotha. He holds the lamb in reverence against his head while standing at the door of the sanctuary saying, “Glory and honor, honor and glory...”

The priest prays the prayer “Glory and honor...” while standing at the door of the sanctuary for three reasons. Firstly, everyone can hear the whole prayer instead of missing parts of it, which can sometimes happen if the priest is moving around the altar. Secondly, it then gives the priest more time when he does move around the Altar to pray the important inaudible prayer of “Remember O Lord all those who have asked us to remember them in our prayers, may the Lord remember them in His Heavenly Kingdom,” in which he mentions all those whom he mentioned before, and maybe those who he forgot to mention. And thirdly, it gives the deacon a chance to respond, as he proceeds around the Altar saying, “Pray for these Holy and Honored oblations, and for our sacrifices, and for those who offered them.” When the priest carries the Lamb with both hands and holds it against his head, he re-enacts what Simeon the Elder did when he carried the child Jesus and proceeded around the altar of God (Luke 2:28). Just as Simeon blessed the salvation of the Lord which He prepared before all people, so the priest also goes around the Altar glorifying God, Who sent His Son for our salvation. The Procession of the Lamb goes around the Altar only once, to symbolize the Savior being taken to the temple by his parents to fulfill the requirements of the law. It also represents that Christ would offer Himself only once as a sacrifice for the whole world.

At the end of the round, the priest stands at the left-hand side of the Altar, unwraps the oblation and lays it on his left palm. He moves the wine decanter near it and prays loudly while signing the cross three times over the bread and wine. He then puts the bread in the paten under the dome with its three holes to the right, completing the three signings, saying, “Glory and Honor...” Next the priest uncovers the chalice and makes sure that it is clean by wiping it with the veil in his right hand.

He takes the decanter from the deacon and after the response is said by the congregation he says, “Pray.” He signs the congregation with the wine while saying, “Peace

be to you all” and follows with the Thanksgiving Prayer. He pours the wine in the chalice. Then the deacon pours some water in the decanter, which is carried by the priest (around 1/4 or 1/3 full, but not exceeding 1/3 and not less than 1/10). The priest then shakes the decanter and pours it into the chalice. He gives the deacon the decanter upside-down in order that it dry properly and quickly in preparation for the next liturgy. The priest completes these tasks while praying the Thanksgiving Prayer. The priest then holds the cross to do the necessary signings for the Thanksgiving Prayer and the Offertory.

It is preferable when pouring the wine and water in the chalice, to pour it in the sign of the cross to remind us that the cross became our strength and pride. Mixing the wine with water reminds the believers of the blood and water that gushed out when Christ our Redeemer was pierced in His side. As they offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, the believers should remember that their Christ is alive in His Divinity although He died in the flesh and gave up His humanly Spirit to the hands of His Father. The proof that He is alive in His Divinity, even after He bowed His Head, came when they pierced His side with a spear, and blood and water ran out of His side (John 19:34). It is medically impossible for a dead person to bleed liquid blood. It is a known fact that when someone dies, his blood clots. To ascertain the death of a person, the physician sticks a pin in his body. If there is no flow of blood, then the person is dead. Even if they stab the heart of a dead man with a dagger, only a few drops of yellowish fluid (known as plasma) come out of the wound. When they pierced Christ in the side after His death, blood and water, still distinguishable from each other, gushed out of His side. This is proof that although Jesus died in His Humanity, His Divinity never departed His Body, protecting it from decay or corruption. This is to say that Christ died with His Humanity but was always alive through His Divinity.

- **The Litany of Offerings** - After the Thanksgiving Prayer, the priest prays the Litany of Offerings inaudibly while holding the Cross. The priest then covers the paten and the chalice. Covering the paten and the chalice symbolizes the shrouding of our Lord Jesus Christ after His death on the cross. The priest takes hold of the top two corners of the ‘Prospherine’ (large altar veil) and the deacon on the opposite side of the altar takes hold of the bottom two corners of the Prospherine, and together they cover the Holy Mysteries. The ‘Prospherine’ represents the stone, which was rolled against the entrance of the tomb. Having covered the Holy Mysteries, the priest places a small triangular shaped veil on the

top of the 'Prospherine'. This small veil represents the seal on the tomb's door. The priest and the deacon who faces him, both in their white clothes, symbolize the two angels that Mary Magdalene saw in the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid, one standing at His head and one at His foot (John 20:11).

Part II: The Liturgy of the Catechumens

• The Absolutions

- **Absolution to the Son** - During this time, before coming out of the altar, the priest silently prays the Absolution for the Son saying, "O Master and Lord Jesus Christ the Only Begotten Son." This is also the third absolution that is said at the end of the Vespers or Morning Incense. He then kisses the altar, kneels before it, stands up and kisses it again. On the right of the altar he offers a metania (prostration) to the priests and to the altar deacons. They do the same, and together they exchange a holy kiss with each other before leaving the Sanctuary in preparation for the absolution.
- **Absolution to the Ministers** - The priest faces East standing behind the deacons who are kneeling on the floor in front of the sanctuary's door. With five signings of the cross the priest says the Absolution of the Ministers (Servants), given as follows: "May your servants, the ministers of this day..." First he signs to the East, crossing the priests serving with him. If a hegemony (protopriest) is present, he would say, "...the hegemony..." and if a priest is attending he would say "...the priest..." He then crosses the deacons saying, "... and the deacons..." If only one deacon is present he says, "and the deacon..." He then turns to the left and does the third sign of the cross towards the rest of the servants saying, "...and the clergy..." He turns to the West and crosses the congregation saying, "and all the congregation..." Finally he turns towards the East and crosses himself saying, "and my weak self..."

The Absolution continues with the saying, "...Be absolved from the mouth of the Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and from the mouth of the one, holy, universal and Apostolic church." Then they all rise.

The priest includes the congregation in the Ministers Absolution as they are considered to be serving and partaking in the Holy Liturgy with the deacons and priest, and are not considered mere spectators. The congregation has their own role with

the responses and hymns throughout the whole Liturgy. It is the participation of the whole - the congregation, the priests and the deacons - that gives strength as the whole church becomes one heart and soul worshipping and praying in spirit and in truth.

- **The Readings**

- **The Pauline Epistle** - The Pauline Epistle reading is a reading from one of the 14 epistles of St. Paul. These 14 epistles consist of the Romans, first Corinthians, second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, first Thessalonians, second Thessalonians, first Timothy, second Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews. After the Absolution the priest enters the Sanctuary, takes the box of incense and bows before his brethren asking them to bless the box with him. In love and humility they bow in return saying, “You bless.” Then he puts five spoonfuls of incense into the censer. The incense is placed in the censer, which is carried by the deacon who stands towards the right of the altar. The priest then does the sign of the cross on the congregation saying, “Let us pray”, then after the response of the deacon the priest says, “Stand up for prayer.” The priest then says, “Peace be with you all”, signifying the introduction to the Pauline Readings. The priest then takes the censer from the deacon and prays some silent prayers. The priest then proceeds around the altar three times while praying silently the Three Major Litanies of Peace, the Fathers, and the Congregations. He Then comes out of the sanctuary with his left foot first without putting his back to the altar. The Round of the Pauline Incense is similar to that of the Vespers and Morning Incense, the only difference being that the priest in the Pauline Round says, “The blessings of Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ be with us all, Amen,” instead of “The blessings of the Vespers/Morning Incense be with us all, Amen.” In the Pauline Round of Incense, the priest proceeds around the whole church in remembrance of St. Paul who exerted himself exceedingly in his travels to preach the message of the Lord, which he did more than any other Apostle. About this the Apostle Paul says, “But by the Grace of God I am what I am and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them” (1 Corinthians 15:10). In the Pauline Round, the priest offers incense from the left side of the church and proceeding to the right indicating that through the faith preached by St. Paul, we were taken from darkness to God’s great light.

- **The Catholic Epistle** - There is no round of incense during the readings of the Catholic Epistle, during which time the priest remains in the Sanctuary according to the Lord's command to His disciples that they should not depart Jerusalem before the coming of the Holy Spirit. The word 'catholic' is a Greek word, which means 'universal'. The seven epistles following St. Paul's epistles are called the Catholic Epistles. These are the Epistle of St. James, the two Epistles of St. Peter, the three Epistles of St. John, and the Epistle of St. Jude. They were called the 'universal' epistles because they were written to all the nations and not to a particular person or a certain group of people, as were the Pauline Epistles. The Gospel of Christ, as taught by the Apostles, is the doctrine of heaven. If we follow it, it will lead us to a happy eternal life.
- **The Praxis: The Acts of the Apostles** - This is a reading from the book of Acts. The priest proceeds around the altar three times while praying the Three Minor Litanies then comes out of the sanctuary and offers incense. He then proceeds to offer incense to the icons on the Southern side of the sanctuary's door, then proceeds towards the Northern side of the sanctuary. He walks among the congregation down the center aisle saying, "Let your people through blessing be thousands upon thousands...", and he blesses the congregation while saying, "The blessings of my masters, the Apostles Peter and Paul...". He does not proceed as far as the Western end of the church but returns to the door of the sanctuary while saying the Mystery of the Confession.

In coming out of the sanctuary to offer incense, the priest symbolizes the Apostles when they left Jerusalem to preach Christianity throughout the whole world. The priest does not go around the whole church as in the round of the Pauline, which signifies the fact that the Apostles limited their preaching to Judea and the cities of Judah, whereas St. Paul preached Christianity to the whole world, and therefore encountered more tribulations during his travels than his fellow apostles did. The priest offers the incense from right to left to indicate that the Apostles returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem after the Ascension of the Lord. Another reason being that, as the priest started the Round of the Pauline from left to right, he starts the Round of the Praxis from right to left, indicating that both are equal. After finishing the Round of the Praxis, the priest does not enter the sanctuary. This is for two reasons. One is due to that fact that the Apostles did not return to Jerusalem

but were martyred in the country where they last preached; and the other is that by the end of the three rounds after reading the Praxis, the priest has completed seven rounds, these being the three rounds after the First Mystery of the Pauline, one round after the Mystery of the Congregations Confession, and the three rounds after the Praxis. These rounds are a representation of the children of Israel and the Ark of Covenant who circled Jericho seven times before the walls tumbled down. As the priest proceeds around the altar offering incense and raising prayers and pleadings to the Lord, the walls of evil and sin tumble down.

- **The Synaxarium** - After the Praxis, the priest reads from the Synaxarium, which is the book containing the daily commemoration of saints. ‘Synaxarium’ is a Greek word meaning, ‘The News’; the chronicles of the fathers, prophets, patriarchs, bishops, saints and martyrs. It narrates their lives and spiritual struggles and how the Lord put an end to their toils by rewarding them with the crown of glory and eternal life in the Heavenly Kingdom; a place where Christ wipes away every tear from their eyes. The objective of reading the Synaxarium is to savor the personal account of such champions and to learn the history of the church. It also tells of the sufferings those men and women have endured for the church; the types of pain and hardships endured for the sake of keeping the faith. The striving, the fasting, and asceticism of the saints was all with the aim of venerating the Kingdom of Heaven, about which the Lord said, “The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12).

It is customary that the priest himself reads the Synaxarium, to give the message an educational and spiritual strength. After reading the story of the saint of the day, the priest may refer to the saint’s life story in the sermon, offering contemplation so that the congregation may benefit and learn from the saint’s example. The priest may also use the Synaxarium as a means of proving the authenticity of the Holy Bible and the promises of the Lord, which are fulfilled in the lives of His faithful saints who accepted the Bible in truth. They applied the teachings of the Bible to their lives, becoming themselves a living Bible.

The author of the Book of Acts, St. Luke, wrote about the deeds of only two apostles, namely Peter and Paul. St. Luke did not conclude the Book of Acts with “Amen” like the other books of the New Testament, but left it without ending, the reason being that the service and ministry of the Church which began with the Apostles

has no ending but is a continuous ministry for as long as the church exists on earth. These apostles were to be succeeded by such apostolic successors as the patriarchs, the bishops, the martyrs and the saints. In fact, all those who strive within the church and shape its history will be annexed to the Book of Acts. This history is recorded in the Synaxarium and that is why the Synaxarium is read straight after the Praxis. The Synaxarium is read all year round, but as a tradition, it is not read during the Eastertide (the 50 days after the Resurrection) so as not to mix the joys of the Resurrection with the grievances of the martyrs sufferings. The festivities of the Resurrection are also superior to the feasts of martyrs and saints and subsequently ought to be foremost in the hearts and minds of the believers. The procession of the icon of the Holy Resurrection, sung in its festive tunes, replaces the readings of the Synaxarium during this time.

- **The Psalm and the Gospel** - The Church highly honors and respects the Gospel, as it is the sayings and deeds of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God. This is why there are many prefaces and notices before reading the Gospel. During the reading of the Gospel, the priest prays a deep prayer called the Mystery of the Gospel, praying that that the Word of God may work in the hearts of the listeners. After reading the Gospel, a sermon is given. The sermon is usually based on the Gospel of the day, as it is the focus of the day's readings. All the readings before the Gospel - the Pauline Epistle, the Catholic Epistle, the Praxis, the Synaxarium and the Psalms - are related to the Gospel and based upon it's reading.

The Litany of the Gospel

After saying the Trisagion, the priest puts one spoonful of incense in the censer, and stands by the door of the sanctuary praying the Litany of the Gospel, saying, "O Master and Lord Jesus Christ Our God..." The priest addresses the Lord Jesus saying, "O Master...who said to His saintly and honored disciples and pure apostles, many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which you see and have not seen them and to hear the things which you hear and have not heard them. But blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear." (Matthew 13:16-17). This quote states that certain facts of the Gospel were revealed to a few of the righteous men of the Old Testament who earnestly desired to see and behold the Word of God but could not. They died with their faith, believing in the coming of

the Redeemer, as it says, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

Those privileges which the Lord has given to us should incite us to give thanks, urge us to apply ourselves and invite us to contemplate the means of Grace, which we enjoy, and the revelations of the New Testament. We should realize that the benefits given to us ought be in accordance with the privileges we receive, otherwise they become our debts; “To whom much has been committed, of whom they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). That is why the priest continues the litany saying, “May we be worthy to hear and to act according to Your Holy Gospels through the prayers of Your saints,” as he asks for the assistance and grace of God to help us to listen to the words of the Gospel and act upon them so that every believer might become a fifth Gospel.

While reading the Litany of the Gospel, a deacon stands behind the priest holding the “Gospel Container”, which is the four Gospels in a book covered with silver or velvet. He puts the cross on it and raises them in honor to the top of his head. At the end of the first part of the litany the deacon responds saying, “Pray for the Holy Gospel”, asking that the Holy Gospel be spread throughout the world and that all should listen and act according to it in the aim of winning eternal life. The congregation responds by saying, “Lord have mercy.” Then the priest continues, “Remember also, O Our Master...”. At the end of the litany he offers incense to God before the sanctuary saying, “And to You we send up the glory, honor...” Remaining there, the priest then offers incense to the Gospel saying, “Bow to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ through the prayers of the chanter David the Prophet. O Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins.” The priest asks David the prophet to intercede for us as we read one of his Psalms. Psalms are prophecies about our Lord Jesus Christ, which is why the reading of the Psalm is before the Gospel. The Psalms are an annunciation of the perfect light, “The light of the Gospel”. The priest and the deacon enter the sanctuary and the priest puts a handful of incense in the censer while saying, “Glory and honor....” The priest then holds the Gospel Container with the cross on it while the deacon faces him, holding onto them also. Together they go around the altar, the deacon walking backwards, while the priest says, “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 people. A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32). During this procession, the priest offers incense to the Gospel Container.

Going around the altar holding the Gospels and the cross represents the spreading of Christianity to the whole creation and announcing that our salvation was completed through the Cross. At the end of the procession, the priest puts the Gospel Container on his head in honor and stands to the left side of the sanctuary facing West. The deacon raises the Cross on his head and stands by the right side of the sanctuary’s door also facing the West, and when the deacon’s response of the Psalm finishes he says, “Stand up in the fear of God and let us listen to the Holy Gospel”, drawing the congregation’s attention and asking them stand up in awe and piety to listen to the Holy Gospel, the Word of God and the Constitution of Heaven. Then the priest, facing the East, comes out of the sanctuary without putting his back to the altar, stepping out with his left foot while saying, “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. A chapter from the Holy Gospel according to St. (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). The verse “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” was said to Christ when He entered Jerusalem in a great procession.

The deacon reads the Gospel saying, “Stand up in the fear of God and listen to the Holy Gospel, a chapter from the Holy Gospel according to St. (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) the Evangelist may his blessings be with us all.” During the reading of the Gospel, two deacons holding lit candles stand on both sides of the lectern; this symbolizes that the Gospel enlightens our path in life, the Gospel being the life and words of our Lord Jesus Christ who said, “I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of Life” (John 8:12). An abundance of light also represents joy and happiness and the Gospel is the Lord’s joyous tidings.

The Priest takes the censer and, while standing in awe before the Gospel, he incenses and prays the Mystery of the Gospel. He implores the Lord to make him, the deacons, and the congregation worthy to hear the Holy Bible, which many prophets and righteous people desired to see but they could not and to hear but they could not hear it. He also pleads that they become not just listeners, deluding themselves, but hearers and doers of its commandments and admonitions for the sake of their salvation. During this time the congregation stands up in awe and devotion listening to the

Holy Bible, the word of life. They learn this devotion and respect for the Holy Gospel from their priest whom they see standing before the Bible in reverence and adoration while he offers incense and prays the Mystery of the Gospel with dedication.

- **The Sermon** - After the Gospel is read, the congregation sits down, and then the sermon is given by the priest. The sermon is usually based on the Liturgy's Gospel and on the other readings which are thematically similar. During the sermon, much care must be taken as to the interpretation of all verses of the Liturgy's Gospel and the spiritual, religious and ritual connotations therein. The sermon should clarify the object and the message the Church wishes to give to her children, through all the readings of the day of which the Gospel is the most important. The sermon also may refer to the saints of the day, as read in the Synaxarium, saving the preacher from using unrelated or remote stories. The sermon should *not* concentrate on just one verse of the Bible, using it as the only frame of reference. The sermon should contain many references, linking one verse to another, and explaining the main purpose of the day's readings. This was the most important objective the church had in mind when arranging the readings throughout the year.

- **The Prayer of the Veil** - This is a silent prayer prayed by the priest asking the Lord to make him worthy of touching the Holy Sacraments. When Moses read the law to the people of Israel, they bowed their heads in order to avoid seeing the light that shone from his face, as he used to unveil his face when he read the law. After the sermon, while chanting the Gospel response, the priest stands in front of the Sanctuary before the veil. He bows his head towards the East and, in submission and humility, prays the Mystery of the Veil. This deep, strong and important prayer has the following Biblical references: John 4:9-10, Isaiah 52:9, 1 Peter 2:25, 1 Corinthians 4:4, Isaiah 64:6, and Luke 17:10. Here the priest asks the Lord to make him worthy of touching the Holy Sacraments without falling in condemnation and without committing the sin of daring to approach the Holies with no merit; a sin which subjects the person to the Divine wrath, and hence, retribution where man can be cast out and thrown into darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing the teeth. Man is never sinless, no matter how hard he may try to purify himself. Hence, the priest relies on the great mercies of God and approaches the Sacraments in fear and awe, saying with the Prophet Daniel, "O my God, incline Your ear and hear. O Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive, O Lord, listen and act" (Daniel 9:18-19). The priest must carefully

consider those who approach the Holy Communion, especially those personally unknown to him. He must ask such questions as, “Do you have a father of confession?”, “When was your last confession?”, and “Are you spiritually prepared for the Holy Communion?” If someone receives the Sacraments without repentance and readiness, he will fall in condemnation and the priest would be responsible as he gave him the Body and Blood of the Lord without considering his spiritual state. Abba Gregarious has an interesting view about this matter. He likens the priest to a bank cashier (teller), who becomes fully responsible before the bank if he cashes a check without properly identifying the check bearer. For this reason, the church admonishes new priests during ordination to be extra careful when giving the Sacraments.

- **The Three Major Litanies** - The priest prostrates before the Sanctuary, before the other attending priests, and finally to the congregation. He asks the other attending priests for absolution and exchanges a holy kiss with them, requesting their prayers. Then he asks the congregation for forgiveness, in accordance with the Savior’s command, “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the Altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the Altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24). The priest then proceeds towards the altar, kisses it and then, with a submissive heart, begins praying the Major Litanies of Peace, the Fathers and The Congregations. He offers incense, as detailed in the Liturgy Book, and at the end of each litany he says, “Through the Grace and Compassion...”. He lifts the front of the Prospherine to offer incense to the covered Mysteries, in remembrance of the time when the three Mary’s came to Christ’s tomb at the dawn of Sunday, as seen in the quote, “Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they and certain other women came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared” (Luke 24:1). At this point, the Liturgy of the Catechumens ends.

Part III: The Liturgy of the Faithful

- **The Orthodox Creed** - In the early church, the catechumen would attend up until the end of the third litany, and leave the church at the reading of the Creed. This was because their faith was weak and they lacked knowledge of the Christian faith. For this reason the deacon calls out before the Creed, “Attend to God with wisdom. Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, in truth”. The deacon here calls upon the people to maintain reverence

while saying the Creed. Then the congregation recites the creed out loud, saying “Truly we believe in one God...”. The Creed must be said audibly and in harmony and unity. In the rites of the liturgy, reciting the Creed is of great importance as there are two essential conditions that have to be met before offering the bloodless oblations and receiving the Holy Communion. These are: i) faith, without which we cannot please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is the goal, and He will reward those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). We declare this strong faith in our Lord by reciting the Creed. We declare it from our hearts so that it may be acceptable and pleasing to the Lord; ii) love - we show our love for each other before God when we exchange holy kisses with one another during the Reconciliation Prayer, as the deacon calls out “Exchange a holy kiss with one another...” And so, by reciting the Creed we declare our Orthodox faith in the one God with three Hypostasis. We announce our hope and anticipation in the Resurrection from the dead when Christ will come again to judge the world. We also hope for the eternal life of the world to come with all the happiness and joy for those who are righteous, and declare misery and sorrow for the unrighteous. By exchanging holy kisses we show love towards each other and subsequently to God, according to the blessed Apostle’s words, “If someone says ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he Has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him that he who loves God must love his brother also (1 John 4:20-21). Hence, by saying the Creed and exchanging holy kisses we have obtained the three great Christian virtues: faith, hope and love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

- **The Pre-Anaphora**

- **Washing the hands** - While the Creed is being read the priest washes his hands three times, as he did before choosing the Lamb. He stands by the Sanctuary’s door, facing West, and shakes his hands before the people. This action cautions and warns people to be prepared before receiving the Holy Communion. He repudiates the guilt of him, who dares to receive Communion undeservedly, as if he is reminding them of St. Paul’s fearful words, “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For

he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself not discerning the Lord's Body" (1 Corinthians 1:27-30). By shaking his hands the priest is signifying, "I am innocent of the blood of whoever undeservedly partakes of the Holy Sacraments, without letting me know," after which he dries them on a white clean towel. The priest washes his hands before the Prayer of Reconciliation in preparation to touching and fragmenting the Holy Body with his undefiled hands, just as the Savior purified His disciples before the Lord's Supper by washing their feet and drying them.

- **The Prayer of Reconciliation** - The first part of the Reconciliation Prayer is contemplation on the Lord's creation of the uncorrupted man who then fell into sin through the envy of Satan, resulting in the death of man. God saved us by the life-giving manifestation of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ when He reconciled us with the Father through His shedding of blood on the cross. "God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed us to the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). This is why the Liturgy of the faithful (believers) begins with the Prayer of Reconciliation, as it symbolizes the reconciliation between us as sinners and God. This reconciliation is important before approaching the Holy Sacraments.

The Reconciliation Prayer is not prayed on Maundy (Holy) Thursday as an indication that the true reconciliation will not be accomplished until the crucifixion of Christ on Good Friday. In the second part of the Reconciliation, the priest prays to God to fill the hearts of the people and himself with His heavenly peace. This wonderful and precious peace which Christ has given us is to be enjoyed by all believers until it is perfected in heaven. When He gave His peace to the disciples, and to the church after them, He said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). The Reconciliation Prayer in all of the three Liturgies (St. Basil, St. Gregory, St. Cyril) prayed in the Coptic Orthodox Church emphasizes this peace. In the liturgy of St. Basil, the priest prays, "With Your Goodness, O God, fill our hearts with Your peace." In St. Gregory's liturgy he prays, "You have become our mediator with the Father, and have brought down the dividing wall of hostility, and reconciled the earthly with the Heavenly making the two of them one." In St. Cyril's liturgy he prays, "Make us worthy of the heavenly peace, which befits Your Divinity, and make us worthy to exchange a holy kiss with

one another.” As the priest entreats the Lord in the Reconciliation Prayer to fill his heart and the hearts of His people with the Heavenly peace, he also prays that He may cleanse them from defilement, evil doings, quarrels and feuds so that they may be able to exchange a holy kiss each other in love, and thus become worthy of partaking of the Divine and Life-giving Mysteries.

On Maundy Thursday, the Reconciliation Prayer is not prayed and exchanging the holy kiss is not done, to remind us of Judas Iscariot’s fraudulent kiss. Here the church urges her children not to emulate his dishonesty, treachery and love of money.

While praying the second part of the Reconciliation Prayer, the priest holds up the triangular veil, which is on top of the Prospherine, which symbolizes the seal on the Savior’s sepulcher. The lifting up of this cloth symbolizes the breaking of the seals on the tomb’s door. When lifting this veil, the priest holds its corners and raises it before his face in the same triangular shape, as it had been when on the top of the Prospherine, and it remains in this triangular shape until the end of the Reconciliation Prayer when the priest places it on the left side of the Altar, ready to take it in his left hand after lifting the Prospherine. When the deacon says “Prospherine, Prospherine!” (meaning “Come forth!”) at the end of the Reconciliation, the priest, with the help of the deacon, raises the Prospherine while creating a vibration. Raising the Prospherine signifies the rolling away of the stone from the sepulcher’s entrance, and also the return of the Savior’s soul to His Body at His rising from the dead. The vibration symbolizes the quake that happened when the angel rolled the stone away from the tomb’s entrance. However, the Savior had risen in absolute quietness and left the sepulcher while the stone was still blocking its entrance with the seals still intact and the armed soldiers still guarding the tomb. Jesus coming out of the tomb while it was left intact is symbolic of how He was born of the Virgin Mary while her virginity was still untouched, and also of when He entered the Upper Room where His disciples were while the doors remained locked.

Throughout the Reconciliation Prayer and until the end of the Fraction, the priest bows his head before the Altar. At the end of each sentence he kneels down folding his arms on his chest. When alternating service between praying priests, the priest standing before the altar must not leave it before the other priest takes his position before the altar. It is forbidden to leave the altar unattended by a priest for even a moment while the Sacred Sacrifice is present.

After the praying of the Reconciliation and before the lifting of the Prosphere is when the ordination of readers, subdeacons, deacons, archdeacons, priests, and protopriest takes place in the presence of the Pope or a bishop. It is done during this time to represent that reconciliation has lifted the barrier that was placed before the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament (now the Sanctuary), from which all were forbidden to enter except to the high priest who was allowed to enter only once a year (Leviticus 16:34). These days anyone with a priestly rank, whether high or small, can enter it once he has been ordained, as we are now in the days of grace and intimacy with God. Another reason for the ordination to take place at this particular moment is so that the newly ordained priests and deacons can participate in the mass from the beginning.

- **The Apostolic Kiss** - At the end of the Reconciliation Prayer, the deacon calls out, “Exchange a holy kiss with one another,” and the people do so with an action of their hands, showing love and forgiveness. The whole Church becomes one heart and one thought, and are prepared to attend to the Holy Liturgy which begins with the priest saying, “The love of God the Father and the grace of His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ, and the gift and fellowship of the Holy Spirit, to be with you all,” meaning that if we have love for one another, then the love of God will abide within us also.

- **The Anaphora (Eucharistic Prayers)**

- **The Lord be with you** - The priest, with the help of the deacon facing him, lifts up the Prosphere and the deacon folds and places it behind the throne of the chalice until the end of the Liturgy. The priest then holds the small triangular veil that he placed on the left side of the altar in his left hand and the small veil that is placed on the paten he takes in his right hand in order to bless the people with the sign of the cross saying, “The Lord be with you all,” which is taken from St. Paul the Apostle in 2 Thessalonians 3:16. The congregation responds, saying, “And also with your spirit.” Here the priest and the congregation mutually pray for each other, heeding the words of St. Paul who said, “You also helping in prayer for us” (2 Corinthians 1:11).

The priest prays for the people and blesses them, and the people pray for the priest, requesting that the Lord bless his fatherly and compassionate spirit. Truly this is a blessed and joyful action; it will soften the Lord’s heart towards us. The priest then

does the sign of the cross towards those serving with him in the altar while he says, “Lift up your hearts.” The priest and all the people must actually lift up their hearts and forget the earthly concerns and worldly worries. About this topic the Apostle Paul says, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of the Father. Set your minds in things above, not on things on earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).

The congregation responds, saying, “They are with the Lord.” Before responding, we must ensure that our hearts are truly uplifted. We must put our minds and hearts in the words and the meaning of the response because if we utter it and our hearts are not uplifted and our minds are not focused on praying then we are lying to the priest and at the same time being dishonest to God. We should ask the Lord at the beginning of every Liturgy to give us this Grace and let our hearts be with Him and be focused on Him, alone, throughout the Liturgy.

The priest then crosses himself saying, “Let us give thanks to the Lord.” He kisses the cross and then puts it on the altar. Let us give thanks to the Lord who made us worthy to enter His House, and to stand in His Presence, and participate in serving Him and lifting our hearts towards the Throne of Grace. The priest here emulates the twenty four heavenly priests, about whom the Revelation says, “And the twenty four priests who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One Who is and Who was and Who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned’” (Revelation 11:16-17).

- **Worthy and Just** - The people respond with, “It is worthy and just.” This response is a confirmation of the thanksgiving offered by the priest to God, who is worthy of every thanks and every praise, for He is full of goodness and His mercy remains forever. The response also carries out the priest’s instruction of “Let us give thanks to the Lord.” The priest then raises his covered hands signifying the Seraphim who stands before God with his eyes and feet covered by his wings because of the imperceptible and unspoken majestic glory of God (Isaiah 6:2). Then the priest prays the following three passages: “Worthy and Just...”, “Before Whom stand...”, and “Around You stand...”.
- **The Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy)** - The priest places the small veil, which is in his right hand on the left side of the altar, and with his right hand he lifts the veil, which

is placed over the chalice and replaces it with the one in his left hand. With his left hand, he then picks up the veil which he put on the left side of the altar. He holds the cross within the small veil held in his right hand and does the sign of the cross three times saying, "Holy (Agios)." The first sign of the cross he does on himself; the second sign of the cross is on those who are serving with him, and the third sign of the cross is on the congregation. The word 'Holy' alone is a most powerful and deep prayer, for it is the greatest defense against Satan who is the enemy of holiness. It carries all implications with which we wish to honor God; He is Holy for He is merciful, loving, almighty, most high and without sin. We should note that the word 'Holy' refers only to God. For those who are righteous we use the word 'saintly' because their piety comes from the Lord, Who is the origin and the source of every holiness.

As we praise the Lord with the word 'Holy' we join the Cherubim and Seraphim as they cry to one another saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His Glory" (Isaiah 6:3). The angels praise centers around the word 'Holy' as it glorifies God, Who is the source of every holiness. As we join the heavenly in glorifying God we must be saintly like Him Who is Holy. In this sense, it is the minimum requirement for being in the presence of the Lord, to see Him and enjoy Him. Without holiness, we do not deserve to partake of the Liturgy's Holy Sacrifice; as the Liturgy gathers together the assembly of the devout, and the Holies are for the holy.

Further Remarks:

Uncovering the paten by lifting the small veil from it saying, "The Lord be with you," while the chalice remains covered represents Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene while His identity was concealed to her. Uncovering the chalice when saying, "Agios," indicates that He revealed Himself afterwards to Mary Magdalene and she then recognized Him. Covering the chalice again after it was uncovered symbolizes Jesus showing Himself to the two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus, then disappearing from them. When the priest first does the sign of the cross with the veil that was on the paten saying, "The Lord be with you all," and then when he does the second sign of the cross with the veil that was on the chalice saying, "Agios," indicates the equality between the Body and the Blood, and the need to get the blessings of them both. These actions also honor both the Body and Blood.

The veils, or wrapping cloths, represent the shrouds that wrapped the Savior's body

at His burial. The direction of the shifting of the veils is performed in the same order in which the Lord Jesus unwrapped Himself and took them off His body during His glorified resurrection. The veils are also placed on the altar in a similar order to the way the shrouds were placed in the tomb when found by Peter and John as they entered the sepulcher (John 20:4-7). This proves that the Savior's body was not stolen from the tomb as the Jews alleged, since a robber, in his rush and confusion while committing his crime, would leave everything in disarray, and not in the perfectly organized manner in which Christ left the shroud.

The action of the priest moving the veils around on the altar represents the movement of the Cherubim's wings. Taking the veil from the top of the Chalice Throne and replacing it with another represents that this mystery has been instituted for the rise and the fall of many (Luke 2:34). It also means that we have been exalted to take the place of the fallen angels. After this, the priest says the following passages: "Holy, Holy, Holy, truly You are Holy O Lord our God...," followed by "He was incarnate and became Man and taught us the way of Salvation...". While saying, "He was incarnate and became Man" the priest adds a spoonful of incense to the censer so that the fragrance of the incense, as it is diffused, reminds us of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary, who is the Golden Censer. The burning embers symbolize the fire of Divinity. At the end of the passage the priest says, "He descended into Hades through the cross." The priest then bows in reverence, placing his hands on his chest in the shape of the cross, then kisses the altar.

He then says, "He rose from the dead on the third day." At the end of this passage when the priest says, "He will appear to judge the world in equity and reward each one according to his deeds," he beats his chest three times in awe and remorse for his sins, recalling the horrifying day of reckoning when the people will gather and the angels will open the books which reveal the deeds and examine the minds of all; the righteous proceeding to eternal life, while the wicked to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

- **The Consecration**

- **The Institution Narrative** - The priest points to the bread and the wine with his hands, which are covered with the veils, and says, "He instituted this great mystery of godliness for us...". He puts the veils on both sides of the throne then incenses his

hands over the censer in preparation to touch, consecrate, fragment and distribute the Holy Sacraments. He then moves his hands away from the censer and says, "... Since He was determined to surrender Himself to death for the life of the world."

Some priests transfer a handful of incense smoke and put it on the bread and others transfer it to both the bread and the chalice. Some do this action only once, and others three times. They transfer the incense smoke on the Sacrament as a symbol of the spices which Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus put on the Savior's body at His burial, but the old liturgy books limited its explanation by saying, "Incensing the hands is done in preparation for touching what is before him and holding it within his hands."

When this is done the priest takes the oblation with his right hand and places it in his left hand, then takes the veil which was in the paten, kisses it and puts it on the altar saying, "...He took the bread upon His pure, spotless, undefiled, blessed and life-giving hands...". It is desirable at this moment, that every priest compares the pure, spotless, undefiled and life giving Hands of the Lord with his own sinful hands. If he does this he will be filled with contrition, humility and shame towards the great mercies of the Lord, Who has chosen him to officiate and consecrate the Sacraments, just as the Lord also consecrated the Sacraments before him.

From the moment the priest handles the bread, the deacons around the altar hold lit candles to illuminate the area around the bread and the chalice. The candles are lit until the priest says the phrase, "He tasted and gave it...," The lighting of candles signifies the awesome moment of transformation when the deacon calls out, "Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence" after which the priest invokes the Holy Spirit to transform the bread into the Body of Christ and the wine into His Blood. The priest puts his right index finger on the bread which sits on his left palm and, looking up, he says, "He looked up towards heaven, to You, O God, His Father and Master of all..." Then, doing the sign of the cross on the bread three times he says, "He gave thanks." "He blessed it." "He sanctified it." This is according to the Bible, where at the Last Supper, Jesus "Took bread, gave thanks and broke it" (Luke 22:19), and "Took bread, blessed it and broke it" (Mark 14:22). He sanctified it because, with His power and words of sanctification, He consecrated the bread, thus transforming it into His Holy Body. After each sentence and signing of the cross, the congregations together with the deacons respond saying "Amen."

The priest then breaks the bread into three parts, from the top to the bottom, without separation. He places one third of it on his right hand and the two thirds of it on his left, saying, “He broke it...” He opens the bread slightly and breathes the Holy Spirit onto it, then continues saying, “...and gave it to His holy disciples and pure apostles saying...” as he breaks the top and the lower part of the bread, still without separating them. The broken parts are the parts above and below the Spadikon; breaking it this way, the bread is divided into four sections making the shape of the cross. During this time the priest continues saying, “Take, eat of it all of you, for this is My Body...” The priest then puts the bread in the paten and clears his hands from any particles of the bread that might be on his fingers. He then puts his hand on the rim of the chalice and says, “Likewise, after supper He took the chalice, mixed it with wine and water. He Gave Thanks. He blessed it. He sanctified it.” The deacons and congregation respond with “Amen” after each sentence and signing, as they did with the Bread. He then touches the rim of the chalice and says, “He tasted it...” The priest then breathes over the chalice as he did with the bread and continues, saying, “...and gave it to His holy disciples and pure apostles saying...” The priest lifts the chalice slightly and moves it in the sign of the cross; he first tilts it Westward, then Eastward, to the North (left), then to the South (right), whilst saying, “Take, drink of it all of you, for this is My Blood...”

Moving the chalice from West to East symbolizes that we, who were once alienated from God and living in darkness (the west symbolizing alienation from God), have been transformed to the light and to the grace of God through the bloodshed and death of Christ on the cross, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the Blood of Christ ” (Ephesians 2:13).

Moving it from the left to the right signifies that we were once rejected and separated from God but through the precious blood of Christ shed on the cross we have been moved to the right hand of the Father to be with our beloved Savior and Good Shepherd Jesus Christ. Moving the chalice in the shape of the cross indicates that Christ shed His blood on the cross for the salvation of all mankind; “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

- **The Anamesis** - The priest then points to the bread and the chalice saying, “For every time you eat of this bread and drink of this cup you preach my death, confess

My resurrection and remember Me till I come back.” These are the very same words that Jesus said when instituting the Eucharist (Matthew 26:26-28), and Apostle Paul also said, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Therefore, every time we perform the Mystery of Thanksgiving and partake of the Holy Sacrifice, we preach the Lord’s death in our own inner Jerusalem, inviting our souls to die with Christ so that we may also rise with Him; “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. Now if we died with Christ we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Romans 6:5-8). We die to the world and to the lusts of the world, as in the quote, “Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:11).

Here, remembrance means the living memory rather than just remembering. The word ‘Anamnesis’ is a Greek word, meaning ‘recalling’ and ‘re-enacting’. We ‘remember’ Christ, Who died for us and rose from the dead, not merely as a historical event, but as an existing, true sacrifice. In other words, it is an effective memory because what we offer on the altar is the same sacrifice that was offered up for us on the cross. This type of remembrance can be likened to the manna, which Moses put in a golden container and kept in the Ark of the Covenant inside the Holy of Holies in remembrance of the Manna the Israelites ate in the desert of Sinai. Remembrance can also consist of something that the mind can conceive but the senses cannot perceive. God exists everywhere, but we still say that the devout will always remember Him, as the Psalmist says, “His remembrance is to the age of ages.” It is therefore absolutely correct to say that this mystery is in remembrance of Christ’s death, because He is present in it in a mysterious, invisible and imperceptible manner. The priest then says, “As we too commemorate His Holy passion, His resurrection from the dead...” When we commemorate His Holy passion, our emotions ascend to Him who was sent as a lamb to the slaughter. We contemplate on Him who endured the iniquity of the wicked, was scourged, had His face slapped and did not turn His face away from those who spat on Him (from the Liturgy of St. Gregory). We contemplate on Him Who “Gives His cheek to the one who strikes Him and be full of reproach” (Lamentations 3:30), “He has filled me with bitterness. He has made me drink wormwood” (Lamentations 3:15). When we remember His life-giving sufferings on the cross, we remember also His descent into hades to redeem Adam and all his

children who died in the hope of the Redeemer. Today, in partaking of the Holy Communion, the Slain One descends from the Altar into our hearts, into our bodies and into our souls, to set us free, and to save us from the captivity of the world and Satan.

- **The Epiclesis: The Invocation of the Holy Spirit** - The priest now prays the litany of the Invocation of the Holy Spirit, saying, “As we too commemorate ...”. This litany ends with “...You Your oblations from what is Yours, for every condition, concerning every condition, and in every condition.” After this is said, the priest comes to the crucial moment of intercession. This very moment manifests his office as a priest and an intercessor on behalf of the whole of creation, as he offers the oblations and the bloodless sacrifice on behalf of everything and everyone in the world. While the priest is kneeling down before the altar to pray the Invocation of the Holy Spirit inaudibly, the deacon then says, “Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence.” The deacon then also kneels down beside the altar but keeps an eye on the Oblation, lest anything happens to it, for he too is responsible for the Sacrifice, as he is the servant with the priest. When the deacon alerts the congregation to kneel before the Lord in awe and reverence, he has to set an example of that fear and reverence. His kneeling down beside the altar must show the utmost piety and respect for this precious moment, which is the most awesome moment of the whole mass, the moment when the Holy Spirit comes down on the Bread and the Wine to transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Upon hearing the deacon call out, “Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence,” the congregation kneels in awe and respect. This is a formidable moment when the Holy Spirit comes down on the mysteries to consecrate and transform them. The whole church kneels down and says, “We praise You, we bless You, we serve You O Lord, and we worship You.” These are fearful moments when every one in the church should be worshipping in awe, awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Mysteries to sanctify and transform them into the works and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

The priest kneels down with his hands on the altar and silently prays the Litany of the Invocation of the Holy Spirit with an air of contrition, saying, “We the sinners and unworthy servants, ask You, O Lord our God as we kneel down before You, through the pleasure of Your goodness, that Your Holy Spirit may come down upon us (pointing to himself), and on these oblations (pointing to the bread and the wine),

to sanctify them, transform them and manifest them holy to Your saints.” The deacon then says, “Let us attend. Amen,” calling for absolute silence and utter stillness during the moments of the descent of the Holy Spirit. The priest rises and quickly does the sign of the cross three times and says in a loud voice, “And this bread, He makes into His Holy Body.” He then kneels again and in reverence praying silently, “Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, this Holy Body given for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who receive it.” This phrase explains the previously spoken phrase, “And this bread He makes into His Holy Body,” in telling us that the Body of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, is given for the forgiveness of sins, and an eternal life to those who partake of it. The priest then says aloud, “And this chalice too, He makes into His Honored Blood of the New Testament.” The priest kneels down again and prays silently, “Our God, Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, this Holy Blood given for the forgiveness of sins.” This sentence also explains the nature of the sacrament like the previous statement. Then he says out loud, “An eternal life to those who partake of it.” The congregation rises and responds saying, “Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.” The bread has now become the Body of Christ and the wine has become the Blood of Christ, and remains so for the rest of the Liturgy.

The Liturgy book states that the priest does the sign of the cross three times quickly on the bread and likewise on the chalice. The reason for the swiftness is that, as he utters the words “He makes it into His Holy Body,” it immediately becomes the Body of the Lord which He took from the Virgin Mary, and which He gave to His pure disciples; the Body which received the life-giving sufferings and was shrouded and buried; the Body which rose from the dead, in which He ascended to heaven, and in which He will come again to judge the living and the dead. Similarly, as he says, “His Honored Blood of the New Testament” the wine transforms into the Lord’s Blood, which was shed on the cross for the salvation of Adam and his offspring. After the transformation, the blessings can come only from the Sacraments, therefore the priest can no longer do the sign of the cross on the Sacraments. Swiftness is therefore necessary, as the action of doing the sign of the cross on the sacraments must be completed before the priest finishes the sentences, “He makes it into His Holy Body... and His honored Blood of the New Testament.” In other words, the signings of the cross must be confined to the words “...this bread...” in the first instance, and, “...this

chalice too...” in the second instance. The priest may need to say the words slowly in order that the signs are completed before the transformation takes place.

- **The Seven Minor Litanies** - After the Prayers of Consecration are completed, the priest picks up the two veils which he left on the altar when he began doing the signs of the cross, and, taking one in each hand, he prays, “Make us all worthy, O Our Master, to partake of Your Holies for the purification of our souls, bodies and spirits, that we become one body and one spirit, and may share the inheritance with all the saints who have pleased You since the beginning.” He pleads for himself and the believers who intend to approach the Holy Sacraments, that the Lord prepares them for the partaking of His holy, pure and heavenly mysteries for the salvation and sanctification to their souls, bodies and spirits in order to become one with Him, abide in Him, and share an inheritance with all the saints who perfected the faith. The priest then prays the Seven Minor Litanies:

- **The Litany of Peace** - This litany asks for the peace of the universal and the Apostolic Church, and for its protection from the schemes of Satan and his forces.
- **The Litany of the Fathers** - This litany asks the Lord to grant the Pope and all the Orthodox Bishops strength, grace and wisdom in their service, and that they maintain the right faith, which has been delivered by the saints.
- **The Litany of the Ministers** - In this litany, we pray for the priests who assist the bishops in rightfully disclosing the word of truth, in shepherding, attending to, and caring for the people and the salvation of their souls.
- **The Litany of Mercy** - This litany asks that the Lord may have mercy upon him and upon all the people, according to His great mercies and abundant compassion. “For with the Lord there is mercy and with Him is abundant redemption” (Psalm 130:7).

The Litany of the Places - In this litany, we pray for the safety and security of the cities and monasteries where our church is located, and for all the places, cities and monasteries in the whole world, because, if the place where the church dwells is in peace, then the children of the church will find their own peace, as in the saying, “And seek the peace of the city.... For in its peace you will have peace” (Jeremiah 29:7), “That we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:2). The Psalmist prays for his city saying, “Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your places. For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will

say 'Peace is within you.' "Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good." (Psalm 122:7-9). In saying, "...And for those who are dwelling in it, in God's faith...", the priest refers to the believers who dwell in the places and monasteries, referring particularly to the monks who live in the wilderness because of their strong faith in God and His care. If it was not for these monk's great faith and love for Jesus Christ they would have not been able to survive such desolate wilderness and endure life in remote monasteries, mountains, and caves, and in places no one knows about. Although impoverished, distressed and humiliated with asceticism and strife, in their vigilance and solitude, all this they endure with joy because of their great love for our Lord. If the priest wants to say the part "Your people and Your church..." (Je Nai-Nan), it should be said after the Litany of the Places.

- **The Litany of the Waters, Sowing, and Harvesting** - This litany refers to the season of the Nile's flooding when the flood waters cover the cultivated lands and deposit abundant silt to enhance its fertility, which occurs from the 12th of Baouna to the 9th of Baba. Prayer for the plants, from the 10th of Baba to the 10th of Tuba, is the season for sowing the main crops in Egypt after the floodwaters subside. Prayer for the winds, from the 11th of Tuba to the 11th of Baouna, is the period of moderate winds which is suitable for the growth, fruiting and ripening of crops, "That both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together" (John 4:36). After each one of these litanies, the priest says "Bring them up to their measure according to Your Grace."
- **The Litany of the Oblations** - This litany refers to offerings in general, including whatever the believers bring to church to the needs of the church and its people; from flour for the bread, to grape juice for filling the chalice; candles, curtains, books, and the Altar's utensils. When praying this litany, the priest points to the Sacraments as they are the crown and symbol of all what the believers offer.
- **The Commemoration of the Saints** - The commemoration (communion) of the saints represent the 'cloud of witnesses' which surrounds the believers and to which the Apostle Paul referred to in saying, "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 ensue us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the

cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself; lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:1-4).

As we mention the names in the Commemoration of the Saints, we remember their life stories and recall their virtues and love towards our beloved Lord. They sacrificed themselves for the Lord, and had no regard for the comfort of their bodies, “And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity of return” (Hebrews 11:15). They endured everything for their great love of Christ the King. Each of them offered himself as an oblation, in one form or another, to God. It was as though the heart of the Virgin Mary had been pierced with a sword when she shared the sacrifice of her Son on the cross. John the forerunner was beheaded because he preached the coming of Christ and told the people to repent. St. Mark served and preached the name of Christ to the people until he was dragged along the streets of Alexandria and was martyred. St. Severus, St. Dioscorus and St. Athanasius all defended the faith even to death. St. Peter, the Seal of Martyrs, was slain for his people, like He who had been slain for the world. St. John Chrysostom was slain for his impartiality. The three hundred and eighteen fathers assembled at Nicea, the one hundred and fifty fathers assembled at Constantinople, and the two hundred fathers assembled at Ephesus were all a testimony to the Lord in defending the Apostolic Faith. Abba Anthony and Abba Paula left the world and followed Jesus, enduring many spiritual hardships until the end. They were dead to this world, living in the mountains and the wilderness because of their great love for Jesus Christ. Abba Macarius tolerated iniquity and humiliation until death, like Jesus who endured disgrace. The powerful Abba Moses the Black offered true repentance and wrestled with sin until death, “Having provided something for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (Hebrews 11:40). “And 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 had been, was completed” (Revelation 6:11).

- **The Diptych** - After the Commemoration of the Saints, the following passage is said by the priest, “Remember, O Lord, all those who passed over to You; all the clergy and all the laity, repose their souls in the bosoms of our saintly father Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the paradise of joy, in the place from which grief, sorrow and sighing have fled, in the

light of Your saints.” He then adds a spoonful of incense to the censer and mentions the names of those whose souls are reposed, saying, “Those, O Lord, who have passed over to You in the Paradise of Delight...” This is the St. Basil Diptych which is prayed even if the St. Cyril diptych was prayed. In Holy Thursday’s Liturgy, neither the Commemoration nor the Diptych are prayed as the church is totally preoccupied in contemplating the Lord’s sufferings and death. The above-mentioned diptych, however, is not sung using the Mourning Tune on Sundays, feast days, or the Eastertide.

After St. Basil’s Diptych, the priest says, “Guide us into Your Kingdom ...,” and ending with, “Peace be with you all.” All of this he says without doing the sign of the cross on the congregation because, as mentioned previously, after the Holy Spirit has descended upon the Sacraments and as we are in the presence of Christ, so it is not permitted to do the sign of the cross on the people or to look Westward giving his back to the Sacrifice.

- **The Fraction**

- **Introduction to the Fraction** - The phrase, “Also let us give thanks to the Almighty God ...”, begins the Introduction to the Fraction. If there is more than one priest attending, the serving priest should recite the Fraction. When it is finished, the priest puts the two veils down on the altar and does not take them into his hands again. He takes the pure Body with his right hand and places it on the palm of his left hand. He puts his right index finger on the Body on the right side of the Spadikon where the Body is broken and says, “The Holy Body.” The congregation then kneels and says, “We worship Your Holy Body.” He then lifts his index finger from the Body and dips the tip of his finger in the Honored Blood. He lifts his index finger slightly and makes the sign of the cross once inside the chalice saying, “And the Honored Blood.” The congregation respond with, “And Your Honored Blood.” The priest gently shakes his index finger inside the chalice to free it from the Blood, taking the utmost care to ensure it does not drip after he takes his finger out of the chalice. He brings the Body, which is on his left hand, closer to the chalice and puts his index finger with the Blood on it on the Spadikon. Then he lowers his hands over the paten and does the sign of the cross on the pure Body with the Honored Blood. With his index finger on the Spadikon, he moves his finger upwards and then over the back of the Body, proceeding towards the bottom and then up the front of the Body until reaching the Spadikon. He then moves his index around the Body from left to

right until he comes back to the Spadikon, thus forming a sign of the cross. While doing this he says, “Those belonging to His Christ, the Almighty Lord, Our God.” The deacon then responds, “Amen, Amen. Let us pray.” The congregation responds saying, “Lord have mercy.” The priest then says to the people, “Peace be with you all”, to which the people reply, “And also with your spirit.”

The three sentences, “...the Holy Body...”, “...the Honored Blood...”, and, “...belonging to His Christ the Almighty Lord, our God...”, are a continuation of the Introduction to the Fraction. The whole passage states, “We ask Him to make us worthy to share and offer His Divine and Immortal Mysteries, which are the Holy Body and the Honored Blood belonging to His Christ, the Almighty Lord, our God.” Performing the sign of the cross on the Body with the Blood represents Christ’s Body covered with His Blood which spilled from the nails in His body, the crown of thorns on His head, and from where He was pierced with a sword. During this time the people cry, “Lord have mercy”, because this moment portrays the crucifixion of Christ and the shedding of His pure Blood which He endured because of His mercy and love for those in the world, and for the salvation of our souls. The priest offers peace to the congregation at this moment; the moment when the world was in great turmoil; the sun was darkened and the earth shook, the rocks cracked and all the people were horrified.

When the priest begins to handle the Sacraments, the deacons light candles to illuminate the area around the Holy Body and Honored Blood, keeping them lit until the end of the Fraction. There are two reasons for keeping the candles lit during this time. One is to honor the Holy Sacraments, the other being that the burning candle sheds light upon others so that they may believe in Him, as Jesus, whose Incarnate Body is being fractionated by the priest, gave Himself up so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life. The droplets of wax that fall from the burning candle remind us of the sweat that dripped from the Savior’s Body like drops of blood as He prayed in Gethsemane, “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). They also remind us of the tears, which He shed during intense prayer, They also remind us of the drops of blood covering His pure body when He was hanging on the cross for our salvation. A lit candle represents to us the salvation which the Lord Jesus made on the cross for those who slept in hope. From the cross,

His soul descended to hades to give light to those who were living in darkness and in the shadow of death and to bring them back to paradise where there is light and joy.

- **Prayer of the Fraction** - The Fraction is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His inexpressible gift, as He gave us His Holy Body and Honored Blood as an eternal life to those who worthily partake of them. It is also a supplication that He may give purity to our hearts, souls and bodies so that we dare, in the intimacy of His Divine love, partake of them. The prayers of the Fraction are numerous. Some Fractions are prayed all year round and some are for major or minor Lord's feasts, the Virgin Mary's feasts, the angels or saints feasts, for periods of fasting, and so on. The fractionation of the Holy Body signifies the sufferings, which were inflicted upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are two methods of dividing the Holy Body: i) the direct and brief fraction, and ii) the comprehensive fraction.

The direct and brief fraction is *not* commonly used, where the priest divides the Body without separating it from the jewels. The Body is divided but is still intact. The priest divides the portion at his right (about one third) to four pieces corresponding to the four crosses on the right. This he does without completely separating them. The priest then divides the left portion (about one third), into four parts around the four crosses on it, again without separation. He then separates the Spadikon completely, lifting it out; he kisses it, then puts it back in its place. Then he puts the Holy Body in the paten and cleans his hands, especially the finger he used in dividing it, to remove any particles of the jewel that may have adhered to it.

The comprehensive fraction is more commonly used. In this method, the priest divides the right portion (about one third) without separation. He then lifts it and places it perpendicular to the remainder (in the shape of a cross). He then takes a jewel from the top part of the portion that contains the Spadikon and puts it in the eastern part of the paten, which is known as the head. He then takes another gem from the lower part of the portion containing the Spadikon and puts it in the western side of the paten. This is known as the limbs. He takes a piece from the right side of the right portion (which is placed on top of the two thirds) and puts it in the paten towards the right. He puts the rest of that portion in the paten to the left. Having done this, he has formed the shape of the cross. He then detaches the two remaining portions, proceeding from the top to the bottom. He then takes the center portion

that contains the Spadikon and places it in the center of the paten. He then starts dividing the portion, which is still in his hand, and is on the left side of the oblation. He divides it into four parts, without separation, so that each part contains one of the four crosses. The priest then removes the pieces he had previously placed on the left side of the paten (which is most of the right third of the oblation), and puts the left third that is in his hand in its place. The portion that he has taken from the paten he then divides into three parts without separation, each part containing a cross. When he finishes he puts it in the right side of the paten beside the piece that was placed to the right at the beginning of the Fraction. This way, the right third is divided into four parts like the left third. He then takes the center third, which he has previously placed in the middle of the paten, and detaches the Spadikon (from below the crust with the soft part in it so that it does not crumble during the following movements). The rest of the center portion remains joined together. The priest puts the Spadikon back in its place in the middle of the center part, taking great care not to let it crumble, then he puts it in the middle of the paten as it was before. The priest then gathers all the divided jewels and puts them back in their place; the oblation now looking intact with all divisions in place as if the fraction never happened.

The great majority of priests do not remember the Fraction prayers by heart so they must read from the liturgy book during the fraction. It is desirable that when the priest finishes each sentence that he then starts dividing the Body, as in this case both his eyes and his mind will be focussed on the Body, rather than the book. When he stops chanting the congregation responds with “Lord have mercy,” and this is an opportune time to look intently and concentrate on dividing the Body. Otherwise he may start spilling portions of the Holy Body outside the Paten.

- **The Lord’s Prayer** - The Fraction Prayer concludes with the Lord’s prayer: “Our Father, Who art in heaven ...”
- **Inaudible Prayers** - After the congregation says, “Our Father Who art in heaven ...,” the silent prayers of absolution and submission are said by the priest. The priest prays, “Yes, we ask You, Holy Father, Who loves goodness, to lead us not into temptation...” as Christ taught us in the Lord’s Prayer, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13). “...We pray that sin will not dominate us...” quoting the Psalmist’s words, “And let not iniquity have dominion over me” (Psalm 119:133). “...But deliver us from sinful deeds; its thoughts,

its actions and its feelings...” Here the priest pleads to the Lord to save him and the congregation from sinful deeds and wicked thoughts and actions, and to protect their senses from every evil. “...Abolish Satan, dismiss him, rebuke also his deeds planted in us...” the priest says, pleading to the Lord to abolish Satan’s snares and influence that we can fall under, such as killing, adultery, stealing and other sins.

The deacon then says, “Bow your heads before the Lord.” This is a call for a collective repentance before approaching the Holy Sacraments. The people bow their heads before the Lord in a moment of penitence and confession so as to be worthy to receive the absolution from the priest’s mouth. What is required here is just bowing the head in accordance with the deacon’s call and not kneeling to the ground like many people do. Full kneeling to the ground befits worshiping and honoring the Lord, while bowing the head suits confessing sins in contrition and humility, like the tax collector who, “Stood afar off would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner’” (Luke 18:13).

The priest then prays the inaudible prayer of Submission to the Father. The priest says, “The grace of the only begotten Son, Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, has now been accomplished. We have professed His redeeming sufferings, preached His death and proclaimed His resurrection.” Throughout the Liturgy, the reality of remembering the sufferings, the death and the resurrection of the Lord, becomes evident in the priest’s prayers and the people’s responses. “The mystery is accomplished,” this happened through the transformation of the bread and the wine into the life giving Body and the honored Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. “We thank you O Lord, the almighty God...” The priest now prays in the same manner as the twenty four spiritual elders who, in their eternal praise, prostrate before the throne of God, saying, “We give You thanks, O Lord, God Almighty, the One Who is and Who was and Who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned” (Revelation 11:16-17).

While the people are bowing their heads, confessing their sins and offering collective penitence, the deacon calls out, “Attend to God in reverence,” so that the people prepare themselves to receive the absolution from the priest. The priest then says, “Peace be with you all.” Before saying the absolution for the remission of sins, the priest gives the congregation peace as a pledge and introduction to the joy they are about to receive. The congregation then responds with, “And also with your spirit.”

The priest then prays the Absolution to the Father, which states, “O Master, God Almighty, healer of our souls, bodies and spirits, You are He Who said to the Apostle Peter, through the mouth of Your only begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ”

The priest then audibly prays the Litany of the Gatherings while uncovering the chalice, saying, “Remember, O Lord, our gatherings, bless them” (without doing the sign of the cross). The deacon raises the cross while responding, “Saved Amen. And with Your Spirit. In the fear of God, let us attend.” The deacon hears the priest’s repentance, “Remember O Lord, my weaknesses and forgive me my many sins...”, and sees his contrition, his humility as he pours himself over the sacrificed Lamb of God, who carries the sins of the whole world. Hearing and seeing this, the deacon testifies immediately to his penitence and reassures him saying, “Saved Amen...”.

Each repentant bowing during this prayer of repentance benefits from this penitence as he is preparing himself to accept the absolution. This response of the deacon reminds us of what prophet Nathan said to King David after David had confessed his sin; “The Lord has put away your sin, you shall not die” (2 Samuel 12:13). The people then implore the Lord for His tender mercies in order to accept their repentance and make them worthy of partaking of the Holies, saying, “Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.”

- **The Confession**

- **Prayers Before the Confession** - The priest holds the Spadikon in his right hand, and while bowing his head, he makes the sign of the cross over the chalice with the Spadikon saying, “The Holies are for the Holy.” Then he slightly dips the Spadikon in the Blood and raises it again without letting any drops fall off it. When bringing the Spadikon back to the paten, he opens his left palm underneath it in case any jewel might fall from it or in case the Blood drips. The priest then signs the Body with the Spadikon that has been dipped in the Lord’s Blood and applies it to the wounds he made in the Body during the fraction by putting the Spadikon on each wound all around the Body while it lies in the paten. He does this while praying, “Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and hallowed is the Holy Spirit. Amen.” When the priest says, “The Holies are for the Holy,” he is warning and cautioning those who intend to approach the Sacraments that the Holies, which are the life-giving

Body and the Honored Blood, are for the holy people only, that is, the repentant who regret their sins and who have confessed them before the priest and who are honest in keeping and obeying the commandments. As the Apostle Paul says, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27).

Dipping the Body in the Blood teaches us that this Body is for the Blood, and this Blood is for this Body. Likewise, signing the Body with the Spadikon absorbed in Blood indicates the unity of the Body and the Blood with the Divinity, which has not parted from His humanity even for a single instant or a twinkle of an eye. Dipping the jewel in the Blood then removing it refers to the baptism of Christ; this baptism also commemorates the Lord’s death and resurrection. After signing the Body with the Spadikon absorbed in the Blood, the priest goes around the Body touching all the wounds he made on the Body during the fraction, in what is called ‘the anointing of the wounds’, as if he is trying to soothe the wounds the Lord endured because of our sins. However, the priest and the congregation should realize that nothing dresses the wounds of the Lord and heals them except if we return to Him in repentance and submit our lives to Him, working hard to please Him and obeying His commandments. This reminds us of the church’s interpretation of the Lord’s words on the cross, when He said, “I thirst.” He did not thirst for water as much as He thirsted for the salvation of our souls and our return to Him.

The congregation responds with, “One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit. Amen.” This is a response to the priest’s call, “The Holies are for the Holy.” Here, the interpretation of the congregation’s response is that they are affirming that we are far from holy, and that they are no saints, but rather unworthy sinners. Only God is Holy with His three Hypostasis. We can say that the true holiness and true worthiness of partaking of the feared mysteries of Emmanuel, our Lord, is to rid ourselves of the burden of sin and its bitterness, confessing it and striving not to return to it, then approaching the Holy Communion in reverence, with tears of repentance.

When the priest perceives the submissiveness and humility of the people in daring to approach the Holiness of the Lord and His awesome mysteries, he gives them peace and reassurance saying, “Peace be with you all,” and so the congregation responds with, “And also with your spirit.” For the second time, the priest anoints the wounds of the Body with the Spadikon saying, “The Holy Body, and the true Honored Blood

of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God, Amen.” And the congregation in true faith responds with, “Amen.” For the third time, the priest anoints the wounds of the Body with the Spadikon saying, “Holy and Honored are the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our Lord, Amen,” and again the congregation responds with, “Amen.” The priest then turns the Spadikon upside down, holds it between his fingers, raises it to the chalice making the sign of the cross over the Blood with it, then puts it upside down in the Blood and says, “Truly this is the Body and Blood of Emmanuel our God, Amen.” The congregation says, “Amen, we believe,” confirming and affirming the priest’s saying and confession. Signing the Body three times with the blood-soaked Spadikon before raising it and placing it back in the chalice refers to the three days that Jesus remained in the tomb before His resurrection on the third day. Turning the Spadikon and placing it upside down in the chalice to be immersed in the Blood symbolizes the act of crucifying Christ, the Lamb of God, who carries the sins of the whole world, when they laid Him on His back to nail Him on the cross. As they began to place the nails in His hands and feet, the blood gushed out and covered His pure Body. His perpetrators were acting like a butcher when he slays a sheep, turning it on its back and slitting its throat.

- **The Prayer of Confession** - The priest then raises the paten carefully and recites the confession, saying, “Amen, Amen, Amen, I believe, I believe, I believe and profess unto my last breath, that this is the life-giving Body which Your only begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, took of our Lady and Queen of us all, the Mother of God, the pure St. Mary...”, This is in accordance with what the Holy Bible teaches us regarding His incarnation and His birth of the Virgin Mary. The Apostle Paul says, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4). “He made it One with His Divinity without mingling nor interchanging nor alteration and declared the proper confession before Pontius Pilate...”, This also being in accordance with what the Holy Bible tells us in the narration of the trial of the Lord of Glory before Pontius Pilate, the governor of Jerusalem at that time. The Apostle Paul says, “...Jesus Christ who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate” (1 Timothy 6:13),” “And gave it up willingly on the Holy Cross-on our behalf. I believe that His Divinity never departed His Humanity, not even a single instant or a twinkle of an eye. Given for the salvation, remission of sins and an eternal life to those who partake of them...,” For Jesus,

Himself, said, “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” (John 6:54-55). “I believe, I believe, I believe that this is true. Amen.”

The priest then puts the paten back on the Altar and covers the chalice with a veil. He then kneels down before the altar and silently prays, until the deacon finishes his confession (see below), saying, “Every honor, every glory and every worship are due at all times to the Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore...” And secondly, “Absolve and forgive us our sins which we have committed our Father...” And finally, “Make us all worthy, O Lord, to partake of Your Holy Body and Honored Blood for the purification of our souls, bodies and spirits and for the forgiveness of our sins that we become one body and one spirit with You. Glory be to you...” These prayers are to give glory to God who, in His modesty, consented to give us His Body to eat and His Blood to drink. The priest does this with humility, contrition and declaration of unworthiness, and then he beseeches absolution and forgiveness before partaking of the awesome Mysteries.

At the end of the priest’s confession, the deacon takes the cross in his right hand, a lit candle in his left hand, and a veil between the two of them. He holds this before his eyes while saying the deacon’s confession, “Amen, Amen, Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe that this is true, Amen. Pray for us and for all the Christians who wished us to remember them in the house of the Lord. The peace and love of Jesus Christ be with you all. Sing praises, Alleluia. Pray for the merit of partaking of these Holy, Pure and Heavenly Mysteries. Lord have mercy.” In the deacon’s confession, the deacon affirms and confirms, on behalf of the people, all that was mentioned in the priest’s confession. He then asks the people to pray for those approaching the Holy Sacraments, that they may partake of them worthily, with a repentant heart, lest they be condemned, for every person approaching the Holy Sacraments should examine himself, as the Apostle said. The words, “Pray for the merit of partaking of these Holy, Pure and Heavenly Mysteries,” emphasize the importance of examining oneself before approaching the Mysteries; is he really ready to receive these Holy Sacraments? Is he complying with these words? As we hear the deacon’s call, “Pray for the merit of partaking of these Holy, Pure and Heavenly Mysteries”, we ought to lift our hearts to the Lord and beseech His blessings and His mercies on all those partaking, so that their communion fulfills the Lord’s promise, which stated, “He

who eats My Body and drinks My Blood, abides in Me and I in him” (John 6:56). We should also pray that those who approach the Sacraments may be worthy and not be condemned. The reason why the deacon holds the cross in his right hand, a lit candle in his left and a veil between them, is because as a deacon cannot gaze at the splendor of the Lord’s glory so he covers his eyes like the Seraphim who covers his face with two of his wings from the brilliance of His majestic glory. As for the priest, he does not hide his face because he has been merited, through the sacrament of priesthood, to fraction and hold in his hands the Body of Christ. The cross and the candle refer to Christ Who endured the sufferings of the cross and sacrificed Himself to give eternal life to the world like a candle which burns itself to give light to the people. Likewise, Christ had fractionated His Body and shed His Blood on the cross to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to bring them out into the brightness of His Kingdom. After the deacon’s confession, the congregation responds with, “Glory be to You O Lord, Glory be to you.” We give glory to God who bestowed His Holy Sacraments for the healing of the soul, body and spirit, for the forgiveness of sins and for abiding in Him.

- **The Holy Communion**

- **Distributing the Holy Body** - The priest rises from kneeling before the Altar and receives absolution from the other serving priests, by bowing and saying, “I have sinned, absolve me.” He also receives forgiveness from the deacons and from the congregation by saying while bowing, “I have sinned, forgive me.” Then he starts giving out the Holy Communion. He begins with the Holy Body, so that he communes himself with the front jewel of the Body (known as the head). He does this in his capacity as the serving priest, and the head of the gathering. If an associate priest is present, the serving priest takes the masteer (spoon) from the top of the throne of the chalice and puts the back jewel of the Body (known as the limbs) in it. The associate priest approaches, bows before the Altar and the Mysteries which are on it, kisses the Altar then takes the masteer with his hand which is covered with a veil. He brings his mouth close to the paten and communes the jewel which is in the masteer. He then communes the altar deacons in the order of their ranks, from the right third of the Body, after fractionating its four portions into small parts according to the number of those who are partaking. When giving the Holy Body, the priest takes a small

gem from the Body between the fingers of his right hand and puts the palm of his left hand beneath it until the jewel is put carefully in the partaker's mouth. During this he says, "The Body of Emmanuel, Our God, this is true. Amen." The partaker then replies, "Amen." After he receives the gem in his mouth, the partaker covers his mouth with a small cloth while he is chewing. This is because he has attained a precious jewel and so is keen to hide and conceal it. It is also to avoid accidentally dropping any part of it while chewing.

The priest places the dome in the paten and covers it with a large veil, making sure the edges do not get inside the paten, and that no particle of the jewel sticks to it when it is covered. The priest covers the paten because it is not befitting that those who are not partaking should behold the sacraments. The priest carries the paten with great care, and from the left-hand side he turns to the West and blesses the congregation in the partaker's area, while saying, "The Holies are for the holy. Blessed is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and Holy is the Holy Spirit. Amen." The people bow and cry out, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." The priest then puts the paten back on the Altar. The priest carries the paten again, and from the right-hand side he turns West, blesses the people and says, "Holy Body and true Honorable Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of Our God. Amen." The congregation cries out while bowing, saying, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." From the right side of the altar, the priest, carrying the paten in his hands, goes to the men seeking the Holy Communion in the Northern part of the Sanctuary. The deacon precedes him, walking backwards with a lit candle in his hand, crying out, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord." If another priest is attending, he takes the chalice to give the Blood to the partakers who have already received the Body. If necessary, a deacon with the rank of Deacon, which is a full deacon, is allowed to hold the chalice and give the Blood to the partakers. If no one other than the priest is available to give the Blood, the priest leaves the chalice in the Throne on the Altar until he finishes giving the last tiny gem of the Body left in the paten, then he gives the Blood. When the priest is not attending to the altar while giving out the Body, he assigns a deacon to stand before the altar holding a lit candle.

After the priest finishes giving the Sacraments to the men, he goes to the women's side. Having given the Sacraments to the ladies, he goes back to the Altar and gives whatever remains of the gems to himself, to associate priests and to the deacons in

order of their ranks. When he finishes partaking of the Body, he puts the paten on the left side of the altar, removes the veil that had been underneath it, shakes it carefully inside the paten, and then he picks up the small molecules of the gems which had adhered to the paten. He asks the associate priest or the deacon to join him in looking closely inside the paten for any molecules he may have missed. If the deacon sees anything, he points at it with his finger without touching the paten and the priest picks it up and eats it. The two of them look carefully until they are both sure that the paten is absolutely free of gems. The deacon then says, "Hail to the Cross." The priest makes the sign of the cross inside the paten with his finger and says, "Hail to the cross of Jesus Christ." Precision in the distribution of the sacraments and in consuming all minute gems that remain in the paten is a very important matter, which the church greatly stresses to the new priest. During an ordination, the Bishop advises the new priest, saying, "Let your distribution be in array, in order, in quietness and calmness, and in caution and carefulness. Look closely at the sacred utensils and ask one with sharp sight to look twice and thrice until you are sure."

It is of great importance that every partaker should approach the Sacraments in preparedness, repentance and confession, so that he does not take condemnation to himself (1 Corinthians 11:27). He has to clear his conscience beforehand by avoiding errors, having confessed his sins, having been reconciled with everybody and, moreover, abstaining from eating and drinking for a required period of time; nine hours for adults, six hours for children and three hours for suckling babies. For the late Liturgies, like those of the Great Lent, the abstinence starts at midnight. The nine hours abstinence signifies the Lord's nine hours of sufferings on the day of His crucifixion, from the beginning of the trial at 9 a.m. until His burial at 6 p.m.

The congregation bows during Communion to emulate Mary Magdalene and the other Mary's who bowed before the Lord when He showed Himself to them after the resurrection; "Jesus met them and said 'Rejoice' and they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him" (Matthew 28:9). It also signifies the disciples who worshiped Him, as they saw Him ascending to Heaven (Luke 24:52). The bowing and lowering of the heads of the congregation symbolizes the Seraphim who covered their faces with their wings when they saw the Lord sitting on His throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filling the temple (Isaiah 6:2). The congregation's cry,

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” indicates that what is in the priest’s hands is the same Body which Christ took of the Virgin Mary and the same Body with which He entered Jerusalem where the crowds welcomed Him with the same outcry, saying, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest” (Matthew 21:9). It also signifies that Christ, who was incarnate for our salvation, rose from the dead and ascended in great glory to the Heavens, and will come again in His Glory to judge the living and the dead.

- **Distributing the Honored Blood** - After giving out the Holy Body and consuming all the remaining jewels in the paten as mentioned before, the priest starts giving out the Honored Blood. He uncovers the chalice, takes the veil that has been placed on top of it, and places it in his left hand, taking the masteer from the top of the throne and putting it inside the chalice. He then raises the chalice from the throne with his right hand, taking the utmost care while doing so. The deacon helps by holding the doors of the throne open. When the chalice comes out of the throne, everyone bows in glorification to the Honored Blood which has been shed for our salvation. When the chalice has been taken out of the throne, the priest holds it in his left hand, which is covered with the veil. He then communes the Spadikon which is immersed in the Blood, after draining it from the precious Blood inside the chalice. He then partakes of the Blood. If there is an associate priest he gives him the chalice and the masteer inside it. The associate priest partakes of the Blood, once or three times (his hand must be covered with the veil when holding the masteer). After this, the priest gives the blood to the deacons with the Masteer, once or three times while saying, “The Blood of Emmanuel our Lord. This is true. Amen.” The partaker responds with, “Amen.” Then he gives the Holy Blood to the congregation; first the men, then the women. He then returns to the Altar and drinks what is left from the Blood straight from the chalice without using the masteer. In doing this, he has to apply great care so that none of the Blood rolls over the handle of the masteer (which is inside the chalice) when he tilts the chalice to drink from it. If too much Blood remains after giving it to the congregation, the priest should take care not to drink it quickly, but gradually, lest he chokes and the Blood splashes out of his mouth.

When the partaker brings his mouth close to the chalice, he should imagine that he is approaching the stab wound in the side of the Divine from which blood and water flowed on the cross. He should offer thanks to God for His inexpressible gift.

The Church gives the two substances of the Thanksgiving Mystery separately, first the Body then the Blood, for two reasons: The Lord Christ Himself gave it to His disciples in the same way when He instituted the Mystery of the Eucharist, “Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat, this is My Body’” (Matthew 26:27-28). The Church wants us to never forget Christ’s Blood, which gushed out of His Divine side on the cross and was shed on the ground for our salvation. The Church collects it in a chalice, separate from the Body, because the Blood, which flowed from His side, streamed, and still streams, for our salvation. In its flow it saves all those who come to the Father through it because it is alive and it intercedes on our behalf with its redemption and saving merits. “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). The serving priest receives the Holy Communion before all partakers, even if there is an older or higher rank priest among them, (e.g., if a priest is serving and there is a protopriest among the communicants), as the serving priest is the Sacrament’s minister. In accordance with what our glorified Savior did during the Last Supper, He first consecrated His Body, He broke it and ate first, then gave His disciples. Likewise, He sanctified the cup, tasted it first, and then gave it to His disciples. No one shares the Spadikon with the serving priest, who alone eats it whole without division or fraction, because the word Spadikon means the ‘Lordly Part’ and it is impossible to divide or faction Christ. The whole Sacraments must be communed. Nothing is to remain for later or the next day. The command of the Old Testament’s law regarding the Passover lamb says, “You shall let none of it remain until morning” (Exodus 12:10). This does not apply to the part of the Sacraments, which the priest keeps in the gem’s box to take immediately after the Liturgy to a sick person. In this case, the priest, without drinking water after the Holy Communion, goes to the sick person when the Liturgy is over to give them the Holy Sacrament. He then washes the gem’s box thoroughly and gives some of the water to the sick person to drink, before drinking the rest of it himself.

We should not prostrate or bow after partaking of the Divine Sacraments because we are in a joyous situation, carrying the Lord Jesus inside ourselves. The church’s rules prohibit kneeling to the ground after receiving the Divine Sacraments.

When the Lord ascended to heaven, the disciples looked steadfastly towards heaven, even after He was out of their sight, for a cloud received Him. They remained staring

towards the heavens until two men in white clothes (angels) stood by them and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:4-12). We should do likewise after the Holy Communion. We should have our hearts drawn to heaven, looking forward to His second coming, to take us with Him on the cloud. Every partaker should pray a thanksgiving prayer after he has received the Sacraments to offer thanks to God for the grace he has attained, and to plead that his partaking of the pure Body and Honored Blood be a blessing, a strength and purity to secure a favorable acceptance before the feared throne on the day of judgment, and not be for retribution or condemnation. In this regard, one of the fathers said, “After we receive this Holy Sacrament, we should not be hasty to leave the church and we should not speak with other people. Instead, we should stay for a few moments on our own and in silence after the Liturgy, offering a thanksgiving prayer to God, appreciate the everlasting value which these moments bring to us as we become able to worship our Lord, sense the presence of the Divinity of Christ inside us, and pour our hearts into His Divine heart. Thus we become a new person, a person who has undergone an alteration, then we can leave the church and mix with the people. The people will realize that an unutterable mystery has been fulfilled within us. It is the mystery of love which will be manifested through our increasing love to others.” In the prayer book of the Hours (the Agpeya), there are prayers to be said before and after partaking of the Holy Communion.

After giving out the Honored Blood, the priest starts washing the utensils. He washes the masteer inside the chalice and drinks the water. Then the deacon pours more water in the cup. The serving priest gives it to the associate priest who drinks it. Again, the priest thoroughly washes the inside of the chalice with his hand, and pours the water in the paten. He then washes the outside of the chalice, especially the spots that he touched with his hands; this washing is done above the paten. Next, he washes the masteer, the whole of it, then the whole of the dome (or star) which sits upon the paten, paying particular care to the ends which touch the paten. He then pours the water that he used to wash the chalice, masteer and star into the paten, washes the paten thoroughly with his hand, and then drinks the water. The deacon pours water in the paten, which is in the hands of the priest, which the deacons then drink to finish any of the remaining Holy Communion. The priest washes his hands

up to the wrist and his lips, then with that water, he washes the paten and drinks the water. If the associate priest has held the chalice and has given the Blood to the people, he also washes his hands in the paten and drinks the water. A deacon then dries the utensils with a clean towel used specifically for drying the altar utensils. He then binds them together with the veils and the Prosphere, making sure the wrapping is not too tight, otherwise the utensils might get damaged. When tying the utensils, the deacon makes five knots: two knots in the preliminary (lower) tie, and three knots on the upper one. This is done so that when the priest unwraps the bundle to dress the altar before the Liturgy, he unties the top three knots with the familiar three signings of the cross, and the lower two with the continuation of the signings, saying “Honor and Glory, Glory and Honor...”

- **Communion Praises** - While the priest is administering the Holy Communion (and during the washing of the utensils), Psalm 150 is sung by the deacons. After Psalm 150 is sung, other Communion hymns, according to the appropriate time of the Coptic year, are sung. Common hymns include Pi-Oik, Rashi (Virgin Mary’s fast and feast), Very Early Sunday Morning (resurrection), Night of the Last Supper, My Coptic Church (Nayrouz), and many others appropriate for the Great Lent, Apostles fast and feast, the Feast of the Cross, and other occasions. There are several appropriate Communion hymns for the entire Coptic calendar. The church does the correct thing in chanting the joyous hymns during the distribution of the Sacraments, as the people of the church stand in awe during such blessed moments, meditating on the sacrifice of the cross and the slain Lamb for the sins of the world. They listen and participate in the hymns of the distribution. This has been the church’s custom since the Apostolic era and this is evident in the Apostolic instructions, “Let all believers sing praise until all the oblation has been communioned.” Taking an example from what happened when Jesus set the Lord’s Supper in the upper room in Zion, the Holy Bible says, “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matthew 26:30). It is not right to give a sermon during the distribution, for the songs of praise and jubilation will be silenced and the people will be distracted from the Sacrifice and the significance of the Communion. They will sit during moments when sitting is strictly forbidden; at the time of distributing Jesus’s broken Body and shed Blood for our sins. Also, during such a sermon, the speaker would be giving his back to the Sacrifice and teaching in the presence of the greatest teacher of all: Christ! Those

who give a sermon at the time of the distribution of Holy Communion violate the original rite that had been prevailing in the days of the Apostles, according to the teaching of the Holy Bible, “And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). From this verse, we can see that the original arrangements of the ceremony of the Thanksgiving Mystery was firstly, i) teaching (nowadays this corresponds with the readings of the Pauline, the Catholic Epistles, the Acts, the Synaxarium and the Gospel, and then the sermon), then secondly ii) the fellowship in partaking of the Lord’s Body and Blood, and thirdly iii) the accompanying prayers and praises.

It is important to note that he who attends the Liturgy and leaves the church before the end of the distribution of the Sacraments and the dismissal prayers receives the same share as Judas Iscariot. Likewise, he who does not attend the reading of the Gospel and the consecration of the offerings and then approaches the Sacraments gets the same punishment. He is partaking of the Holy Communion with an unclean soul. The reading of the Holy Books and praying the Liturgy were set to be read before Communion to sanctify the partaker’s soul and body; then he becomes worthy of the offerings. As the Lord sits on the throne at the right hand of the Father in heaven, He also sits on the throne of our hearts when we unite with Him in faith during the Holy Communion. Thus our hearts become thrones, our bodies become a heaven, and our thoughts and all our lives become spiritual and heavenly.

- **Thanksgiving Prayer After Communion** - After the priest has finished washing the utensils, he bows his head before the Lord and prays the following Thanksgiving Prayer: “Our mouth is full of exaltation, and our tongue with praise, because of our partaking of Your Immortal Sacraments, O Lord...” This is similar to what David the Psalmist says, “When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nation, the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad” (Psalm 126:1-3). Here the Lord has brought back the captivity of inner Zion, our souls, and freed us from the captivity of Satan, who had trapped us within his will. The Lord has brought us back to Himself, through repentance, and bestowed upon us the greatness of His favors by giving us His Holy Body and Blood.

- **The Dismissal**

- **Dismissing the Angel of the Sacrifice** - After the Thanksgiving Prayer, the deacon pours some water in the priest's hand and the priest breathes on it three times while saying the three signings of the cross. If other priests are present they too blow on the water and repeat the second signing. The priest stands before the Altar and dismisses the angel of the Sacrifice by sprinkling some of the water on the Altar and sprinkling the rest upwards saying, "O angel of this offering who ascends to the highest with this praise, remember us before the Lord that He may forgive us our sins." It is not befitting that any priest or deacon takes off the vestments of the service before the angel of the Sacrifice is dismissed or before the congregation has been dismissed.
- **Dismissing the Congregation** - After sprinkling the water and dismissing the angel of the Sacrifice, the priest starts to dismiss the congregation. First he places his hand, wet with water, on the throne of the chalice, then on his own beard, then on other priest's beards. He then places his hand on all of the deacons heads as a blessing before dismissing them. Dismissing the congregation can be done in two ways: If only a few people are in attendance, the priest places his hand on each person's head. If there are many people, he dismisses them by sprinkling water on them in an organized manner to avoid any noise. During the sprinkling of water, the people should not leave their places. The priest dismisses the other serving priests by placing his hand on their beards and not on their heads. The Liturgy book says that he wipes their faces with his hand because placing the hand on the head indicates giving a blessing and blessings are only given by the senior to the junior, like the Apostle Paul says, "Now beyond all contradiction, the lesser is blessed by the better" (Hebrews 7:7). As all the priests are brothers and none is less than the other, the priest does not give them the dismissal by placing his hand on their heads but by wiping their beards with his hand. Moreover, the beard is a sign of their pledge and devotion to God, so it is a sacred and respected thing.

The priest has to make sure that the sprinkled dismissal water has reached each and every single person in the church. The Coptic Orthodox Christian is under the conviction that even if he attends from the beginning of the Liturgy, partakes of the Holy Communion and attains many blessings but has not received his share of the

dismissal water with which he wipes his face, or has missed out on the Eulogia (blessing), he considers the benediction to be incomplete and leaves the church unsatisfied and not filled with happiness. Dismissal by placing the hand on every person's head was the original way of dismissal carried out in our church. It has many meanings and benefits. It means that the priest attends to the congregation and knows who has come to church and who has not, hence he should ask about them. After the Liturgy, he can then go to visit his people as if they are his own children, or as endeared sheep of the holy flock, which deserve the care and attention of the shepherd.

If the Patriarch or one of the Bishops is present, but not serving during the Liturgy, the serving priest does not sprinkle the water but instead puts the water that has been poured in his hands into the Patriarch's or the Bishop's hands. The Patriarch breathes on the water and sprinkles it upwards to dismiss the angel saying, "O Angel of this offering..." He then prays the dismissal of the clergy and the congregation and says the blessing.

- **The Code of Benediction** - At the conclusion of all of the collective prayers, the congregation chants "Amen Alleluia, Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit." In the presence of the Patriarch or a Bishop they add, "May you be bestowed the blessing of Moses." After that, the priest stands by the door of the Sanctuary facing West and says the usual benediction, which is the same as what is said at the end of raising the incense. After the Lord's prayer, the priest gives the dismissal saying, "And now, the love of God the Father, and the grace of the only begotten Son, our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, and the fellowship and the gift of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Go in peace. The peace of the Lord is with you." The people respond with, "And also with you." The priest then kisses the altar and goes around it once while saying Psalm 46, which says, "O clap your hands, all you peoples..."
- **Washing the Hands** - After reciting Psalm 46 and kissing the corners of the altar, the priest washes his hands after giving the dismissal in preparation for giving the congregation the Eulogia.
- **The Distribution of Eulogia: Morsel of Blessing** - Eulogia is a Greek word, which means 'blessing'. In our church, the word Eulogia is given to the 'morsel of blessing' which is distributed to the worshipers at the end of the Liturgy. The Eulogia comes from the bread, which remains after choosing the Lamb. This bread

was a potential offering and could have become the Divine Body. For this reason they have much honor and the priests and congregation share them. It has been the custom in Coptic churches that the priest distributes the Eulogia first to the believers in front of the Sanctuary. He starts with his brothers, the priests, who shake hands with him and break a morsel of the Eulogia. If the Patriarch or a Bishop is present, he distributes the Eulogia. The priests go first to break a piece from the bread in his hand, then the people follow. The Patriarch, the Bishop or the priest gives each member of the congregation a morsel of the blessing, which each person kisses, eats and then goes home. In doing this, every believer will come out of the church thankful to the Lord, comforted and asking for the continuation of this grace for him and for all believers.

The priest breaks the Eulogia over the Lamb's plate, which the deacon holds for him so those fragments of the bread don't fall on the floor. At the end of the distribution, the priest or the deacon collects the fragments, which have fallen in the plate, and eats them. The Eulogia must be kissed before eating it because it is a morsel of blessing and has attended the Liturgy, and we know that everything becomes sacred with the word of God and with prayers. If the morsel is too big and one cannot take it in one mouthful, he then breaks it with his hands and not with his teeth, making sure he does not drop any fraction on the ground. In the non-fasting days, the Eulogia must be eaten before leaving the church. In fasting days when the Liturgy finishes earlier than the time of breaking the fast, the Eulogia can be kept until eating time and be taken before the meal.

The priest then takes off the vestments of service and puts on his black clothes before leaving the Sanctuary, as he does with his left foot, while facing East. He then draws the curtain of the Sanctuary saying, "Draw Your shield over us, and let the door of Your church be opened in our faces, throughout the ages and till the end of all times." He kisses the curtain and goes in peace.

Baptism and Chrismation

Baptism and Chrismation are two of the seven Sacraments in the Coptic Orthodox Church. Baptism is immediately followed by Chrismation. Chrismation is the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism

- What is Baptism? Simply put, baptism is our death, burial, and resurrection in union with Jesus Christ. It is a rite of passage, given by Christ to the Church, as an entrance into the Kingdom of God and eternal life.
- The Apostle Paul describes the promise of God in this “mystery” when he writes, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).
- To baptize literally means to immerse, to put into. The Orthodox Church baptizes by triple immersion, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).
- In the Old Testament, baptism was pictured by the passage of God’s people with Moses through the Red Sea (Exodus Chapter 15, 1 Corinthians 10:1-2). John the Baptist, the last prophet of the Old Covenant, baptized in water unto repentance (Mark 1:4, Acts 19:4). John’s baptism was received by Jesus, who thereby transformed the water and baptism itself. In the New Covenant, baptism is the means by which we enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:5), are joined to Christ (Romans 6:3), and are granted the remission of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
- What results from Baptism? From the start, the Church has understood baptism as:
 - (1) **A first and Second Dying** - Our first dying with Christ in baptism was our death with Him on the Cross. In the fourth century, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem instructed his new converts as follows: “You were led by the hand of the holy pool of divine baptism ... and each of you was asked if he believed in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And you made that saving confession, you descended

into the water and came up again three times. In the very same moment, you died and were born.”

The second death of baptism is continual - dying to sin daily as we walk in the newness of life. Saint Paul writes to the Colossians concerning baptism (Colossians 2:12) and concludes by saying, “Therefore put to death your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

(2) **The Resurrection of Righteousness** - This is our life in Christ, our new birth and entrance into God’s Kingdom (John 3:3), our “newness of life” (Romans 6:4). It is our being joined to Christ in His glorified humanity and indwelt by God Himself (John 14:23). Our relationship with God is not something static, a legal fiction given to us by a Divine Judge. Rather, this is a dynamic and real life in Christ, holding the promise to everlasting life. Our resurrection to new life now forms a prelude to the resurrection of our body at Christ’s Second Coming.

(3) **An Intimate and Continual Communion with God** - We are raised to new life for a purpose: union and communion with God. In this sense, baptism is the beginning of eternal life. For this reason, Saint Peter writes that baptism now saves us (1 Peter 3:21) - it is not the mere removal of dirt from our bodies, but it provides us with “a good conscience toward God.”

Because of these promises, the priest prays for the newly baptized, thanking God, who has given us, unworthy though we be, blessed purification through holy water, and divine sanctification through life-giving chrismation, and who now also has been pleased to bring new life to the newly baptized servant, newly illuminated by water and the Spirit, and granted remission of sins - voluntary and involuntary.

Chrismation

- From the earliest times, the church has practiced chrismation immediately following baptism. In the sacrament of chrismation (which means “anointing”), the newly baptized person receives the Holy Spirit through anointing with oil by the priest. The roots of this sacrament are clear both in the Old and New Testaments, and are especially brought to light on the Day of Pentecost.

(1) **Promises of the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament** - In his sermon on the Day

of Pentecost, Saint Peter quotes the well-known prophecy of Joel, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28). This promise was significant because under the Old Covenant, the gift of the Spirit had been given only to a few - the patriarchs, the prophets, and some of the judges. Certain leaders of Israel were indwelt with the Holy Spirit to accomplish their tasks. Joel, however, prophesied that the Holy Spirit would be given to all God’s people, “all flesh.” This was fulfilled at Pentecost, for Peter exclaims, “this [outpouring of the Spirit] is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16).

Other Old Testament prophets who speak of this same promise of the Spirit include Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:25-27). In fact, the Ezekiel passage ties together the water and the Spirit in a prophetic vision of baptism and chrismation.

- (2) **Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit** - Our Lord Jesus Christ repeatedly promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to his disciples. Early in His ministry, He said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit ...” (John 7:37-39). Jesus also said, “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” (John 14:16).

Christ promised the Holy Spirit would reveal truth to the Church. “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). Jesus says the Holy Spirit will bring glory to Christ. This gives us an excellent means of testing whether or not acts attributed to the Holy Spirit are indeed valid.

The last words of Christ before His Ascension include a promise: “John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). This word was fulfilled ten days later on the Day of Pentecost.

- (3) **How is the Holy Spirit Given to Us?** - The people who heard Peter speak at Pentecost asked him how they might receive salvation. He answered, “Repent, and let every one 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” (Acts 2:38). We repent (turn from our sins toward Christ); we are baptized; we are given “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” chrismation. That practice has never changed.

In Acts 8, Philip, the deacon and evangelist, preached in Samaria (Acts 8:5-8). Many believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12). The apostles came and later confirmed these new believers with the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-17). Here is the sacrament of chrismation following Holy Baptism. Later, the Apostle Paul met some disciples of John the Baptist who had not been present when Peter spoke at Pentecost (Acts 19:1-7). They believed in Christ, “were baptized” (Acts 19:5) and “the Holy Spirit came upon them” (Acts 19:6), again through the hands of the apostle.

The promise of God includes both our union with Christ in Holy Baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit at chrismation.

The Calculation of the Orthodox Easter

- There are two different calendars used by Christians today: these are the Gregorian and Julian Calendars.
- The Jews calculate dates according to the Hebrew Calendar.
- The Orthodox Church abides by the Julian Calendar, whereas all other Christian denominations abide by the Gregorian Calendar.
- The civil calendar, which the world abides by, is the Gregorian Calendar.

History

- Between 326 AD and 1582 AD, Christianity determined Easter using an algorithm approved by the First Ecumenical Council in 325 AD, with the Spring Equinox defined as March 21.
- The Spring Equinox marks the beginning of Spring when day and night are each about 12 hours long all over the earth.
- All of the calculations of Easter are based on the beginning of the Spring Equinox. The Gregorian and Julian calendars have different calculations of the Equinox.
- From 1054 AD (when the Orthodox and Catholic Churches split) through 1582 AD, both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches celebrated Easter on the same date, still using the algorithm from 325 AD.
- The Julian Calendar was used by the European (and Christian) communities until the Gregorian reform of 1582 AD.
- Since October of 1582 AD (when the Gregorian Calendar was adopted by much of Catholic Europe), the Orthodox Easter usually falls on dates different than the Western Christian Easter.
- The development of calendars is based on estimating the length of time the earth takes to make one orbit around the sun. Once the earth makes one orbit, this is counted as 1 year.

The Julian Calendar

- The original Julian Calendar was introduced by Julius Caesar in 44 BC.
- In this calendar, the length of the natural solar year (the time it takes for the earth to make one orbit of the sun) was estimated to be 365 days and 6 hours.
- Every fourth year, the extra 6 hours were collected and added as an extra day to the year, thus creating a leap year of 366 days.
- The contention in 1582 AD by Pope Gregory of Rome was that the Julian Calendar is 11 minutes and 14 seconds longer than the natural solar year, and thus the claim was that the Julian Calendar estimated the solar year with this error.
- This accusation has caused all of the calendar problems, and the astronomers of Gregory of Rome came up with a new calendar, the Gregorian Calendar, which claims to give a more accurate estimate of the solar year.
- The claim was that if there is an error in the original Julian Calendar, over a period of time, the extra minutes and seconds accumulate to a full day and the Spring Equinox arrives faster, or a day earlier in the civil calendar. This would thus cause an error in the calculation of Easter which would add up over the years.
- According to the Julian Calendar, the Orthodox Easter always occurs *after Passover*. The Orthodox Easter can occur up to 3 weeks after the Jewish Passover. In this period of time, the Orthodox Easter is occurring on the first Sunday after the Passover.
- The Jewish Passover is what Christ and His disciples celebrated on Holy Thursday.
- The Passover is, of course, based on the last plague that God imposed on the Egyptians, in which the firstborn sons of the Israelites were “passed over” and the firstborn sons of the Egyptians were killed. Thus, Passover is a celebration of the killing of the firstborn sons of the Egyptians.
- We view The Passion Week and Easter as The Passover Meal, in which Christ is the sacrifice, and we have been freed from the slavery of sin through His crucifixion and resurrection. Thus, it is critical to have Easter *after* the Jewish Passover.

- The Gregorian Calendar does not track Passover, and thus the Western Easter often falls *before* the Passover, which does not make sense from a theological or Biblical perspective.

The Gregorian Calendar

- The Gregorian Calendar dates from the year 1582 AD.
- The Gregorian claim in the 16th century was that the Spring Equinox was arriving 10 days earlier on the Julian Calendar date of March 11th instead of March 21st, because of the uncorrected “error” in the Julian Calendar.
- With updated astronomical information, Pope Gregory of Rome tried to refine the Julian Calendar.
- His astronomers reduced the number of leap years so that the average length of the civil calendar would be nearer to the natural length of the solar year.
- In a 400-year cycle they dropped three leap years and reduced the “error” from 11 minutes and 14 seconds a year to 26 seconds a year
- Under this system it takes many years more for 26 seconds to accumulate into a full day.
- In 1582 AD, the 10 days were dropped from the civil calendar so that the Spring Equinox would again fall on March 21st as the Church had ruled in 325 AD. Thus, this established the Gregorian Calendar which is used by the Church in the West for both fixed and movable feasts.
- There is a current 13 day difference between the Gregorian and Julian Calendars. For example, the Gregorian Christmas is on December 25th, and the Julian Christmas is on January 7th, a 13 day difference.
- The Gregorian and Julian calendars use different algorithms (formulas) for calculating the date of Easter.

Calculating the Orthodox Easter

- The Orthodox Easter has a cycle that (in the Julian Calendar) repeats itself every 532 (19×28) years (since the Julian Solar calendar repeats every 28 years and the Metonic Lunar cycle is 19 years).
- There was an algorithm derived by the German mathematician Gauss. This algorithm calculates the number of days *after* March 21 (Julian) that Easter occurs. (Note: It is a much simpler calculation than the Western Easter).

Let $\text{RMD}(x,y)$ = remainder when x is divided by y . A $*$ below denotes multiplication.

$$R1 = \text{RMD}(\text{Year}, 19)$$

$$R2 = \text{RMD}(\text{Year}, 4)$$

$$R3 = \text{RMD}(\text{Year}, 7)$$

$$RA = 19 * R1 + 16$$

$$R4 = \text{RMD}(RA, 30)$$

$$RB = 2 * R2 + 4 * R3 + 6 * R4$$

$$R5 = \text{RMD}(RB, 7)$$

$$RC = R4 + R5$$

- The number RC ranges from 1 to 35, which corresponds to March 22 to April 25 in the Julian Calendar (currently April 4 to May 8 on the Gregorian).
- The Julian Calendar is now 13 days behind the Gregorian, and will be until March 1, 2100 when it will be 14 days behind the Gregorian Calendar.

Example of Using the Algorithm

- Year = 2005
- $R1 = \text{RMD}(2005, 19) = 10$
- $R2 = \text{RMD}(2005, 4) = 1$
- $R3 = \text{RMD}(2005, 7) = 3$

- $RA = 19 \cdot 10 + 16 = 206$
- $R4 = \text{RMD}(206, 30) = 26$
- $RB = 2 \cdot 1 + 4 \cdot 3 + 6 \cdot 26 = 170$
- $R5 = \text{RMD}(170, 7) = 2$
- $RC = 26 + 2 = 28$
- Thus, the Orthodox Easter in the Julian date is 28 days after March 21 = April 18.
- April 18 + 13 days = May 1 (Orthodox Easter for 2005).
- The Orthodox Easter for 2006 is April 23.
- The Orthodox Easter for 2007 is April 8.
- Table 1 below shows the dates of the Orthodox Easter from 2004 to the year 2081. Note that the dates are given in the **Julian Calendar**. To convert to Gregorian, add 13 days. For example, according to Table 1, the Orthodox Easter for 2005 is on April 18 + 13 = May 1, that is 4/18 + 13 = May 1. The Orthodox Easter for 2006 is on April 10 + 13 = April 23. The Orthodox Easter for 2007 is on March 26 + 13 = April 8, and so on.

Dates of Orthodox Easter According to Julian Calendar

Year	Date	Year	Date	Year	Date
2004	3/29	2005	4/18	2006	4/10
2007	3/26	2008	4/14	2009	4/6
2010	3/22	2011	4/11	2012	4/2
2013	4/22	2014	4/7	2015	3/30
2016	4/18	2017	4/3	2018	3/26
2019	4/15	2020	4/6	2021	4/19
2022	4/11	2023	4/3	2024	4/22
2025	4/7	2026	3/30	2027	4/19
2028	4/3	2029	3/26	2030	4/15
2031	3/31	2032	4/19	2033	4/11
2034	3/27	2035	4/16	2036	4/7
2037	3/23	2038	4/12	2039	4/4
2040	4/23	2041	4/8	2042	3/31
2043	4/20	2044	4/11	2045	3/27
2046	4/16	2047	4/8	2048	3/23
2049	4/12	2050	4/4	2051	4/24
2052	4/8	2053	3/31	2054	4/20
2055	4/5	2056	3/27	2057	4/16
2058	4/1	2059	4/21	2060	4/12
2061	3/28	2062	4/17	2063	4/9
2064	3/31	2065	4/13	2066	4/5
2067	3/28	2068	4/16	2069	4/1
2070	4/21	2071	4/6	2072	3/28
2073	4/17	2074	4/9	2075	3/25
2076	4/13	2077	4/5	2078	4/25
2079	4/10	2080	4/1	2081	4/21

Tradition and Christianity - Part II

Introduction

We want to discuss four aspects of tradition. These are

1. What is tradition?
2. Impact of tradition on Christianity
3. Importance of tradition in service
4. Preservation of our Coptic Orthodox tradition and heritage

1. What is Tradition?

- The word tradition in Greek, as is mentioned in the New Testament is “Paradosis,” does *not* mean imitation. It comes from the verb “paradidomi” which means “handing over or delivering something by hand.” It is also closely related to the verb “paralambano” which means “receiving a thing or taking it.”
- Tradition is that which guides our today based on yesterdays.

2. Impact of Tradition on Christianity

- There are four aspects of the impact of tradition on Christianity. These are, i) tradition and the Bible, ii) tradition and the councils, iii) tradition and the sacraments, and iv) tradition and the Church.

(i) Tradition and the Bible

- The Bible is the written part of tradition. Tradition, in its totality, is the Bible plus what the church kept as teachings and practices from Apostolic teachings.
- The Orthodox Church offers me the Bible in the prayers of the seven daily Agpeya prayers, during raising of incense, and in the Liturgical services.

- Through tradition, the Orthodox Church teaches me the practical spirituality of the Bible, not from a philosophical point of view. St. Augustine once said, “As for me, I would not believe in the Gospel if the authority of the Church did not move me to do so.”
- The Apostolic teachings are reflected in the Bible according to the gifts given to each.

- **St. John and Love** - St. John speaks of salvation through *love*.
 - * “The one who does not love has not known God. For God is love” (1 John 4:8).
 - * “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16).
 - * “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:11).
 - * “If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12).
- **St. Paul and Faith** - St. Paul speaks of salvation through *faith*.
 - * “Even the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ, toward all and upon all those who believe” (Romans 3:22).
 - * “Then where is the boasting? It is excluded. Through what law? of works? No, but through the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the works of the Law” (Romans 3:27-28).
 - * “For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Romans 4:13).
 - * “Not having my own righteousness, which is of the Law, but through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9).
- **St. James and Works** - St. James speaks of salvation through *works*.
 - * “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).
 - * “My brothers, what profit is it if a man says he has faith and does not have works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14).
 - * “Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith from my works. You believe that there is one God, you do well; even the demons believe and tremble” (James 2:18-19).
 - * “You see then how a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24).
- **St. Peter and Hope** - St. Peter speaks of salvation through *hope*.
 - * “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

- * “By the power of God, having been kept through faith to a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5).
- * “Therefore girding up the loins of your mind, being sober, perfectly hope for the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13).
- * “He who raised Him up from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope might be in God” (1 Peter 1:21).
- * “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason of the hope in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

– **The Gospels and Epistles**

- * The Gospel according to St. Matthew is in harmony with the Epistle of St. James.
- * The Gospel according to St. Mark is in harmony with the Epistles of St. Peter
- * The Gospel according to St. Luke is in harmony with the Epistles of St. Paul
- * The Gospel according to St. John is in harmony with the Epistles of St. John

(ii) **Tradition and the Councils**

- The role of the Councils was/is not to establish new rules in the church, but to explain and clarify the rules already established by the apostolic tradition.
- The Orthodox Creed was initially established by the apostles themselves as they received it from Christ, when He told them, “Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”
- It was the apostolic traditions of the Orthodox Church that guided it through the three councils to maintain the faith until today.

(iii) **Tradition and the Sacraments**

- The orthodox faith which we received from the apostles was given to us in two parts: the first is the oral message that renews us and revitalizes the dynamics of our spirituality through faith in Jesus Christ, and the second is the personal unity with Christ Himself, which can only be fulfilled in Secret (hence the sacraments).
- A prerequisite to our unity with Jesus Christ is that we must be living spiritually.

- * “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).
- * “God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).
- Our new birth and fellowship are given to us in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist which Jesus Christ established and gave to the apostles.

(iv) **Tradition and the Church**

- The church was established by Christ Himself:
 - * “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).
 - * “And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Of whomever sins you remit, they are remitted to them. Of whomever sins you retain, they are retained” (John 20-22-23).
- The Orthodox Church today is nothing but the continuation of that first church, through the ordination of bishops, priests, deacons, and all its rites through tradition.
- The earthly church (church repentant) is one with the heavenly church (church triumphant) whose chorus offers prayers and intercessions on behalf of the earthly church.

3. Importance of Tradition in Service

- St. Paul makes some great statements to young Timothy regarding tradition. St. Paul first says, “when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Timothy 1:5).
- St. Paul also tells Timothy to “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us” (2 Timothy 1:13-14).
- St. Paul also calls Timothy a “a true son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2).
- Tradition is the guide that leads the church to her final destination.
- It is through tradition that we carry the torch of love, faith, deeds, and hope from one generation to the next.

- Tradition is the dynamism of the Bible and the teachings of our Church Fathers manifested in our lives.
- We must embrace the Orthodox tradition in carrying the message of salvation to the world.
- We must acknowledge the importance of the responsibility we have been given in delivering what we have received from the fathers of the church.

4. Preservation of the Coptic Orthodox Heritage

- There are two main components that make up the Coptic heritage:
 - (a) Spiritual
 - (b) Cultural
- It is important that we separate these two notions when discussing preservation of heritage. In our discussion today, we hope to explain and clarify these two aspects of heritage. We will first define these components of heritage, and then proceed to discuss their makeup.
- What does preservation of spiritual heritage mean? Our spiritual heritage is focused upon worship. In particular, spiritual heritage concerns our faith, the Divine Liturgy, church history, (such as the Desert Fathers of Egypt), Coptic hymns and chants, Coptic art, and relationships.
- What are the things that comprise our cultural heritage? Cultural heritage includes things such as social gatherings, friendships, the Coptic language, Egyptian food, etc...
- Is there a relationship between spiritual and cultural heritage, or are they two unrelated aspects? Is one aspect more important than the other? They are indeed related on certain issues. But when we speak of preservation of Coptic heritage, the more important aspect is of course, preserving our spiritual heritage. Preservation of heritage should be centered on preservation of spiritual heritage. This is by far the most important aspect for us Orthodox Christians.
- Now that preservation of Coptic heritage has been characterized, we present several issues relating to spiritual heritage. The first issue is *preservation of the Orthodox faith*.

- What does preservation of the Orthodox faith mean? Does it mean that as long as I believe in God and Jesus is the Son of God, that I am preserving the Coptic Orthodox faith? No. Preservation of faith involves more than that. In addition to what has just been mentioned, it also involves the preservation of the Sacraments, preservation of the Divine Liturgy, preservation of the Lord's feasts, and other feasts of the Coptic Orthodox church. Other faiths may not believe these notions. For example, when we receive Holy Communion every Sunday, we believe that we are actually receiving the real body and blood of Jesus. During the Liturgy Abouna asks the Holy Spirit to descend and transform the bread and wine into the true body and blood of Jesus. Other faiths do not believe this. They use the bread and wine as mere symbols of the body and blood of Jesus.
- Why should we preserve the Coptic Orthodox faith? What is the motivation behind preserving the faith? God was not Coptic Orthodox, Jesus was not Coptic Orthodox, and none of the Apostles were Coptic. In addition to what we just said, we must also realize that the Orthodox church is the oldest church with the oldest traditions. It has changed very little since its beginning (4th century). As a result of this, we can be assured that our beliefs and practices are the most accurate with the Bible and the early church (the church of the Apostles). Also, as a result of these facts, our church is very spiritually rich. One can use this richness to get closer to God, which is our primary goal as Christians in this life.
- How about if we attend other non-Coptic Orthodox churches? Are we not preserving the Coptic Orthodox faith? Yes, but only partially. The faith is essentially the same, but the Divine Liturgy, the hymns, and some of the church rites are different. And of course, most Eastern Orthodox churches do not have chants.
- We now discuss another aspect of preservation of spiritual heritage: Church History. What does church history have to do with spiritual heritage? How will knowledge of the events of the early church help me preserve my heritage?
- It is very important to know about the history of our church, the church Fathers, and Saints. Knowing the history of our church helps us to establish our spiritual identity, and it enables us to understand the practices and rituals of our church today. All of this can help us develop a closer relationship with God.
- In addition to this, reading about the early church Fathers can be a tremendous source of inspiration to us. The way they lived their lives can serve a perfect example

to us as to how we should live ours. We should try and model our lives after theirs. Reading about their struggles and persecutions and how they dealt with them can help us deal with our problems today. A good example of one of the great early church fathers is St. Athanasius. St. Athanasius played an instrumental role in the writing of the Nicene Creed. He had to deal with several heretics, particularly Arius, who tried to convince the people that Jesus was not equal to God. Yet Athanasius was bold and persistent, and worked very hard to prevent this heresy from becoming widespread. Of course, he eventually was able to overcome the heretics. As we know from reading the Creed, “Jesus is of one essence with the Father”. The book titled The Story of The Copts, by Iris Habib El Masri has the story of Athanasius, and several other great stories about Orthodox Saints. Other examples of early church Fathers who had a big impact on the church include St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. George, and St. Mina.

- Learning about the lives of the saints and the early church fathers certainly can enhance one spiritually. It also makes us more aware of church practices, and helps us establish our spiritual identity.
- Coptic Art: We want to examine the relationship between Coptic art and spiritual heritage. What do icons reflect spiritually? Are icons just pictures used by any Christian faith and do they reflect our spiritual Coptic Orthodox heritage?
- Yes, the Coptic Orthodox icons very much reflect our faith and our beliefs. For example, Coptic icons of Jesus show Jesus holding up one finger to denote his two natures combined into one. Also, icons of Jesus and St. Mary together never show Jesus as a baby. They always show him as a boy or an adult. This signifies that Jesus was always complete and equal to God from the incarnation. Other faiths, however, show Jesus as a baby.
- Another example is the icon of the baptism of our Lord. In this icon, we see Jesus immersed in water and the Holy Spirit descending upon him in the form of a dove. Other faiths show Jesus, the dove, and a picture of the Father (God) above Jesus in the clouds. Coptic icons never show the Father because no one has ever seen the Father.
- Coptic language and heritage: Why should learn Coptic? Most of us cannot understand Coptic, yet we memorize chants and don't know what they mean. We need to

understand how knowing the Coptic language preserves our heritage. Furthermore, we need to discuss how knowing Coptic can enhance and improve our spiritual life.

- Language in its own right, whether its Coptic, Greek, or English is primarily cultural. Thus, learning Coptic is mainly a preservation of cultural heritage. Language itself has no spiritual basis. For example, Jesus Spoke Aramaic. No one uses this language in the Liturgy today. The Gospels themselves were originally written in different languages, yet during the Liturgy, we read the Gospel in English, a language we can understand.
- The main point here is that we speak a language that we can understand so that we may grow spiritually. St. Paul himself elaborates on this point in detail in 1 Corinthians 1:14-19. It is here that St. Paul addresses the issue of speaking in tongues. He emphasizes that people should speak languages that every one can understand, so that one can grow spiritually. Learning a language, such as Coptic, for mere sake of the language only preserves cultural heritage, and produces minimal results spiritually.
- Are we saying then that we should not bother learning Coptic, since we can all understand English? No, not at all. What we are saying here is that, when we learn something in church, such as Coptic, we should focus on its spiritual impact. Thus, we should not only memorize the Coptic chants, but also understand what they mean. This will provide us with the spiritual growth. Memorizing chants alone without meaning will not enhance spiritual growth. For example, when we say in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in Coptic and we do not know what it means, it cannot have any effect on us spiritually.
- So why don't we just translate all of the Coptic chants in English and say them in English and in this way everybody will understand and get maximum benefit spiritually?
- It is true that everyone will benefit spiritually, and this is the most important thing, but there are other factors we should consider. Part of our pride in our church is preservation of culture and tradition, and thus we should also strive to preserve certain aspects of our Coptic culture. Moreover, the Coptic language itself reminds us of our history and identity. Coptic was the official language of Egypt until the invasion of the Arabs in the 7th century. This common background that we all share as Copts can help us to grow spiritually and to become more united as a church.

- Moreover, many of the Coptic chants lose their spiritual impact, tone, harmony, and meaning when translated into English, and thus one can definitely lose the spiritual experience by removing the Coptic from the liturgy and praises.
- Having said that though, in the end, there must be a balance and speaking languages that everyone can understand is best for spiritual growth. Coptic in itself is a preservation of cultural heritage. We should not only memorize Coptic chants, but more importantly focus on understanding what they mean. If done properly, preserving cultural aspects of our heritage can certainly enhance our spiritual growth. As was just mentioned, Coptic reminds us of our history and identity, which may serve to unify the church.
- How about hymns? How do hymns, even sung in English, preserve our spiritual heritage. Are not hymns primarily part of the Coptic culture? No. Hymns and chants play a very important part of our spiritual heritage. Hymns, as well as chants, teach us the Coptic Orthodox faith. In the days of the heretic Arius, the faith was taught through hymns. Thus hymns (and chants) play a large role in preserving spiritual heritage because they teach us the faith.
- In addition to music, Coptic architecture also has spiritual meaning. Coptic churches are often built in the shape of a Cross or a ship (symbolizing Noah's Ark). Moreover, The architecture of the church altar has spiritual meaning. The seven steps in the back of the altar represent the seven orders of the church, with the icon of Jesus being placed above the top step.
- The next topic we wish to discuss is relationships. In particular, we want to examine how relationships play a role in preserving our spiritual heritage.
- Is having Coptic Egyptian friends a preservation of spiritual heritage. Is it true that as long as I have Egyptian friends, then this implies that I am a good Christian and leading my life in the right direction? The answer to both questions is, of course, no. Having Egyptian friends does not imply any preservation of spiritual heritage nor does it imply that you are a good Christian. Having Egyptian friends may not even result in preservation of the Coptic culture. The mere fact that the majority or all of our friends are Coptic says nothing about us spiritually.
- However, having Coptic friends may encourage one to preserve their spiritual heritage and to grow spiritually. Why? Well, two Copts already have something in common:

the Coptic Orthodox faith. If you can pick good Coptic friends, you can certainly learn about God and the church just by spending time with them. The right people in your life can certainly influence you spiritually.

- We must not think that just by having Egyptian friends and showing up at church every Sunday to socialize automatically qualifies us as good Christians. We are fooling ourselves if we believe that. Rather, we should realize that we have a common faith with one another, which can be used to our advantage to grow spiritually. This growth can come from Fellowship, Bible study, Sunday school, church retreats, etc... Thus having Coptic friends is more meaningful if its purpose is enhance spiritual growth and make the church stronger and more united.
- Does this mean then that for us to preserve our spiritual heritage and grow spiritually, we should only seek friendships with Copts? No, not at all. We should keep our church doors open to everyone and not isolate ourselves from anyone, whether they are Egyptian or not. Everyone should be welcome in our church, and we should tell people about our faith if they are interested. St. Paul says that sectarianism is sinful (1 Corinthians 1:10). Moreover, it was St. Paul who declared that the Gentiles did not have to go through the rites of Judaism to become Christians. If it were not for St. Paul Christianity today would be a sect of Judaism. This serves us with the example that the church is open to everyone, Copt or non-Copt, and we should readily accept individuals who want to know the Orthodox faith.
- We close with the following great verse from St. Paul, “Therefore brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Why Saints are Important

1. Saints are a very important part of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Synaxarium is all about the saints of the church.
2. The saints of the church are commemorated in the Divine Liturgy.
3. We pray for intercessions of the saints.
4. Saints are important to discuss in Sunday School because the Sunday School kids can identify with the lives of the saints. Most saints went through the same types of struggles against sin that we do, and many of them had lives that we can relate to.
5. We can find stories about saints who struggled with lust, the love of material things, sexual desires, dishonesty, anger, lack of faith, fear, repentance, envy, jealousy, impurity, arrogance, pride, drunkenness, and so many other things.
6. They overcame their struggles and were victorious over sin. They are great examples of victory over sin, courage, faith, patience, love, and perseverance.
7. Saints are excellent role models and examples of righteous, pure, and holy lives.
8. Encourage your Sunday School kids to get to know and pick a favorite saint and have that saint as their friend. Friendship with saints is very important. We can talk to that saint, we can find encouragement through that saint, we can seek guidance and comfort from that saint, and we can ask that saint to intercede for us before Christ.
9. We should tell stories about the saints who are connected to Egypt or the Coptic Church in some way.
10. There are many sources and references for saints in the Coptic Orthodox Church. These include
 - The Coptic Synaxarium
 - The Coptic Book of Saints
 - Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages by Otto Meinardus

- <http://www.copticcentre.com/coptic saints.html>
 - <http://www.copticchurch.net/>
 - <http://www.mycopticchurch.com/saints>
 - <http://www.coptic.net/boston/>
11. There are many types of saints covering different eras: saints from the Bible, martyrs from the early church, confessors, and ascetics (monks).
12. Saints from the Bible include
- St. Mary the mother of God (assumption of St. Mary celebrated August 22)
 - St. John the Baptist
 - St. Mark the Apostle
 - St. Peter the Apostle
 - St. Paul the Apostle
 - St. Mary Magdalene
 - St. Stephen (the first martyr)
13. Saints martyred in the early church include
- St. George
 - St. Mina
 - St. Theodore
 - St. Demiana
 - St. Abanoub (martyred when he 12)
 - St. Marina
 - St. Barbara
 - St. Moses the Black
 - St. Peter the Seal of Martyrs
14. Other saints in the early church include
- St. Bishoy (washed the feet of Christ)

- St. Maximos
- St. Domitius
- St. Mary of Egypt
- St. Augustine
- St. Irene
- St. Hilaria
- St. John Climacus
- St. John Chrysostom
- St. Samuel

15. Saints who are well known monks include

- St. Anthony
- St. Paul the first hermit
- St. Macarius the great
- St. Pachomius

16. Saints dealing with church dogma and theology include

- St. Athanasius
- St. Cyril
- St. Dioscorus
- St. Basil
- St. Gregory the Theologian

17. When giving a Sunday School lesson, we should try to pick a story about a saint that is appropriate for a given topic. For example, if the lesson is about overcoming lust and being pure, one can talk about St. Mary of Egypt, Mary Magdalene, or St. Augustine. For a topic on anger or dishonesty, one can discuss St. Moses the black. For a topic on living a monastic life, one can talk about St. Paul the hermit or St. Anthony. If the topic is on church theology or defending the faith, one can talk about St. Athanasius, St. Cyril, or St. Dioscorus. If the topic is on courage and witnessing for Christ, good examples are St. Mina, St. George, St. Abanoub, St. Demiana, and St. Marina.

St. Abanoub (July 31)

Abanoub was born in a town called Nehisa in the Nile Delta. He was the only son of good Christian parents who died when he was a young child. At the age of twelve, Abanoub entered the church to hear the priest asking the congregation to remain faithful during the persecutions provoked by Diocletian, the Roman emperor. Abanoub received the Holy Sacraments, and then prayed for God to guide him to where he may confess his faith in the Lord. When he finished, Abanoub went out and gave all of his possessions to the needy, after which he set off, on foot, to a city called Samannoud. While he was walking, he saw the Archangel Michael in celestial glory. The sight was so extraordinary that Abanoub fell to the ground, but the Archangel raised him up, and told him that he must suffer for three days in Samannoud, and that he would also witness to Jesus Christ in other places. Once in Samannoud, Abanoub went to the Roman ruler and declared his faith openly. He also insulted the ruler's idols that the ruler became furious and gave orders that the child be whipped on his belly. The soldiers beat Abanoub severely, until his intestines poured out, but the Archangel Michael miraculously healed him. The ruler then put him in jail with other Christians, who became encouraged by his presence among them, and later were martyred for the name of the Lord. On the following day, the ruler took Abanoub on a boat to a city called Atrib, and as a form of punishment, the young saint was hanged upside down from the sail of the boat. The soldiers, along with their ruler, began to drink and dance, while hitting Abanoub on the mouth. Abanoub's nose bled, but then, unexpectedly, the soldiers became blind and the ruler became paralyzed. In their agony they cried to him and said, "Please Abanoub, pray to your God to heal us. For if we are cured, we will become Christians." Saint Abanoub replied, "This will only happen in Atrib, so that everyone there should know that there is no other God but Christ." When they arrived in Atrib, they were all healed, and they cried with joy, "We are Christians! We believe in the God of Abanoub!" They took off their uniforms and threw them on the ground in front of the ruler of Atrib. The governor became infuriated and ordered that they all be killed. In Atrib, Abanoub was tortured severely, sometimes by whipping and sometimes by being tied to a steel bed and having a fire ignited under him. But in all these tribulations, the Lord showed his power and Abanoub was saved. As a result of these miracles, many onlookers became Christians, and received the crown of martyrdom. The ruler then ordered that Abanoub's hands and feet be cut off, but suddenly, the Angel of the Lord came down from heaven, replaced his hands and feet, and healed him, after which Abanoub arose and walked in front of everybody. Hundreds of people became Christians as a result of

that miracle. Frustrated, the ruler called some of the best magicians in the country, and asked them to help him defeat Abanoub. They suggested that he should be thrown to the poisonous snakes, which “had enough poison to kill two or three hundred men,” they said. So they put Abanoub in a cell with the snakes, but God, Who shut the mouths of the lions at the time of Daniel, tamed the snakes and they did not harm Abanoub. In the morning, and to everyone’s astonishment, Saint Abanoub came out from the cell alive. Suddenly, one of the snakes crawled out of the cell and coiled itself around the ruler’s neck. The man started shaking and he cried, “In the name of Jesus, your God, be merciful to me and do not let the snake harm me.” The young saint, who loved everyone -friend or enemy -just as the Gospel commands, prayed from his heart, and then ordered the snake to come down and not to hurt the ruler. On that day, many people who were present, including the three magicians, believed in Jesus. Finally, one of the ruler’s advisers told him to behead the saint and put an end to that episode. So the ruler ordered the soldiers to kill Saint Abanoub by the sword, after which a faithful man called Julius wrapped the young martyr’s body in fine linen and sent him to his hometown, Nehisa, where he was buried. In 960 A.D., his body was transferred to the church Saint Mary in Samannoud, where it still lies until today. Throughout the years, Saint Abanoub has had many apparitions in that church. May the prayers and supplications of this great Martyr, the Child Saint Abanoub be with, us. Amen.

St. Mary of Egypt (April 14th)

On this day in 137 A.M. (421 AD.), Saint Mary of Egypt, the hermit who lived for seventy-six years, departed. She was born in the city of Alexandria, in about 61 A.M. (345 A.D.), of Christian parents. When she was twelve years of age, Satan led her astray and made her his net, through which he caught innumerable souls. She continued in this sinful conduct for seventeen years, until the mercy of God touched her life. She met people going to Jerusalem and went with them. Since she did not have enough to pay for the trip, she gave herself to the owners of the ship in return, until she came to Jerusalem, where she also went on, doing the same there. Mary wished to enter through the door of the church of the Resurrection, but she felt a hidden power pulling her back, preventing her from entering. Whenever she tried to enter, she felt as though someone prevented her from doing so, and right away, she realized that it was because of her sinfulness. With a broken heart, she lifted up her eyes and wept, praying to Saint

Mary, and asking her to intercede on her behalf before her Beloved Son. She felt encouraged and wished to enter with those entering, and nothing prevented her from entering this time. She prayed therein to God, asking Him to guide her as pleased Him. She stood before the icon of the blessed and pure Virgin Saint Mary and asked her fervently to guide her that her soul might be saved. A voice came from the icon saying, "If you cross the Jordan River, you will find rest and salvation." She rose in haste and left the courtyard of the church. On her way, she met a man who gave her three small coins with which she bought bread: She then crossed the Jordan River to the wilderness, where she lived for forty-seven years, eating the herbs of the desert. Saint Mary of Egypt strove strenuously for seventeen years. Satan fought against her but, with the grace of God, she overcame him. In the forty-fifth year of her life in the desert, Saint Zossima went to the wilderness for devotion and asceticism during the holy Lent, according to the custom of the monks there. While he was walking in the desert, he saw this Saint from a distance and thought that she was a shadow or a mirage. He prayed to God to reveal to him the fact about this mirage and he was inspired that it was a human being. He went toward the shadow, but it fled from him. When Saint Mary saw that he insisted on following her, she called him from behind a hill saying, "Zossima, if you wish to talk to me, throw me a rag that I may cover myself, for I am naked." Saint Zossima marveled, for she called him by his name, so he threw to her what she covered herself with, and she came to him. After the greetings and the prostrations, she asked him to pray for her because he was a priest, after which he asked her to tell him the story of her life from the beginning. After she told him, she asked him to bring the Holy Eucharist in the following year so that she may partake of it. On the following visit, he came to her and she partook of the Holy Sacraments. He then gave her what he had of dates and lentils, but she only took a handful of lentils and asked him to come to her in the following year. When Saint Zossima came to Saint Mary in the next year, he found that she had departed. A lion stood beside her, and a written message on the ground which read, "Bury Mary, the poor woman in the dust of which she was created." He marveled at the writing and the lion that was protecting her body, and while he was thinking of how he was going to dig to bury her, the lion came and dug a grave for her. He prayed over her and buried her. When he returned to his monastery, Saint Zossima told the monks the story of the struggle of this holy woman, and they all increased in steadfastness in the divine mercy, and progressed in spiritual life. May her prayers be with us, Amen.

St. Bishoy (July 15)

Bishoy is a Coptic word which means lofty. Saint Bishoy is one of the monastic Fathers of the fourth century A.D. He was the only one to be called “the perfect man.” Saint Bishoy was born in 320 A.D. of a pious family in a small village called Shensha, in the province of Menoufeya. An angel appeared to his mother, and announced to her that her son was chosen from among all his brothers to be the servant of God; she obeyed gladly and prepared him for his mission. In 340 A.D. Saint Bishoy went to live in Wadi El-Natroun and there he became a friend of Saint John the Short (famous for the “tree of obedience”); both were disciples of Saint Pambo. When Saint Pambo died, Saint Bishoy and Saint John prayed for God’s guidance, and an angel appeared to Saint Bishoy, directing him to the site of the present monastery, on which he was to live the life of a hermit. There, Saint Bishoy became the spiritual father to many monks who gathered around him. He grew famous for his love, simplicity and kindness, as well as for his extremely ascetic life. He was serious, wise and a great recluse, loving seclusion and quietness. Emperor Constantine and Jeremiah the prophet appeared to him in visions, and Saint Ephrem the Syrian visited him. It is said that because of his love for God and his desire to be with Him always, he used to tie his hair with a rope to the ceiling of his cell in order to resist sleeping during his night prayers. We are told that Saint Bishoy met our Lord Jesus Christ on several occasions. On one such occasion, he carried Our Lord, Who met him as an old man on his way, and that it is for this reason that his body remains uncorrupted to this day. Saint Bishoy is also said to have washed the feet of the Lord, Who visited him as a poor stranger. In the year 407, the first sack of Scetis occurred, in which Berbers attacked the monasteries. During this time Saint Bishoy, accompanied by some of his disciples, went to Antinoopolis, near the present-day town of Mallawi (currently known as Deir El-Barsha). There he met Saint Paul of Tammah and their love for each other was such that God promised them that they would never be parted; thus the uncorrupted body of Saint Bishoy and the relics of Saint Paul still lie together in the main church of the monastery of Saint Bishoy in Wadi El-Natroun until this day. Saint Bishoy died on July 15, 417 A.D., and was known for his love, meekness, simplicity, and his worship.

The Story of Saint Nicholas - Synaxarium Reading for 10th of Kiahk

On this day, the righteous St. Nicholas, Bishop of Mora, departed. (St. Nicholas is the true personality behind the story of Santa Claus or Baba Noel, who leaves presents for children on Christmas Eve). He was from the city of Mora, his father's name was Epiphanius and the name of his mother was Tona. They were rich, as well as God-fearing people. They had no children to bring joy to their hearts and to inherit their wealth after their death. They remained without a son until they grew old and they were enveloped with despair. God had pity on them and gave them this saint. God made him holy and blessed since his childhood. When he reached school age, he demonstrated, through intelligence and knowledge, that he learned far more from the Holy Spirit than he did from his teachers. He learned all the doctrine and the teachings of the church since his young age and was appointed deacon. He became a monk in a monastery wherein his cousin was the abbot. Because he lived an ascetic and righteous life, they made him a priest when he was nineteen years old. God gave him the gift to work signs and wonders and to heal the sick. There was a very rich man in the city of Mora who lost all his wealth. He had three daughters who had passed the age of marriage, and could not marry them because of his poverty. Satan caused the man to think that he should make his daughters live in sin so that they might get their food by means of fornication. God revealed to St. Nicholas the thoughts which were in this man's head. St. Nicholas took one hundred dinars of his father's money and tied it up in a sack, and during the night he threw the money into the window of that man's house. When the man found the gold, he was astonished and rejoiced exceeding and was able to give his eldest daughter away in marriage. During another night the saint threw another hundred dinars into the man's house and the man was able to give his second daughter away in marriage. The man wanted to know who this charitable person was. The third time when the saint threw the gold into the house, the man was watching and immediately when he felt the drop of the sack, he went out of his house running to see who was throwing the gold to him. He found the kind bishop St. Nicholas and the man bowed down at his feet and paid him great homage and thanked him because he saved his daughters from poverty and from a life of sin. The saint refused to accept any thanks and asked them to thank the Lord Who put this thought in his heart. St. Nicholas drove out the devil and his angels from people, he healed many sick people, and blessed little bread to satisfy many people. Before being selected bishop, he saw a vision with a great throne and vestments placed on it and a man said to him, "Put on these vestments and sit on this throne." Another night he saw our Lady, St. Mary, giving him

the vestments of the priesthood and our Lord Jesus Christ gave him the Gospel.

When the Bishop of Mora departed, the Angel of the Lord appeared to the Archbishop and told him the one who was chosen for this rank was Nicholas and described his virtues to him. When he woke up he told the bishops what he had seen, and they all believed that vision. They knew that it was from the Lord Jesus Christ. They took St. Nicholas and made him Bishop over the city of Mora. Shortly thereafter, Diocletian reigned, and the spread of pagan worship increased. He arrested many believers and he heard about this saint. He seized him and tortured him severely for many years, and our Lord Christ strengthened him, protected him, and raised him whole from all these tortures so that he might become a mighty branch of the tree of faith. When Diocletian was tired of torturing him, he cast him into prison. Saint Nicholas wrote to his congregation from prison until God destroyed Diocletian and the reign of Constantine the Just began. King Constantine brought out all confessors from prison, among them was St. Nicholas, who returned to his city. He was one of the three hundred and eighteen bishops assembled in the city of Nicea and he rebuked Arius and cast him out. Having finished his course and guarded his flock, he departed to be with God. He sat on the episcopal throne for more than forty years, and all the days of his life were about eighty years. May his blessing be with us and Glory be to God forever. Amen.

John the Baptist

- **Nayrouz** - Yesterday we celebrated the Coptic New Year, Nayrouz which is a Persian word which means beginning of the year. This is a very joyous time of the church year from now until the feast of the Cross on Sept 27, where the church hymns are sung in the long tune,
- **Gospel Readings** - The Gospel reading today and the one tomorrow really center on John the Baptist and his life.
- It is fitting that the life of St. John the Baptist be the focus in the Gospel readings because so many aspects of his life symbolize the New Year.
 1. **Baptism** - The first of these symbols is Baptism. John the Baptist is a symbol of Baptism. Baptism is a symbol of new birth, renewal, and new beginnings. When we think of baptism we think of John the Baptist for it was he who baptized the multitudes in the Jordan river before the arrival of Christ and it was he who baptized Christ in the Jordan when Christ started His ministry. As we start this new year, we too must think of renewal and new beginnings in our spiritual life where we put off the old man and put on the new man as St. Paul says. We all need renewal in our spiritual life and John the Baptist is a great symbol of this through Baptism.
 2. **Repentance** - John the Baptist is also a great symbol for repentance, so as we start this new year, we need to practice a true life of confession and repentance. John the Baptist baptized people in the Jordan and the people confessed their sins. The first words that John the Baptist uttered in Matthew 3:2 is “Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

For the kingdom of heaven to become a reality for us we must first repent. Repentance is Godly sorrow for the sins we have committed. Godly sorrow is not like the worldly sorrow which leads to despair, depression, and even suicide. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, repentance leads to forgiveness, forgiveness leads to salvation, and salvation establishes the kingdom of God, the rule of God, in our hearts.

Where there is no repentance, no Godly sorrow for our sins, the kingdom of God will never come. For we cannot have the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil ruling in the same heart.

Repentance is not merely a negative battling against sin and evil; it is also and primarily a positive progress toward God. Repentance is preparing the human heart for God to enter. Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

The prophet Micah once said to God, "You will cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). What does this verse mean? This verse means that God has hurled all of our sins away from Him, burying them in the deepest, deepest waters. And into the surrounding land, His mighty arm of victory has hammered a sign which reads "No Fishing Allowed." That which has been swallowed up in the vast sea of God's forgiveness will never, never surface again.

Now the devil may attempt to dig up the past and try to hold those old sins against us. But he cannot succeed. God ignores the devil's accusations about the past. And when the devil points to our sins of the past, God points to His Son on the cross and only sees His Son's blood. He has forgiven us of the sins of the past and has no intentions of uncovering that which has been covered by the blood of His Son.

For when we repent, Christ puts our sins in the deepest, deepest, waters! And this is why St. Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). So when we confess our sins and repent, the past is buried deep in the love of God, and He says, "No Fishing Allowed."

3. **Holy Zeal** - John the Baptist is a great model of spiritual zeal, for he was very zealous for God even before birth when he leaped in Elizabeth's womb. We read that John the Baptist was a "voice crying in the wilderness," and he was clothed in camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey.

He had great spiritual zeal and he completely dedicated and submitted his life to God. Oh how great it would be if we could have such spiritual zeal in our life - how we could have a zeal for giving, for forgiving, for loving, for serving and ministering others, and to invest our life in alleviating pain and suffering by lending an understanding

ear to the tired, to the discouraged, and to the aged.

People today have no time for spirituality. They get too busy with the cares of this life, and they get caught up in their problems and worldly affairs and leave no time for God.

People get caught up in their suffering, their misfortunes, and how unfair life has been to them, and they make that the focus of their life and it takes up all their energy and time. “For I consider, writes St. Paul, that the sufferings of the present time, are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

How great it would be if we could make it a goal this new year to have spiritual zeal, and to be on fire spiritually by being filled and guided by the Holy Spirit, and to let the Holy Spirit guide all of our actions, our decisions, our service, and dealings with others.

4. **Identity** - John the Baptist is also a a great symbol of a person knowing exactly who he was. He knew his identity. He knew his position in life.

John the Baptist came before Christ and he had lots of followers and disciples. We read in Matthew 3:5 “Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.”

John the Baptist could of competed with Christ for discipleship and was in a great position to seek power, authority, and glory for himself, but because he knew who he was, he knew his identity, he did everything to glorify God. And when he saw Jesus coming he said, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,” and he encouraged his own disciples to leave him and to follow Jesus.

And when the Pharisees asked him if he was the Christ, he said he was not and continued “He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He said I will baptize you with water but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He also said to Jesus, “I need to be baptized by You and you are coming to me?”

He knew who he was. He knew his identity. Everything he did was for God's glory. How many of us know our identity? When we ask someone who they are some say they are Americans, Egyptians, Coptic Americans, Arabs, some don't know and some say we're all the same. We don't know who we are. We don't have an identity.

One of the great examples of identity occurs at the last supper. Recall what Jesus told his disciples as they were eating that "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." Notice here that the disciples could of said, "Who me?" It can't be me. Rather we read that they they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, Lord, is it I? In other words, is it I who makes things all wrong in the world today, am I the reason that that things aren't going well, am I the reason that my relationships with others aren't going well, and am I the reason that has messed everything up?

It would be great if we took the example of the disciples here and always asked "Lord is it I" rather than "Who me?"

Another great example of identity is demonstrated by Jesus at the last supper. We read "Jesus, knowing that that Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded." (John 13:3-5).

When we know who we are, we go out to be what we are, that is, servants of the Most High, and we are even willing to wash feet for His glory.

5. **Martyrdom** - Finally, John the Baptist is also a great symbol of martyrdom. He was beheaded for being a follower of Christ, and the Acts reading today talked about how Herod harassed the early church and killed the Apostle James. The readings other than the Gospel readings all focus on those who suffered for Christ's sake. Our church is the church of the martyrs and our calendar is AM, Anno Martyri, the year of the martyrs. Our church is characterized by all of those who witnessed for Christ over the years and those who have suffered and died for their faith as John the Baptist and all of the great saints - this is our identity.

In closing, how great it would be if we could look at the virtues and symbols of John the

Baptist and apply them to our life: A life of renewal symbolized by Baptism, where we die to sin daily ii) a life of repentance where we change our ways and put down the sinful self daily through repentance, iii) a life of Holy Zeal, iv) understanding and having a firm grasp of our identity by clinging to our church - the church of the martyrs.

Anxiety

The verses below address the topic of anxiety.

The classic verses on anxiety are given in St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. They are contained in Phil 4:6-7. "Have no anxiety about anything, but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus".

Verses from the Old Testament

1) Many verses on anxiety can be found in the Psalms. Below are a few.

a) Psalm 77:2. "In the day of my trouble, I sought the Lord."

b) Psalm 6:3-9. Verse 6:3 is "My soul is greatly troubled", and verse 6:9 is "The Lord has heard my supplications".

c) Psalm 43:1-5. Here David is praying to God in his distress over the enemy. Verse 43:2 is "For You are my God of my strength; why do You cast me off ? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy ?"

2) In 2 Kings 19:14, we read a story about Hezekiah receiving a very disturbing letter from his enemy. This letter made him very anxious. We read "And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord."

Verses from The New Testament

1) Jesus says in John 14:1, " Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in Me."

2) In Matthew 8:23-27, we read about the storm at sea when Jesus was with His disciples. The storm had made the disciples very anxious and troubled, as the disciples said in verse 25, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!”. Then Jesus responds in verse 26 by saying, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith.”

3) In Matthew 14:22-33, we read about Jesus walking on the sea. Again, the disciples were caught in a storm at sea, and were very anxious and troubled (especially Peter). When they saw Jesus walking on the water, we read in verse 26, “And when the disciples were saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear.” In verse 27, Jesus says “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” Then, Peter, still being troubled and lacking faith says in verse 28, “And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” Further, we read in verse 30, “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’”

4) One of the best examples about anxiety in the Gospels occurs when Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane right before his arrest. We read about His prayer in Matthew 26:36-42, Mark 14:33-36, and Luke 22:39-46.

a) Jesus was so anxious and troubled in Gethsemane that his sweat was like drops of blood. As we read in Luke 22:44, “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

b) Matthew 26:37, “And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.”

c) Mark 14:33-34, “He began to be troubled and greatly depressed. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.’”

As a result of His anxiety and sorrow, Jesus began to pray to the Father, as we read in Matthew 26:39, Mark 14:35-36, and Luke 22:41-42.

d) Matthew 26:39, “He went on a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’”

e) Mark 14:35-36, “He went a little farther and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible from You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.’”

f) Luke 22:41-42, “And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.”

We see here how Jesus dealt with anxiety in the Garden of Gethsemane. First there’s prayer and then relinquishment (surrender), as He says in all these verses “Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.” Thus Jesus surrenders His will for God’s will. Then, after surrender comes peace, as Jesus says on the Cross in Luke 23:34, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Then in Luke 23:46, “Father into Your hands I commend My spirit.”

Thus to deal with anxiety, first comes prayer, then surrender, then peace, as Jesus shows us in His prayer in the garden. This is exactly the cure that St. Paul recommends in Phil 4:6-7.

Other verses dealing with anxiety and worry:

Jesus addresses anxiety and worry in His sermon on the mount in Matthew 6:25-34. In particular, in verse 25 He says, “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. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing ?” Also in verse 34 Jesus says, “Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” Many of the verses in Matthew 6:25-34 are repeated in Luke 12: 22-32. In particular, in Luke 12:29, Jesus says, “Do not seek what you should eat or drink or have an anxious mind.”

Luke 12:32, “Fear not little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

In Luke 10:41-42, we read about Jesus coming to the house of Mary and Martha. Here we read that Martha is busy and worried about preparing something for Him in the kitchen rather than listening to Jesus as Mary was. Jesus then says, Luke 10:41-42, “And Jesus answered her 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.”

We can be assured that Jesus is aware and cares about our anxieties as Peter reassures us in 1 Peter 5:7, “He cares for you.”

Remarks: In discussing any topic in Sunday School, I find it useful to connect the topic to stories (verses) in the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Epistles of Paul whenever possible. This may be difficult for some topics since God’s methods of dealing with people were quite different in the Old Testament as compared to the New Testament. Anxiety was dealt with differently in the Old Testament than in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God’s people often needed physical intervention by God to overcome their anxiety. An example of this occurs in the book of Exodus, where Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. Here, in their journey to the promised land, the Israelites experienced many trials and tribulations, and were often cured of their anxieties by God’s physical intervention and appearances to Moses. Faith and love were not as prevalent in the Old Testament. In the new Testament, however, as Jesus and St. Paul mention, anxiety was mainly overcome by prayer, faith, and love.

Dating

1. Dating is an emotional and/or physical relationship between a boy and a girl who are not engaged and not in an age that is emotionally, financially, or intellectually ready for engagement or commitments to marriage and family life.
2. Dating in this sense is not an acceptable practice in the Coptic Orthodox Church. It should never be approved or sanctioned by the parents or Sunday School servants.
3. If two mature adults are at an appropriate level of maturity and ready for the commitment of marriage, emotionally, financially, and intellectually, then the priest and the parents may approve of a short period of time for getting to know one another before the period of engagement. This period of time is typically quite short and is under the supervision of the priest and the parents.
4. When a couple are engaged to be married, then this marks the official beginning of the dating period for the couple. In this period, the couple are expected to be pure and holy in every way. This period should not be too long and should be under the supervision of the priest and the parents.
5. Engagement precedes marriage and should only be done with the goal of marriage. It is a period of getting acquainted with one another during which each may get to know the other's interests, their way of thinking, and their lifestyle, so that they can determine if they are suitable for one another. Relationships beyond these limits are wrong and sinful. Neither the Bible nor the Church approves of it.
6. Dating is a very big problem with teenagers and young adults. Teenagers are
 - not emotionally ready for relationships.
 - not mature enough for relationships.
 - not financially ready for relationships.
 - not intellectually ready for relationships.
 - still developing their personality, and in general, are still quite unstable in their emotions.

7. Emotional and/or physical relationships are very damaging to the spiritual life of a teenager or young adult. They lead to

- loss of purity and morality: adultery (Matthew 5:27-28)
- distant relationship from God and the church.
- emotional and physical problems.
- guilt.
- loss of self-esteem.
- depression.
- psychological destruction.
- loss of future. and career

8. What does the Bible say about dating?

- In Ecclesiastes 3:1-10, we read, “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up; A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away; A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak; A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.” These verses tell us that everything has its time and we should not act prematurely, but should do everything according to the natural law that God has planned for us.
- This natural law allows a person to take the responsibility of raising a family.
- A man can get married and have children after he finishes his education, gets a suitable job, and counts the costs of his life. As we read in 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.”

- Only then (after “he counts the costs of his life”) should he look for a spiritual person to help him build a Christian home. They both help one another. This cooperation is the strong foundation on which their life is to be built, like the house built on the rock (Matthew 7:24-27, Luke 6:47-49). Teenagers and young adults are not mature enough and not yet capable of thinking this way.
9. Thus, it is not enough to admire one another emotionally through physical attraction, money, intellect, or whatever. Teenagers and young adults primarily function on emotions. They are going through periods of physical and hormonal changes that makes their emotions dominate their actions. The emotional foundation is *not* enough to build a successful marital life.
 10. Emotions may sometimes change or weaken and this may result in the failure of a marriage. This is a main problem when marrying at too young of an age.
 11. Since the teenage years are a period of emotional change and instability, teenagers are not ready to think about relationships or marital life.
 12. We should be aware of some things that might encourage dating:
 - dances or similar functions at school
 - parties
 - highschool prom
 - too much one on one socialization with the opposite sex
 - television and movies
 - peer pressure: everybody has a girlfriend (boyfriend), why not me?
 13. What can we do to encourage pure and healthy relationships between girls and boys?
 - socialization in group activities at church or church related activities with proper supervision.
 - group socialization in retreats with proper supervision.

14. We must be careful not to completely isolate girls and boys in church. It can have a damaging effect and it may have negative consequences.

Dating - Part II

Dating at the teenage years has some very negative consequences. Here are 10 reasons **not** to date as a teenager.

1. Dating is emotionally destructive. It takes up emotional energy and destroys our emotional balance, and inevitably leads to deep emotional pain when a break-up occurs. It can lead to depression or irrational emotional behavior, such as taking drugs, suicide, smoking, alcohol, loss of motivation, failing school, etc...
2. Dating results in loss of purity and virginity. It is impossible to remain pure and chaste when dating as a teenager.
3. Dating results in feelings of guilt, loss of self-esteem, and loss of direction and focus.
4. Dating often results in a loss of future.
5. Dating as a teenager will very, very unlikely result in marriage to that individual. Even if it does, a very long time would elapse before marriage occurred, making it essentially impossible to remain pure during that time.
6. Our emotions are constantly changing during the teenage years. What we like today, we may not like tomorrow.
7. We are still maturing during our teenage years. What seems attractive and compatible today may not be so tomorrow due to our constantly changing maturity.
8. As teenagers, we are too young to think about marriage, so forget about dating. Dating is for mature couples who are ready for marriage soon.
9. Dating makes you lose your freedom and it does not enable you to enjoy life as a teenager should. Someone who is dating spends less time with friends, spends less time doing the things they enjoy, spends less time at home, and spends a lot of emotional energy and effort trying to please the other person.
10. Dating distances you from the church, from God, from your parents, and your friends.

Pre-marital Sex

1. Pre-marital sex is a big problem in our society today, especially with teenagers and young adults.
2. Pre-marital sex and any form of sexual act between two people who are not man and wife is *wrong* in the Coptic Orthodox Church because the Bible says so. Jesus says its wrong and the Apostles repeatedly say it's wrong throughout the New Testament,
3. Jesus says in Matthew 5:27-28, "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".
4. Adultery in the Old Testament meant sexual relations with someone who is married, but not your wife (husband). Christ in the New Testament gives a new definition to adultery. Adultery now is much more broad and involves any form of sexual relations to between two people who are not married to one another. Thus adultery now covers pre-marital sex, or any form of sexual activity between two people who are not married to one another.
5. Thus, the commandment "You shall not commit adultery" covers any form of sexual activity between two people who are not married to each other. Thus, pre-marital sex is breaking the 7th commandment of God.
6. Teenagers have a misunderstanding of the word adultery. They think it has the meaning according to the Old Testament. They think that the Church has prohibited pre-marital sex and its prohibition is not based on the Bible.
7. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus, St. Paul and others mention the words *fornication* and *sexual immorality* repeatedly.
8. The dictionary definition of the word fornication is "human sexual intercourse, other than between a man and his wife." One can replace "intercourse" by "contact". Thus, fornication is the same as adultery.
9. Jesus says in Mark 7:20-22, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness."

10. In Acts 15:19-21, the Apostle James said in the Council of Jerusalem “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality (fornication), from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”
11. St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:20-22, “For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.”
12. In Galatians 5:18-21, we read, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”
13. In Ephesians 5:2-4, we read “And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. 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.”
14. In Colossians 3:4-6, we read, “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience.”
15. As Sunday School servants, we should emphasize the following points about pre-marital sex and the notion purity and chastity:
 - Our bodies are not ours to use as we please. We read in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who

commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 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? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

- Sexual immorality leads to hell, as we read in Galatians 5:18-21.
- Sexual immorality results in deep guilt and distance from God and the Church (David and Bathsheeba in 2 Samuel 11:1-27).
- Sexual immorality results in loss of self-esteem (St. Augustine).
- Sexual immorality results in loss of future.

Addiction

1. **What is Addiction?** - Addiction is a life-controlling process that leads its victims on a downward spiral towards spiritual death. It is estimated that 1 out of every 10 people who use a psychoactive substance will become addicted to that substance. What can a person be addicted to? ANYTHING! For example, one can be addicted to drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, shopping, watching television, sex, gambling, etc...

2. The Characteristics of Addiction

- **Absorbing Focus** - Addiction consumes people's time and energy. Addicts become obsessed and preoccupied with the substance.
- **Increasing Tolerance** - An addict will need increasing amounts of the substance to maintain the same effect (high), or they will need stronger and more potent substances.
- **Growing Denial** - Addicts tend to deny their addiction. They are usually outwardly convinced they can stop whenever they want. Addicts are great actors. There is always a fear in addicts that their addiction will be discovered, so they cover it up and deny it. A person may also lose control of themselves while on this substance. Their behavior may become completely unpredictable when they use this substance.
- **Damaging Consequences** - There is no such thing as a harmless addiction. Addictions become destructive to the addict and to the people around them. Addictions can destroy relationships, break up families, result in a decline of academic performance in school, failing in school, and loss of a job. Addicts can lose their jobs, their health, and their future. Addictions are enslaving destructive dependencies. Most importantly, addictions destroy one's capacity for self-control: the addict simply cannot stop doing what they are doing. The addict will continue to use this substance despite the negative consequences.

3. Causes of Drug Addiction

- **Lack of Self-worth** - Low self-esteem is one of the major causes of drug addiction. In a Christian sense, this means feeling unworthy of Christ's love or feeling that it

is impossible to live in holiness. Giving in to peer pressure can be a result of low self-esteem. A person with low self-esteem wants to fit in, in any way possible, and this makes them quite vulnerable to peer pressure, and hence addiction.

- **Emotional Emptiness** - This is an inner emptiness of the soul that results in depression and a feeling being unwanted, unloved, and a feeling of not belonging. This results from not having a relationship with Christ. The addict is missing Christ in their life. As a result, they turn to drugs to fill that void. They want to escape reality and ease their frustrations by turning to drugs.
- **Physical Emptiness** - This refers to positively occupying one's time with sports, church activities, friends, etc. That is not to say that if a person has free time, that they will develop an addiction. This is saying that the more one keeps themselves busy with positive things, the less vulnerable they are to drugs and addiction.

4. The Addictive Cycle

- **Addictive Activity** - Addiction is sometimes initially caused when one undergoes some sort of trauma. If the person does not turn to Christ to help them deal with their trauma, they look for relief elsewhere. They look for something that helps them temporarily numb the pain of whatever is traumatizing them. Addictions also provide the illusion of being in control. While people and circumstance are beyond one's control, addiction always delivers on the promise of temporary comfort, pleasure, and power. Addictions appear attractive to some because they provide predictable doses of relief and power in the midst of pain and helplessness. But, the effect is always self-destructive.
- **Dissatisfaction** - As one loses more and more of themselves to addiction, pleasure decreases and one becomes dissatisfied. Moments of relief are replaced by lingering shame. The addict begins to feel guilty for having a habit that is taking over their life. They become afraid of being discovered and feel shameful.
- **Moral Resolve** - In turn, the addict resolves to quit, or makes amends for failures, hoping it will lessen feelings of guilt and shame. But it never does without Christ. Addiction may go away temporarily, along with its unpleasant feelings, but without Christ, it cannot be completely eliminated.
- **Pain Returns** - The pain results from disillusionment and despair as a result of their

failure in overcoming their addiction. As a result, the addict becomes more acutely aware of their emptiness.

- **Demand for Relief** - This draws the addict into the familiar arms of habit. The cycle is played out again and again with deepening levels of dissatisfaction, disillusionment, despair, and enslavement.

5. **Spiritual Consequences of Drug Addiction** - Some people feel that the most severe consequences of drug addiction are mostly physical and social. But in fact, the spiritual consequences are the most serious.

- **Drug Addition Destroys God’s Temple** - “Do you know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). Addiction often destroys the body physically. Christ has given us these bodies, but they do not belong to us. They belong to Him. They are the temple of the Holy Spirit, so we must respect these bodies and souls since they belong to Him.
- **Drug Addiction is a Merciless Master** - The Bible tells us that a person cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). An addicted person becomes enslaved by addiction, and drifts away from God. They lose their focus on God. Their addiction is all they can think about. All they think about is when can they get the drug next, how, and for how long. St. Paul speaks of this phenomenon in 1 Corinthians 10:23, when he says, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful but not all things build up.” And in 1 Corinthians 6:12 he says, “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”
- **Drug Addiction Drives People to a Series of Sins** - Addiction has a way of pulling people in. And since it is a sin, it often draws one into other types of sins. Addiction is thus a compounded sin, which leads the addict from one sin to another. One loses their sense of values and moral principles.

6. **What Does it Take to Break the Cycle?** - The addict must first “come to themselves” as the prodigal son did in Luke 15:11-32. They need to take a serious and hard look at themselves. An addict needs spiritual help to break the cycle of addiction and regain their sense of self-control. The first step is that they have to take a hard look at themselves and admit they have a problem, and admit that they are not in control of their life. What

leads addicts to this first step is different for every person, but they all ultimately realize that they need the help of God and others for their recovery.

- **Relationship With God** - Addicts need to understand God's mercy and forgiveness. There needs to be an understanding that Jesus died for sinners. As St. Paul says, "Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Christ thus "sanctifies" addicts and all sinners. Jesus said "Those who were well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Mark 2:17).

A relationship with God is the only thing that can truly satisfy us and fill the void in our life. Christ is the only person who can occupy the empty space within to rid us of our inner-emptiness and our problems. Christ is the one who can help anyone recover from their addiction by giving them the strength and the will to do it. Christ gives us this strength when we surrender our life to Him. He then takes over and the power in us to overcome is really the power in Him. He becomes the addicts strength and his new creation.

- **The Power to Resist** - The second step in breaking the cycle of addiction is to acquire the power to resist temptation. In James 4:6-8, we read, "But He gives us more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.' 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 4:6-8). Part of the key to overcoming addiction is developing a personal relationship with Christ, because he then gives us this power to resist temptation. Part of the struggle is that an addict's desire resides in the world, but the key for the addict is to adopt a lifestyle of repentance to continually draw closer to God. Through submission, Christ lifts us up and transforms us into a new creation.

- **Jesus Puts us in Our Right Mind** - Addiction is demonic. It is initiated, dictated, and regulated by the devil. This is why we need Christ to help us battle

our addiction, since it is really a battle with the devil. Recall the demon-possessed man in the country of the Gadarenes (Mark 5:1-20). The demon-possessed man's name was legion, meaning many. When he saw Christ, he asked Him, "are you here to torment me?" And when Jesus healed him we read, "Then they came to Jesus, and saw the man who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind" (Mark 5:15).

- **Pursuing One's Purpose-** The final step to breaking the cycle of addiction is finding a purpose in life. Life has no purpose without Christ. So if we are to find a purpose, we must do it through Christ. God created everyone with a purpose and a will, and as long as an addict is living outside of God's purpose and will for him/her, they will have an inner emptiness and life will have no meaning. We should run the race of endurance in our life. As St. Paul says, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance that race that is set before us, looking onto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him which endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls" (Hebrews 12:1-3).

7. **Prevent the Cycle** - By fleeing from bad habits early on, we should always ask ourselves if our actions and lifestyle are pleasing to God. We should strive for righteousness and realize that sin separates us from God. We must learn to hate sin. We should always examine ourselves so that whatever we are doing does not turn into an addiction. When we feel we are becoming enslaved to something, we should take bold action, seek help, and come to Christ.

Dancing

We would like to discuss the proper conduct and characteristics of a servant with respect to the topic of dancing. St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians is an excellent Epistle on characteristics of a servant that all servants should read. Here we want to focus on several verses. These are

“But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9).

“Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Corinthians 8:13).

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

1. In these verses, St. Paul talks about the notion that we might have the knowledge between right and wrong (1 Corinthians 8:1), and know the difference between sin and no sin, we can behave in such a way that we do *not* sin, and yet make our fellow man stumble (sin).
2. This tells us that things that make other people stumble are not necessarily only sinful things. We can be behaving in a non-sinful way and yet make our brother stumble, and such behavior may even encourage our brother to sin (1 Corinthians 8:11).
3. Dancing is not an appropriate behavior for a servant. As St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:13, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify”. Dancing does not edify or help our spiritual life in any way. Moreover, it is a bad example to others who are trying to grow in the faith.
4. Servants should not dance at weddings, school dances, or wherever.
5. Dancing excites the body physically, which may lead to other sins. Dancing may be the beginning of physical contact which may lead to sins.
6. We must behave appropriately at wedding receptions, for example. Servants should *not* dance, drink alcohol, make loud noises, play musical instruments, etc... They should be

seated quietly in their seats socializing with others in a calm and decent way with good self-control, self-respect and dignity (1 Corinthians 10:7, Galatians 5:22, Titus 2:6-8). We must also be appropriately dressed at all times (1 Timothy 2:9).

Cults

What is a cult? Cultism is any major deviation from Orthodox Christianity relative to the doctrines of the Christian faith. There are two types of cults: i) ones that deny Christianity, and ii) ones that claim they are consistent with Christianity. We want to focus on the second type. For this second type of cult, it is any religious movement which claims the backing of Christ or the Bible, but distorts the central message of Christianity by

- an additional revelation
- by displacing a fundamental tenet of faith with a secondary matter.

Extreme examples of these types of cults are the Branch Davidians of 1993 in Waco Texas and the Jim Jones cult of Guyana in 1978.

Cultism is nothing new. False teachings have existed since the devil. St. Paul warns us in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, "For such are false prophets, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness." Also in Galatians 1:6-9, St. Paul speaks of the propagation of a "different gospel" - a departure from the true gospel.

We want to discuss seven cults which claim to be Christian but are far from it. These are

1. Jehovah's Witnesses
2. Mormons
3. Christian Science
4. Spiritualism
5. 7th Day Adventists
6. Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Church
7. The New Age Movement

1. **Jehovah's Witnesses** - This religion started in 1879, founded by Charles Russell. It has over 300,000 converts per year, and over 10 million members in 231 countries.

- Jehovah's witnesses deny many important doctrines of Biblical Christianity.
- They deny the Holy Trinity, and they accept only "Jehovah" as God.
- They reject the divinity and equality of Christ with the Father. They believe that Christ was only created by the Father.
- They believe that the Holy Spirit has no person-hood, being only "God's active force."
- They deny that man has an immortal soul. We Orthodox Christians believe that our soul will continue to exist after death. They believe that the lost will not suffer eternal punishment, but rather be annihilated.
- They deny that Christ died for our sins.
- They deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, teaching that He arose as a spirit creature who materialized a body on various occasions in order to be seen by His disciples.
- They deny the second coming of Christ. They claim that He returned invisibly in 1914.
- Jehovah's witnesses are works oriented. They believe that works alone are sufficient for salvation.
- They refuse blood transfusions and organ transplants. They believe that blood transfusions are a form of feeding on blood - intravenous feeding - and that the Bible forbids this. They believe that anyone receiving a blood transfusion will result in eternal death.
- They are always promoting a message of urgency, and that the end of the world is near. They have been promoting this message for over 100 years and have attracted many converts as a result.
- How we deal with Jehovah's witnesses? It does not help to argue with them or get sidetracked. They do make door to door visits, and are very respectable people in general. If you do get engaged in conversation with them, focus on Christian doctrines, the person of Christ, and the work of Christ. Don't condemn or judge them. Pray for them.

2. **Mormons** - This is also known as the Church of Christ and Latter Day Saints. The Mormons are one of the largest and fastest growing cults in the world. Membership is well over 10 million. Many Mormons live in Utah, and many still practice polygamy (many wives). Polygamy was allowed in the early Mormon church.

- The Mormon Church was founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith.
- Mormons claim to be Christians but they are not.
- Their “Bible” (inspired version) is a revision of the New King James version of the Bible, and was revised by Joseph Smith.
- The Book of Mormon - God’s dealings with the Western continent.
- Doctrine of Covenants - they believe in celestial marriage and baptism for the dead.
- Pearl of Great Price - The book of Moses and the book of Abraham according to Smith’s translation of the Bible.
- They reject the Holy Trinity, and the three persons of the godhead are viewed as separate and distinct.
- They believe that God is a resurrected man with a physical body.
- They believe that man existed as spirit before he inhabited the earth. The Garden of Eden was located in Independence, MO.
- They reject the notion of the original sin of man.
- They reject the virgin birth of Christ. They reject the notion that Jesus was begotten by the Holy Spirit.
- They believe that individual salvation is gained by a person in the degree which he believes and obeys the Mormon gospel. They do not believe that the blood of Christ atones for all sins.
- They believe in polygamy.
- They believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.

3. **Christian Science** - This cult was founded by Mary Baker Eddy in the last quarter of the 19th century.

- The main book of Christian Scientists is called Science and Health.

- Christian Scientists believe in abstractions of mind and spirit. Everything is controlled by the mind and spirit.
- They reject the Bible and every Christian doctrine.
- God to the Christian Scientist is a divine mind, and mind is all that truly exists. They reject the Holy Trinity.
- They deny the reality of the body, the sin and fall of man, and they repudiate man's temporality and finiteness.
- They deny the present existence of Christ, the necessity of Christ's earthly mission, the incarnation, the virgin birth, the sinlessness of Jesus, His divinity, and His humanity. They reject Jesus's suffering, death, bodily resurrection and ascension.
- They reject the atonement of sin by the death of Jesus on the cross.
- They believe that salvation is accomplished when one ceases to sin, and when one stops believing that there is such a thing as sin.
- They believe that the death of Christ has nothing to do with salvation. If Christ had never existed, it would of made no difference as far as salvation was concerned.

Living a Balanced Christian Life - Part I

- Balance is a very important aspect of our Christian life.
- The early Church Fathers said, “All which exceeds limits is from the demons.” The devil *loves* extremes, and it cannot please him more when he sees us living a life of extremes.
- God created the world based on foundations of balance. When God created the earth, He gave it *perfect* balance so that it could turn its 25,000 miles in 24 hours without a tremor or a vibration.
- When God created us, the law of balance was strictly observed. In the bloodstream, for example, there is a ratio of white and red blood cells, and that balance must be kept. One of the first things the doctor looks at when we are ill is a sample of our blood to see if that balance has been disturbed.
- There is much evidence today that excesses in the consumption of certain types of food may cause various diseases. Too much of one thing and not enough of another: imbalance.
- So one of the truly rare gifts that we can achieve in life is the gift of balance.
- There seems to be a constant tendency in this society (especially in the U.S.) to swing from one extreme to the other extreme! If we were too rigid in the past, we become too loose now.
- If we had too much religion in childhood, we ignore it completely when we grow up.
- If sex was never talked about in the past, we use it now to sell everything from soda to automobiles. The pendulum swings from one extreme to the other. Yet, the truth lies in the middle, in balance.
- So one of the secrets of successful living is to be found in that word *balance*, which refers to the avoidance of harmful extremes. We need food, but we must not over-eat. We should work, but we must not become workaholics. We should play and relax, but not let play and relaxation crowd out everything else in life and rule us.

- Throughout life, it is important to find the safety of the middle ground rather than the imbalance of the extremes. St. Augustine once went so far as to say, “sin is imbalance.”
- The four critical ingredients of balance are worship, love, work, and relaxation (or play).

1. **Worship**

- We need worship of God. We need to adore someone bigger than ourselves, that is someone who so loved us that He sent His only Son Jesus to take away our sins and to restore us to the true, full, balanced, and wholesome life (John 3:16-17).
- We all need to look to someone bigger than ourself, that is, Christ, to maintain balance because this keeps our ego under control and prevents us from playing God and thinking that we are running the universe.
- Man needs something to hope for, someone to adore, someone to worship, someone to thank, someone to love, someone to serve, someone greater than any human being or material object. That is God!
- Someone once wrote that “Without God, man cannot bear the burden of himself.” Without worship, the inner person collapses under the pressures of life!

2. **Love**

- The second ingredient of a balanced life is love.
- Our greatest need as we know it is to be loved and to love. God came to us in Christ to help us experience the love of God in our lives personally and to help us reach out with that love to other people.
- In Christ, we know that we are deeply loved and we are enabled by the indwelling Christ and the Holy Spirit to reach out with that love which we have received from Him to others.

3. **Work**

- In addition to worship and love, the third ingredient of a balanced life is work.
- At creation, God gave us a job to do. He told us to have dominion over the entire earth and to subdue it (Genesis 1:26).

- Work, as we know, challenges our creativity. It helps give meaning and purpose to our life.
- Long periods of idleness, as we know, literally warp a person.
- St. Paul said, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

4. **Relaxation (play)**

- The fourth ingredient of a balanced life is relaxation or play. Play, such as sports, hobbies, etc... is necessary in life because it relaxes and lubricates the mind and the soul.
 - Relaxation (play) is a necessary part of a balanced life when balanced with worship, love, and work.
-
- No human being is whole or complete, wholesome or healthy, who suffers from imbalance. Imbalance is dysfunctional.
 - Imbalance is another word for indicating a deficiency in our lives.
 - What we need to live by are the four essentials of worship, love, work, and relaxation.
 - Balance plays a big part in emotional and spiritual maturity. The balanced person matures much faster than an unbalanced person.

Halloween: Hallowed or Harmful?

- Halloween is a natural part of life in America. Many people feel that this is the second most important occasion on our yearly calendar after Christmas. Many people feel that it's a fun time for us and our children, who dress up in scary clothes and go around trick or treating and having lots of fun.
- Fun? We should not be so sure about that. Can we call dressing up our children as vampires, ghosts, devils and witches as fun?
- As we pass through through the stores, we can see how much impact Halloween has in people's lives. It is everywhere, in shopping centers, banks, hospitals, households, everywhere you could see signs of people preparing for this "fun" celebration.
- We also need to realize that Halloween is a big business in America. The Christian Broadcasting Network states that, "Merchants also look forward to October 31. The sale of candy, costumes, decorations, and party goods make Halloween one of the major retail seasons of the year."
- In a book called "Halloween and Satanism" it states, "Did you know that Halloween is a day witches celebrate above all other days?"
- Even the Internal Revenue Service has given tax exempt status to the church of Wicca (the official church of witchcraft), which means your gift to witchcraft is a tax deductible, charitable donation of a religious nature, the same as if you were tithing to the (Christian) Church.
- When we know the history of Halloween, we will learn that it is a celebration of witchcraft and it is completely demonic.

History of Halloween

- How did Halloween begin? Many centuries before the birth of Christ, the Celts and Priests, inhabitants of Britain and Ireland, observed the festival of Samhain on October 31 (Samhain is their god, lord of the dead).

- This marked the eve of the Celtic New Year, which began on November 1. It was at this time that full harvest was complete and winter was creeping in.
- The Celts believed that the power of the sun was fading and for the next few months, darkness would prevail. They also believed that during the Samhain, the evil separating the living and the dead was at its thinnest.
- They believed that on the evening of October 31, evil spirits and souls of the dead passed through the barrier and entered the world of the living. Departed family members would revisit their earthly homes. They felt that this was frightening and exciting.
- The Celts believed that these spirits and dead souls could torment the living. Crops might be destroyed, babies stolen, and farm animals killed. But this was also an opportunity to commune with the spirits, and foretell the future.
- The Devil, the lord of darkness, was ordinarily feared, but during Samhain, his power would be called on to foretell the future.

Trick or Treat

- The Druids (magicians and wizards) were responsible for appeasing the goblins and preventing harm to the people. Huge Samhain bonfires were lit to guide the way of the spirits.
- Various sacrifices, including human, were performed to assure a good year. Like many pagan cultures around the world, the Celts left out food for the spirits, hoping that a “treat” would prevent an evil “trick.”
- Centuries later, descendants of the Celts continued to observe the Samhain festival by dressing as evil spirits. They roamed from house to house demanding food in exchange for the “spirits” leaving the home unharmed.
- They carved demonic faces in hollowed-out turnips and lighted them with candles. This is what is called “Jack-O-Lantern”.
- The story says that an Irish drunkard named Jack made a deal with the devil and the devil agreed to spare his soul for ten years. But a year later, Jack died and was turned back

from the gates of heaven. So he went to the gates of hell and was rejected by the devil also. So as Jack was walking to find a place, he was eating a turnip so the devil threw him a live coal out of the fires of hell. So Jack put the coal in the turnip to help him see.

- It is believed that since that time, Jack is roaming the face of the earth with the Jack-O-Lantern seeking a place of rest.
- Such a story that is rooted in devil worship should make people think carefully before they put a Jack-O-Lantern in their house!
- Just as people once offered gifts of food to the spirits, people today offer treats to the children who represent them. In reality, the lighted Jack-O-Lanterns that the children carry are really a symbol of the fires and torches of former Halloween's and of the ancient Samhain. This was the beginning of the trick or treat!

All Hallows' Eve

- In the seventh century, the Roman Catholic Church set aside a day in May in memory of the early Christians who died for their faith. It was called All Saints Day.
- By the year 900 AD, the date was changed to November 1st. Another name for All Saints Day was All Hallows.
- October 31st was known as All Hallows' Eve, which was later shortened to Halloween.
- The reason for the change of the date was an attempt to encourage people to replace this evil celebration with a holy feast.
- Halloween with all its customs arrived in America in the mid-1800's with the Irish immigrants.
- The costumes of the children going "trick or treating" has become an established American tradition.
- Only in recent years have parents hesitated to send their children into streets because of the increased danger of accidents, poisoned food, and menacing strangers.
- People today might be innocently imitating the ancient Celtic customs, but in an indirect way, they are participating in and celebrating something that is sinister, evil and demonic.

- The Christian Broadcasting Network states that, “Witches and Satanists still consider Halloween to be one of the strongest times during the year to cast a spell. On Halloween, most witchcraft practitioners participate in a ritual called “drawing down the moon”. In this, the chief witch of the coven (group of witches) becomes, they believe, a channel for the moon goddess.
- During this ritual, the participants both male and female, are ‘sky-clad’, that is, naked. Evidence persists that some Satanist and voodoo groups offer sacrifices - usually animals, but also possibly human babies.

The Biblical Response to Halloween

- People celebrating Halloween today are naturally not thinking about the darkness and evil that underlies most Halloween practices. They are just thinking of it as a fun time.
- Some might say, “surely, you cannot deny children or adults the fun of Halloween just because of its past hideous history. Can there be anything wrong with lighthearted raging?”
- Let us see what the Bible says. In the book of Deuteronomy, God gives clear instructions to His people concerning associating with such practices. “When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. These shall not be found among you anymore who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead” (Deuteronomy 18:9-11).
- In the second book of Kings it says, “And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger” (2 Kings 17:17).
- So, all of these practices God saw as evil, and they angered Him.
- Saint Paul mentioned witchcraft amongst the works of the flesh which are manifest, in Galatians 5:19-21, where he says, “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness,

revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

- Also, in the Book of Revelation, Saint John mentions that sorcerers “shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).
- In the book of Micah, God speaks out strongly against those who practice witchcraft and the like by saying, “I will cut off sorcerers from your hand, and you shall have no soothsayers. Your carved images I will also cut off, and your sacred pillars from your midst; you shall no more worship the work of your hands; I will pluck your wooden images from your midst; thus I will destroy your cities. And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury on the nations that have not heard” (Micah 5:12-15).

Our Responsibility

- We now hope that the background and history of Halloween is clear to all of us, and that it is not something which is fun and nice. It does have evil connotations to it that we must be aware of.
- What does it mean as a Christian to dress your child as a witch or devil? Is this what our Lord has asked us to teach our children?
- Some might say that, “this helps us to teach our children not to be afraid of anything.” Is this the way to teach our children not to fear, or is it through the words of Christ that fear is cast out and peace and comfort prevail? The answer is clear!
- We must rethink how we spend this day. Let us educate our young people about the facts of Halloween and perhaps arrange for a spiritual meeting to replace the Halloween parties that young people attend.
- During this time, perhaps a lecture or discussion can be organized around this topic.
- It should be also a time of fervent prayer, so that our Lord Jesus Christ will protect us from all the powers of the Enemy. As we say in the Prayers of Thanksgiving. “All envy, all temptation, all works of Satan, all intrigues of the wicked, rising up of enemies, visible and invisible, do cast away from us and all your people.”

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

What is ADD?

- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), is a diagnosis label we give to children and adults who have problems in four main areas of their lives:
 - Inattention
 - Impulsivity
 - Hyperactivity
 - Boredom
- It is a neurological based disorder. It's a matter of self-control in a neurological sense rather than a moral sense.
- Individuals with ADD tend to have slower brain wave activity in the front regions of the brain, the limbic system, the part of the brain that helps us decide what to pay attention to in the world around us.
- An ADD child (or adult) is *born* with the problem. It is not just a matter of being lazy, bored, or lacking self-control in an intentional way.
- A person with ADD
 - does not understand cause and effect.
 - does things without thinking about the consequences of their actions.
 - says things without thinking how others will respond.
 - has trouble taking turns.
 - misreads social cues, and can interpret others' remarks as hostile.
 - has difficulty with delayed gratification.

Prevalence of ADD

- How common is ADD? Official diagnosis is fairly complex and its actual prevalence is not as high as we may think.
- Studies show that ADD affects 5% of children in the U.S. and 3% of adults in the U.S.
- About 50% of those with ADD are hyperactive, meaning that they have high levels of motor activity. These children move around from one activity to the other without ever finishing what they started. These children are diagnostically labeled as ADHD, which stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.
- Each Sunday School classroom will typically have 1-2 ADD children in it.

What We Can do to Help

There are several modifications we can make to our Sunday School class that might help for a smoother environment. Let's take a look at some changes we can make to the classroom, our lessons, and dealing with behavioral problems.

Classroom Modifications:

- Seat the children in rows to avoid the most distraction: if you prefer to have a more discussion-oriented setting, then you can attempt to put children in a U-shape but make sure that the Sunday School servant (you) can have access to all the kids and walk up to all the children in the class.
- Place the ADD child near the servant (you). We should not let him/her sit in the back of the class thinking that they will be less distracting there. Surround him/her with good role models.
- Do not place the ADD child near heaters, air conditioners, windows, high traffic areas, or the door. Always keep the door shut.
- Be cautious of wall hangings also, as they may be very distracting.

- Try and make the climate as comfortable as possible: not too hot and not too cold.

Lesson Presentation Modifications:

- Maintain eye contact with the ADD child when giving instructions, and make sure they are looking at you, and have them repeat the instructions back to make sure they understand.
- All children will benefit from receiving an outline of the day's lesson prior to the start of the class.
- Use colored markers to emphasize words on the board. Have the child write for you during the lesson. If you need to pass out papers, have him/her pass out the papers for you. Involve the child in your lesson in any way possible.
- Have the children be involved, have all kids repeat things in unison, and role-play.
- Be energetic. Fluctuate your voice and change actions. Use visuals and be creative. This will benefit your entire class.

Behavior Management Recommendations:

- For younger children, post the rules of the class on the wall and review them in the beginning of each class. Make sure they are clear and leave no room for interpretation, so the children do not seek ways around the rules. For example, the rule "no talking in class" is more direct than "proper conduct in class." The latter one leaves things open for interpretation, whereas the first one is quite clear. Older children should have a say in planning consequences of rule breaking, whereas for younger children, you may want to illustrate the rules.
- When rules are broken, administer consequences immediately and consistently to all children. The servant should always avoid getting personal due to their own frustrations, circumstances, etc... Avoid ridicule and criticism. If the child refuses the negative consequences of their actions, give them 1-2 minutes to decide if they will do what they are told or be given a more serious consequence. Always give them a choice.

- Focus on the positive. The servant should actively reward behavior that they want the children to do. Encourage positive self-talk, for example, by saying “you did very well remaining in your seat today. I am proud of you.” This encourages the child to think positively about him/herself. A simple wink or a smile to reward them when working on a specific task is also very uplifting for a child.
- Use a secret signal with the child that both you and the child agree on and understand. For example, a tap on the shoulder to remind them to focus on the lesson without verbally saying anything to them. You do not and should not stop your lesson at all times for disciplinary reasons. Develop certain signs and gestures with the kids so that they know how to behave without you having to say a single word.
- If you ask a question in class, have the kids think out loud. This will give you insight into their thought process and how much they actually learned.
- Ask them not to answer for 15-20 seconds after the question is asked so that they have time to think about the answers.
- Most importantly, involve parents whenever possible. Find out how the child acts at home and in school. If a child is officially diagnosed with ADD, find out if they are on medications, whether these medications are working for them, and whether the medications are taken on Sunday.
- If a child’s behavior is not consistent, examine the Sunday School room or patterns for when the child acts up. It may be something other than ADD. The child may have a hearing problem or learning disability that causes their inattention, and the child may need to see his/her doctor.
- We need discipline in class. Although ADD is a problem that the child cannot control, we cannot merely ignore disruptive behavior. Test the waters, and try to be creative and energetic to keep the class interesting. Change your lesson presentation style occasionally to keep the kids attracted.
- Be consistent about keeping all of the class rules.
- The key is *Godly discipline and unconditional love* to all kids.

Music and its Effects on the Youth

- Music is a big issue with our youth today.
- Music is a very sensitive and delicate topic to discuss with our youth.
- Why does music have such a powerful effect on youth, and people in general?
 - God created us to be moved by music. Man is inspired by music and his soul is aroused.
 - Music helps teens define reality and get easy and attractive answers to confusing issues in life.
- What do certain types of music have to offer to our youth?
 - The acceptance and worship of Satan
 - The rejection, mockery, and blasphemy regarding Jesus Christ
 - Relationships, broken relationships, and sex
 - Falling in love
 - Drugs and alcohol
 - Violence
 - Filthy and promiscuous language
 - The message that we are worthless and that life is empty and worthless
- How do we address the topic of music in Sunday School?
- What types of music are acceptable? What alternatives do we offer the kids?
- How do we get the kids to realize that certain music, whether satanic or not, is not good for their spiritual well being?
- How do we get the kids to enjoy listening to Church music as the alternative?
- Can one have a close relationship with God and at the same time enjoy listening to rap music, heavy metal, rock music, or any other kind of music that focuses on eight items above.

- How can we make peaceful and convincing arguments to the kids on the effects of music?

The Six Stages of Moral Decline in Our Society

- In the past 30-40 years, we have seen an amazing pace of moral decline in our society. The moral decline will reach its zenith in the last days.
- All of God's creation regarding man is centered around the notion of family, as is seen throughout the Bible in the stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Noah, Joseph, Jacob, and many others. Thus, moral decline starts with the breaking apart of a family, and in particular the marriage in a family.
- We will discuss six stages of moral decline in our society. Each one is related to the notion of a family, and in particular, the concept of marriage.
- The moral and spiritual strength of a family is critical in the well-being of a society. This point has been mentioned by not only theologians and church leaders, but by sociologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists. The stronger and more spiritual the family ties are, the more spiritual and more moral the offspring and the surrounding community is, in general.

We now discuss the six stages of moral decline in the world:

1. **Increased and Rapid, Easy, Causeless Divorce** - divorce without a cause has become so common in our society today, that it is not even a very important topic in the world today. Today, couples are willing to get a quick mutual "causeless" divorce to satisfy their selfish ambitions. They get divorced for no good reason and when there is the slightest difficulty in the relationship, they are not willing to work things out. They want the easy way out. This is why the divorce rate keeps getting higher and higher. In 30 years, it went from 25% to 60% in the U.S. alone.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife just for any reason", Jesus responded by saying, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So then, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:5-6). Jesus goes on to say, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his

wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9).

2. **Elimination of the Real Meaning of the Marriage Ceremony** - One of the most unfortunate things in our society today is that the definition of marriage is no longer related to, dictated, or tied down to the Church. Today, people get married just about anywhere, such as a beach, Las Vegas, a sporting event, bars, and other places. The notion that the wedding ceremony is a Holy Sacrament and unique mystery defined by God in which two become one, is being forgotten, lost and disrespected. Even when a wedding does occur in a church, there is often disrespect and disregard by the congregation and the wedding couples for the prayers and the church readings. The fact of the matter is that marriage is a Sacrament and the wedding ceremony is the Holy fulfillment of this sacrament, a divine and holy mystery that defines the beginning of family life for a couple living in Christ.

3. **Rise of Theories that Companionate Marriage or Looser Family Forms Would Solve Social and Family Problems** - There are many theories today that claim that traditional marriages cause more harm than good they don't allow enough freedom to the spouse or the children, they demand a certain structure including a head of the household, they impose too many restrictions and too much pressure on the children that may lead to a troubled childhood, etc.. To avoid these “troubles,” what society advocates today is a looser form of family that requires minimal accountability and responsibility, but demands maximal levels of self-centeredness. Examples include couples living together and not being married, married couples purposely not having children so that they can enjoy their selfish life, married couples living separate lives at home and not living as one flesh - each has their own friends, interests, activities, finances, etc.. Another example is divorce by mutual consent.

Recall what St. Paul says about structure in a family. He says, “Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church and He is the savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:22-24).

4. **The Loss of Tradition in Family Life** - We see more and more today the loss of certain traditions in family life. Examples include stopping or seldom going to church, families not reading the Bible together, not praying together, not taking Communion together, and

not doing activities together. Today, on a typical Saturday morning, the wife has her set of activities, the husband has his, and the children have theirs. Society has also lost the tradition of teaching purity and chastity to the children. Parents no longer care what their children are doing and instead of teaching them not to have sex before marriage, they now emphasize safe sex to their children. Another example is discipline of children according to the Bible. Discipline today is often called child abuse. Another example is obedience and submission, two concepts that have been annihilated in modern family life. The children are no longer obedient or submissive and neither are the husband and wife obedient and submissive to one another. The sixth commandment says “Honor your father and mother” (Deuteronomy 5:16). The Coptic Church maintains that tradition is very important in the family. Saint Paul says, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). In talking about Timothy’s faith, St. Paul says, “when I call to remembrance the genuine faith which is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Timothy 1:5). St. Paul also tells Timothy, “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from who you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:14-15).

5. **The Increasing Acceptance of Adultery in Society** - Today, adultery is becoming widely accepted as a “natural” urge and occurrence for those who are married or unmarried. Sex before marriage is rampant in our society and completely acceptable, and adultery within the context of marriage is more common and acceptable than ever before. This kind of acceptance is evident from television and the media, who promote this kind of lifestyle and label it as “natural”, “instinctive,” “pleasurable”, and “desirable”. The eighth commandment says, “you shall not commit adultery” (Deuteronomy 5:18). Jesus says, “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mark 5:28).
6. **Common Acceptance of all Forms of Sexual Perversions** - The last stage of moral decline, a stage in which our society is in today, is the common acceptance of all forms of sexual perversions such as homosexuality, prostitution, pornography, transgender, etc... Today much of the news concerns gay rights, same sex marriages, civil unions, etc.. We

see such perversions promoted as totally acceptable on television, the media, and the government. We are in an age of sexual perversions, where anything is acceptable. Such sexual perversions often indicate “the last days” or “end of times” in the Bible. For example, it was such sexual perversions that led to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). It was also such perversions that led to the flood in the times of Noah (Genesis 6:2). St. Paul says, “Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9).

The Problem of Boredom

Introduction

- A common phrase that we hear today among people of all ages is that “I am bored”, or “life is boring,” or “there is nothing to do.” Why are we bored? What is the root cause and how do we overcome it?
- We want to talk about boredom especially as it relates to our spiritual life. Why is our spiritual life boring and we are we bored by spiritual activities such as Sunday School, prayer meetings or spiritual meetings, the liturgy, church events, and activities related to spirituality in general?
- We want to discuss the 3 C’s of boredom: Cause, Consequences, and the Corrective (CCC).

1. The Cause: Boredom Has a Spiritual Basis

- The church fathers identify that boredom primarily comes from a lack of the love of God and the lack of a real and meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. Thus, boredom directly results from the fact that Christ is not the primary aim in our life.
- St. John Climacus talks about boredom as the 13th step in his book the Ladder of Divine Ascent, and says that of the eight great vices of the devil, boredom is the most serious one.
- St. John Climacus refers to boredom as despondency or spiritual tedium. He says, “Tedium is a paralysis of the soul, a slackness of the mind, a neglect of religious exercises, a hostility to vows taken. It is an approval of worldly things. It is a voice claiming that God has no mercy and no love for men. It is a laziness in the singing of psalms, a weakness in prayer, a stubborn urge for service, a dedication to the work of the hands, an indifference to the requirement of obedience.”
- St. Climacus also says, “Who are your enemies? Who can destroy you?” And tedium may be constrained to reply: “I cannot lay my head among those who are truly obedient, and I live quietly where I may. I have many mothers - Stolidity of the

Soul, Forgetfulness of the Things of Heaven, or, sometimes, Too Heavy a Burden of Troubles. My children who live with me are Changing from Place to Place, Disobedience to One's Superior, Forgetfulness of the Judgment to Come, and sometimes, the Abandonment of One's Vocation. The singing of psalms and manual labor are my opponents by whom I am now bound. My enemy is the thought of death, but what really slays me is prayer backed by a firm hope in the blessings of the future. And as to who gave birth to Prayer, you must ask her."

- Jesus created us to have a longing for Him, and when we do not seek to satisfy this longing for Christ by coming to Him and developing a relationship with him, we feel emptiness within and become bored with life, especially our spiritual life. Not only do we become bored with our spiritual life, but we become indifferent towards it and even reject it all together.
- When Christ is not number one in our life, we become bored with spiritual activities and become bored in church because it is as if we are visiting the house of a stranger. When we visit strangers, or go into a home in which we know no one, we become bored. Our excitement comes from having friends and having a meaningful relationship with other people, in which we talk to and converse with. The same is with God. We need to have a relationship with Him through prayer, reading the Bible, and partaking of the Holy Sacraments, especially Holy Communion.
- We need to give Jesus a chance to fit into our life. Take a chance on Him and see what happens. Recall what Philip told Nathaniel. "And Nathanael said to him, Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, Come and see" (John 1:46).
- When a person becomes bored in their spiritual life, they usually become bored with life in general, finding it unfulfilling and without purpose or meaning. This is why people turn to drugs, sex, violence, pornography, alcohol, nightclubs, parties, and so many other bad things, because they look for these things to give them excitement in life.
- We can look at the life of King Solomon. He was the wisest and richest king who ever lived. He had everything the world had to offer. Jesus said about Solomon, "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6:29). But God was not his number one priority in a major part of his life, and he felt empty and bored at the end of his life. In the book of Ecclesiastes he says

”Vanity of Vanity. All is Vanity.” Solomon realized that his whole life was wasted on worthless worldly living. This is why in his last chapter he said “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

- God made us to have a desire to be excited and stimulated, but to be excited and stimulated about Him, not the things of this world.
- Boredom often comes from laziness, and laziness is another vice of the devil intended to prevent us from making a movement towards God.
- Jesus is the one who gives us excitement and fire in our life. He alone is the one who can remove boredom permanently from our life. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).
- We often look for excuses to explain our boredom. We often say things like the “liturgy is too long,” “the person speaking is boring or monotonous,” “it’s too long or too late at night,” “it’s not clear, or too low of a level, or too high of a level,” “too much Coptic, or Arabic, or English,” “not spiritual enough,” “too academic,” “no fun.”
- Rather than look for excuses to our boredom, we should examine ourselves and our relationship with Christ. The person who has an intimate relationship with Christ always sees the cup as half full rather than half empty, and always finds the positives in each situation and dwells on this, and thus is never bored. For example, rather than expect Sunday School to be fun and games, they try to benefit from what is being said in order to apply it to their own life. The person who is not bored is serious about their spiritual life. They can take any situation and benefit from it.

2. The Consequences of Boredom: Boredom Leads to Sin

- The person who is bored wants excitement, and in searching for such excitement, he turns to the world and commits sin.
- Boredom is a vice of the devil. He uses this vice to make us negative, depressed, and desperate. When we are in that state, we typically commit sin. Boredom is one of the most common prerequisites to commit sin. Most violence or sexual acts are committed solely out of boredom.
- We take here the life of David the Prophet. Let us read 2 Samuel 11:1-27. Notice how we read about David’s boredom in verse 1, “It happened in the spring of the year,

at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem” (2 Samuel 11:1).

- David should of been out there fighting, but somehow he became lazy and neglected his responsibility, and as a result, had a lot of time on his hands. David’s relationship with God at this point was not strong. He felt bored. And this is what led him to the roof and then desire Bathsheba.
- On the contrary, let us consider Joseph, the person who had the perfect opportunity to commit sin with Potiphar’s wife. Rather than wasting his time and being bored, Joseph kept his relationship with God strong and also kept himself busy with his God given work. Let us read Genesis 39:8-9, “But he refused and said to his master’s wife, ‘Look my master does not know what is with me in this house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God.’” Here we see the two things that saved Joseph from sin: i) his strong relationship with God, and ii) his attention to God’s work, that is, his responsibilities in the house of Potiphar.
- St. Anthony the great often fought with the vice of boredom. We read in his story, “The devil fought him with boredom, laziness and imagination of women, but he overcame all these things by the help of the Lord Christ.” We also read, “One day he was taken by boredom. He heard a voice telling him to get out and look. He went out and he saw an angel who wore the garb of the monastic life and had a cover on his head, weaving palm leaves then rising to pray, then after some time sitting down again to work. The voice told him, ”Antonios, do this and you will have comfort.” St. Antonios did as the angel told him and from that day on, he was never bored again.”
- One of the great sins that results from boredom is gossip. People gossip when they have time on their hands and nothing better to do. Jesus tells us in Matthew 12:36-37 that we must answer for every idle word we have spoken. He says, “I tell you on the day of judgment, men will render account for every careless word they utter. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37). How true that verse is in Proverbs, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21).

- Here are some verses about gossip in the Bible. “You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:16).
- “A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.” (Proverbs 11:13).
- “being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers” (Romans 1:29).
- “And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not” (1 Timothy 5:13).
- “The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body” (Proverbs 18:8).
- Thus, boredom almost invariably leads to sin and we must avoid getting bored.

3. The Corrective of Boredom

- Invest our life in Jesus Christ and He will remove our boredom. Make Jesus the number one goal in our life, and make our relationship with Him the most important thing in our life.
- View the cup as always half full rather than half empty. Try to benefit from every spiritual activity by focusing on the positives.
- Stay busy with what God has assigned you to do in life. Do not give yourself an opportunity with too much time on your hands. Stay busy by being active in your work life and your prayer life, in balance, as St. Anthony did.
- Be involved with church services and activities. Take on responsibilities in church services and activities. Be a leader and take initiatives in church services and teach the kids to do the same. For example,
 - During the liturgy, assign deacons certain roles to keep them engaged and interested in the liturgy. Get the kids involved in the liturgy by teaching them hymns and chants and getting them to participate in the liturgy. Give them responsibilities in the liturgy.

- Give the kids responsibilities in the Sunday School class.
 - Assign readings and homework to the Sunday School kids.
 - Let the kids talk about their feelings.
 - Be creative as a servant in your Sunday School class or church event.
- When you feel “bored,” get into the habit right away of praying or reading the Bible. For example, during the liturgy, focus on the words that are being said and meditate on them, focus on the readings, and pray.
 - Try to see the image of God in everyone you encounter in life. “If we were able to see God’s image in our neighbor, do you think weapons and generals would be needed?”

How to Make Church Exciting for the Kids

1. Introduction

- Making the church exciting and attracting the kids to church, and namely to Christ, is our most important mission in Sunday School service.
- If we are unable to attract kids to church, we risk losing them completely. We have to reflect back on our service when we hear kids say that church is boring, Sunday School is boring and is of no benefit, there are not enough church activities, the servants are not loving and caring, etc... It is these kinds of things that Christ will hold us seriously accountable in our service.
- It is our highest obligation to make church a loving, caring, active, spiritual, attractive, and exciting environment for the Sunday School kids and the youth in general.
- There are three basic elements of church life for the kids: Liturgy and praises, Sunday School, and church activities, such as retreats, outings, the Nadi, going out to eat, picnics, etc... We will discuss how to make each of these events as exciting as possible for the kids.

2. The Basics: We Must Love

- No church activity is meaningful if it is i) not done in love, and ii) not done with a spiritual purpose and goal.
- We must truly and unconditionally love the kids we serve. Love is the greatest attractor of children, youth, and adults. Love provides comfort, acceptance, security, confidence, peace, and encouragement for the child. Love is by far the best way to attract anyone to church. It is not the number of activities we do or how well we do a lesson or memorize hymns, or how many retreats we have. If any of these are done without love, they will not be blessed by God. They will have no effect on the child's spiritual life.
- All St. John ever talked about was the importance of loving one another. He equates God with love: "God is love" (1 John 4:8). "He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him" (1 John 2:10).

- Love also demands humility and simplicity. Kids are attracted to humble and simple people, people who can talk to them and reason with them on their level. Let us all strive to be humble, simple, and soft-hearted.

3. The Liturgy

- Kids spend most of their church time in the Liturgy. They spend more time here than in any other activity in church, so we have to make the Liturgy exciting for them.
- One of the key elements in attracting the kids to the liturgy, as well as attracting them to church in general, is to *give them responsibilities*. Give the deacons responsibilities, and give the girls responsibilities, ask them to do things, make them feel important and wanted. Make them feel that their responsibilities are important and crucial to the church. Have them arrange books, readings, organize things, say deacons responses, have them stand in the front, get them in the middle of things. Have them help out in the altar, have them help monitor the halls, get them involved.
- Give them attention during the liturgy. Give them a liturgy book to follow, point to things on the screen. Give them a pat on the back to show them acceptance and love.
- Teach them the liturgical responses at home and in Sunday School so that they would know what is going on and so that they can be more attentive during the liturgy. One becomes interested in something once they understand it. So teach them responses so that they would be encouraged to chant them during the liturgy. Once a kid starts learning and chanting the responses, they immediately become interested in the liturgy.
- How great it would be if all of the Sunday School Servants on Sunday gathered the kids in the first two rows of the church and prayed the liturgy with them, both the young and the old kids.
- Teach the kids praises also, such as the Tasbeha, Coptic hymns, spiritual songs, and other church prayers that would encourage them to like the liturgy more and make them want to participate.

4. Sunday School

- Be creative with lessons: make them exciting, interactive, perhaps with props for the younger kids, play spiritual games (such as jeopardy), and do skits. Get the kids stimulated. Have them talk in the class. Lessons should *never* be a lecture. They must be interactive and creative. Get the kids involved in your lessons, have them represent a character in the Bible, ask for their opinion for things to do for the class, etc...
- Give the kids responsibilities in the class. Have them arrange books, collect tithes, erase the board, pass out papers, etc...
- Hug your kids.
- Have friendly talks with your kids after Sunday School class.
- Call your kids at home when they don't come.
- Visit the kids in their home.

5. Church Activities

- Every church event must have a spiritual goal. We must never do a church activity just for the sake of "fun." The spiritual goal in any church activity should be to i) get to know the kids on a deeper and more intimate personal level, ii) draw the kids closer to Christ by showing them that the church has much more to offer than the world.
- Have retreats and fun church outings. Every class must do this. Have overnight retreats, one day outings to a park, plays, the Nadi, museum, picnics, or other places.
- These activities must occur on a regular basis. Retreats, picnics, outings, etc.. must happen on a regular basis and they should be fun. They should give the kids enough time to talk, eat, play, and relax.
- Be active and full of spiritual energy! Kids are attracted to church when they see regular and organized activities, and see the servants committed to these activities and full of zeal. Kids recognize a dead, unmotivated, or unenthusiastic servant!

6. Pray

- We must continually pray to God for our service and pray that God draws the kids closer to church. We must pray to God to change the kid's heart to make him/her more attracted to church.
- We must pray individually for all of our kids in Sunday School.
- We must also pray for each other.
- Prayer is powerful. It produces change. It produces fruits. It produces Godly children.

The Problem of Facebook - Part I

1. Introduction

- Facebook is a global social networking website that is operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc. Users can add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves.
- Additionally, users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region. The website's name stems from the colloquial name of books given at the start of the academic year by university administrations with the intention of helping students get to know each other better.
- Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook with his college roommates and fellow computer science students Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes while he was a student at Harvard University. The website's membership was initially limited to Harvard students, but was expanded to other colleges in the Boston area, the Ivy League, and Stanford University. It later expanded further to include any university student, then high school students, and, finally, to anyone aged 13 and over. The website currently has more than 300 million active users worldwide.
- Facebook has met with some controversy. It has been blocked intermittently in several countries including Syria, China and Iran, although Iran later unblocked Facebook in 2009. It has also been banned at many places of work to discourage employees from wasting time using the service.
- Privacy has also been an issue, and it has been compromised several times.
- A January 2009 Compete.com study has ranked Facebook as the most used social network by worldwide monthly active users, followed by MySpace.
- Facebook's mission is to "give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. Millions of people use Facebook everyday to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet."
- There are many social networking sites, such as MySpace, Twitter, and LinkedIn, but Facebook is perhaps the potentially most damaging and dangerous in the sense that it allows photos and videos.

- What is the problem with Facebook? Although Facebook is not a sin and it may have good intentions, it does way more harm than good and is impossible to control what your friends put on it. The end result of Facebook is that inappropriate pictures get posted on one's account or on the account of one of the friends. It also results in a total invasion and loss of privacy. It can be the source of a major stumbling block in the spiritual life of others especially when servants use Facebook inappropriately. It ruins the image of the role model, and it can easily lead others away from God.

2. What Bishop Youssef says about Facebook

- “Here is my take on facebook and this type of media. Everything we do has a pro and a con. Every tool God has given us can be used for good and can be used for evil. These tools have the potential to build and the potential to destroy. This is fairly true in just about anything in life: television, money, education, cars, computers, medicines, and even talents. It is important that Sunday school lessons are not just lectures packed with information, but that they are also interactive, applicable, and encourage critical thinking skills. Why is it so important that everyone knows everything about someone? This baffles me about facebook. Privacy means nothing! What goes on a facebook page today maybe be damaging to the same person many years from now, when they are parents, executives, judges, diplomats, politicians, perhaps even priests, or wives of priests. No one knows the future except God.

The reason facebook is controversial is because it contains a major negative component. While you mentioned many positive aspects, one cannot ignore the impact of the lack of discernment of many people who naively succumb to inappropriate behaviors, comments, photos, language, attire, expressions, etc. Many young people, especially in the middle school teen years, have been cyber-bullied and harassed through these types of means. Rumors and gossip have found a new way to spread. As servants, we are accountable for what we are teaching and more importantly, what this teaching looks like when it goes into effect. Many people say that the reason they have facebook is for announcements, events, etc., but I don't think that is the main pull. The main fascination seems to be with the pictures that are posted. People have shown up on facebook never knowing that the picture someone took was for this purpose. There is no control or respect of anyone's privacy. Although many of these photos may be innocent and taken with good intentions, there is a strange obsession

with this kind of media. Servants in the church are public figures. Each servant has to decide for him/herself what stance they want to take regarding this matter. Each one should be aware of their own “private” behavior so that it is not contradictory to their public persona. If they make a mistake and repent, God will forgive them. What about the possibility of negative influence they may have had on someone else? How will that get rectified? If a servant choose to have facebook, it must be very well monitored. Otherwise, they should get rid of it altogether. One of the reasons we place young servants with this age group is because they can easily become role models for them and provide them with a wholesome and genuine sense of identity. I am not completely against facebook, etc., but I don’t find it as valuable as other use of media.” “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Corinthians 8:13).

- “First of all, servants should not think or feel that their service is isolated to a particular class, area, or event. We are a church community, a church family. Whatever we do in a particular service will somehow impact another area and another person, etc. The parents of the children in the Sunday school classes also need to be served to some extent by their children’s servants. Having said that, it is important to begin by establishing some kind of rapport with those parents, so they do not feel threatened. The dynamics of the current situation is steered by fear and the unknown, especially if the parents are newcomers or immigrated as adults. Sometimes they become quickly overwhelmed by the all the negative images and things they hear about in this extra liberal society. With the best of intentions, they exert a tremendous amount of effort trying to protect their children. The result is they over-shelter them to a fault and isolate them from what they believe is mass corruption in society that is foreign to their understanding of child rearing. In reality, neither extreme of being too permissive nor too restrictive is healthy. Raising spirituality in children so that the children can grow to be spiritual adults requires balance.

Effective communication on the part of the servants is imperative. Visitations to the home help to facilitate this dialog. The servant’s purpose for communicating with the parents or visiting them should not be for the sole purpose of persuading them that they are wrong and that they should just let the children attend the church activities. The servants along with the priest must first discuss the pressing matters at hand and scrutinize the behaviors of concern. A thorough analysis of the problem should

be investigated. Do these problems of which the parents are complaining really exist? If they do, a plan of action needs to be implemented to remedy the problem. Then, when the visitation is made and the issues of concern arise, the servants can with a clear conscience assure the parents that their concerns have been taken seriously and a plan is in effect. If the investigation reveals there are no issues and the parents' concerns are unwarranted, then perhaps the priest can sit with the servants and the parents for reassurance.

If the immediate issue is the matter of the servants using facebook and that it would somehow have a negative impact on their children, the servants can grant them access to their own accounts and even show them what is on their page. Here is where the mind changes for some. The servants may now tend to feel that their facebook is a private matter, when in reality, it really isn't, because other people, or "friends" that gain access to their accounts can easily disclose what is on them already. What about the kids that do have facebook and invite the servant, etc? The next argument might be that the servants' information and pictures are fine, but they cannot control what others have added onto their page. Therefore, the servant must first decide how much of his/her life can be public or private.

Discipleship has a cost. Servants are not under contract by the church priest, but by the guidance of the Holy Spirit through their spiritual fathers must be faithful and diligent. They need to make a decision on how much of their lives will be sincerely consecrated to the service. Children are like sponges. They will absorb more of the subtle non-verbal messages than most of the lectures combined. When we attempt to redirect children to choose appropriate role models, the young servants are usually the ones whom they choose. The message the servants give to the parents must be much more than 'I am not just an Egyptian-American alternative to your child's role model problem,' but rather, 'I am a principled Christian who sincerely cares about you and your children.'"

3. Remember These Verses

- St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians is an excellent Epistle on characteristics of a servant that all servants should read. Here we mention several verses. These are "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak" (1 Corinthians 8:9).

“Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Corinthians 8:13).

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

4. Summary

- Facebook is a major invasion of privacy
- It is impossible for one to control the content on Facebook
- It becomes a major stumbling block to those we serve.
- It becomes a major stumbling block to the servant himself.
- It does more harm than good.
- It is very difficult to use Facebook in a 100% positive way.
- Discipleship has a cost. We must think very hard about how we effect others in our service and what kind of role model we are to others. We must always think about the issue of being a spiritual stumbling block to others.
- Facebook can be a very deceptive social scheme. It looks very innocent and attractive, but it is often spiritually devastating especially to those young in the faith. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8).

The Ecumenical Councils

- The word Ecumenical means “general in extent or influence in promoting worldwide Christian unity”.
- The Ecumenical councils are a very important part of the history of the early church. They also play a very large part in the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- It was at the Fourth Ecumenical Council that the Coptic Church was accused of being Monophysite, that is, Christ only has a divine nature. Thus, the accusation was that His two natures were dissolved and blended into one: the divine. This characterization of Coptic Orthodoxy is, of course, completely incorrect.
- There were a total of seven Ecumenical councils. The Coptic Church only accepts the first three of them.

1. **First Ecumenical Council** - This took place in Nicea, Asia Minor in 325 A.D., under Emperor Constantine the great. 318 Bishops were present.

- **The Arian Heresy** - Arius denied the divinity of Christ. His argument was that if Jesus was born, then there was a time when He did not exist. If He became God, then there was a time when He was not. Believers of this heresy were called Arian and the heresy itself was called Arianism. The Council declared Arius’s teaching a heresy, unacceptable to the Church, and decreed that Christ is God. He is equal to God the Father and that the three persons of the trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are equally eternal (uncreated) and equally divine.
- **The Creed** - The first part of the seven articles of the Nicene Creed were ratified at the First Ecumenical council, ending with “...whose Kingdom has no end.” This is the same Creed that we recite in the Divine Liturgy today.
- **Defenders of Orthodoxy**
 - **St. Athanasius the Great (297 - 373 A.D.)** - he was a fearless champion of Orthodoxy. He spent sixteen of his 45 years as Bishop of Alexandria in exile. He was one of the most profound theologians, and is recognized as one of the great Fathers of the Church.

- **St. Basil the Great (330 - 379 A.D.)** - A natural leader and organizer who spoke and wrote against Arianism. He founded hospitals, orphanages, and welfare agencies. He revised and updated the Divine Liturgy. He made a great contribution to Monasticism, and he was one of the famous Cappadocian Fathers, together with St. Gregory of Nyssa (his brother) and St. Gregory of Nazianzus the Theologian (his close friend). The Cappadocians, along with St. Athanasius the Great, laid the pattern for formulating the doctrines related to the mystery of the Holy Trinity. St. Basil the Great, along with St. Gregory of Nazianzus (the Theologian) and St. John Chrysostom are called the Three Hierarchs.

2. **Second Ecumenical Council** - This took place in Constantinople in 381 A.D., under Emperor Theodosius the Great. 150 Bishops were present.

- **The Macedonian Heresy** - Macedonius, somewhat like Arius, was misinterpreting the Church's teaching on the Holy Spirit. He taught that the Holy Spirit was not a person but rather simply a "power" of God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit was inferior to the Father and the Son. The Council condemned Macedonius's teaching and defined the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The Council decreed that there was one God in three persons (hypostases): Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- **The Creed** - The holy fathers added the last five articles to the Creed, starting with "Yes we believe in the Holy Spirit and the life of the age to come."
- **Defenders of Orthodoxy**
 - **St. Gregory of Nazianzus, the Theologian (329 - 390 A.D.)** - He was a scholar who studied in Athens with St. Basil the Great. He became Patriarch of Constantinople (379 A.D.) and presided at the Second Ecumenical Council. He was a poet and profound thinker. He wrote many poems, hymns, essays, and sermons.
 - **St. Gregory of Nyssa (331 - 396 A.D.)** - He was the younger brother of St. Basil the Great. He was a theologian who delved deeply into the truths of the Faith.
 - **St. John Chrysostom (345 - 407 A.D.)** - He was born and educated in Antioch (Syria). He became Patriarch of Constantinople in 398 A.D. He is known for his eloquent and straightforward sermons. He is nick-named the Golden

Mouth because of his great sermons. He was responsible for the revision of the Divine Liturgy. He died in exile.

3. **Third Ecumenical Council** - This took place in Ephesus, Asia Minor in 431 A.D., under Emperor Theodosius II (grandson of Theodosius the Great). 200 Bishops were present.

- **The Nestorian Heresy** - This heresy concerned the nature of Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Nestorius taught that the Virgin Mary gave birth to a man, Jesus Christ, not God the Logos (Word), the Son of God. The Logos only dwelled in Christ, as in a Temple. Christ therefore was only the “Bearer of God.” Therefore, the Virgin Mary would not be the Mother of God, but rather the Mother of Christ. Thus, the Nestorian heresy taught that Christ was less than God and overemphasized the human nature of Christ at the expense of the divine.
- **Decision** - The Council denounced Nestorius’s teaching as erroneous. Our Lord Jesus Christ is one person, *not* two separate “people”: the Man Jesus Christ and the Son of God, the Word. The Council decreed that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is complete God and complete man. The Virgin Mary is the Theotokos because she gave birth not to a man but to God who became man. The two natures (divine and human) that Christ took were united into one entity.
- **The Creed** - The Council declared the text of the Creed decreed at the First and Second Ecumenical Councils to be complete and forbade any change (addition or deletion).

4. **Fourth Ecumenical Council** - This was held in Chalcedon, near Constantinople in 451 A.D., under Emperor Marcian. 630 Bishops were present.

- **Monophysite Controversy** - The Council was concerned once again with the nature of Christ. There was a misunderstanding that Christ’s human nature dissolved itself in His divine nature, and thus in reality Christ has only one nature, the Divine. The term Monophysite means one nature. Thus, Monophysitism overemphasized the divine nature of Christ, at the expense of the human. Monophysitism is the exact opposite of Nestorianism.
- **Decision** - The Council condemned Monophysitism and proclaimed that Christ has two complete natures: the divine and the human, as defined by the previous councils.

These two natures function without confusion, are not divided, not separate (against Nestorius), and at no time did they undergo any change.

- **Coptic Orthodox Church Accused** - At the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the Coptic Orthodox Church was accused of being Monophysite, which is of course not true. The Coptic Orthodox Church believes that Christ has two natures (human and divine), He is fully man and fully God, and His two natures are mysteriously united into one entity (nature), where this unified entity does not favor one nature over another, but rather this united entity is fully man and fully God.
- The Coptic Orthodox Church does *not* accept the fourth Ecumenical Council.
- As a result of this accusation, there was a split in the Orthodox Churches, into Oriental Orthodoxy and Eastern Orthodoxy. Another name is Non-Chalcedonian and Chalcedonian Churches.
- The Coptic Orthodox Church is an Oriental (Non-Chalcedonian) Orthodox Church.
- The Oriental Orthodox Churches include
 - Coptic Orthodox Church
 - Eritrian Orthodox Church
 - Ethiopian Orthodox Church
 - Indian Orthodox Church
 - Syrian Orthodox Church
 - Armenian Orthodox Church
- The Eastern Orthodox Church includes
 - Greek Orthodox
 - Russian Orthodox
 - Romanian Orthodox

5. **Fifth Ecumenical Council** - This was held in Constantinople in 553 A.D., under Emperor Justinian the Great. 165 Bishops were present.

- **Nestorian Heresy and Eutychian Controversy** - The Council was called in hope of putting an end to the Nestorian heresy and Eutychian (Monophysite) controversy. The Council confirmed the Church's teaching regarding the two natures of Christ (human and divine) and condemned certain writings with Nestorian learnings. Emperor Justinian himself confessed his Orthodox faith.

- The Coptic Orthodox Church does not accept the Fifth Ecumenical Council.
6. **Sixth Ecumenical Council** - This took place in Constantinople in 680 A.D., under Emperor Constantine IV. 170 Bishops were present.
- **The Monothelite Controversy** - It concerned the last attempt to compromise with the Monophysites. The Monophysites believed that although Christ did have two natures (divine and human), He nevertheless acted as God only. In other words, His divine nature made all of the decisions and His human nature only carried and acted them out, hence the name “Monothelism” (mono = one, thelesis = will).
 - **The Councils Pronouncement** - Christ had two natures with two activities: as God working miracles, rising from the dead and ascending into heaven; as Man, performing ordinary acts of daily life. Each nature exercises its own free will. Christ’s divine nature had a specific task to perform and so did His human nature. Each nature performed those tasks set forth without being confused, subjected to any change, or working against each other. The two distinct natures were mystically united into the one Divine Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - The Coptic Orthodox Church does not accept the Sixth Ecumenical Council.
 - **Defender of Orthodoxy** - St. Maximus the Confessor (580 - 662 A.D.). A simple but enlightened monk. He died in exile.

Quinisext Ecumenical Council - This was held in Constantinople in 692 A.D.

- **Legislative Matters** - It is regarded as supplementing the Fifth and Sixth Ecumenical Councils, hence, it is called “Quinisext”. Its work was purely legislative. It ratified 102 canons and the decisions of the previous Ecumenical Councils.
 - **Doctrinal and Disciplinary Canons** - It Sanctioned the so-called “Eighty-five Apostolic Canons” and approved the disciplinary decisions (canons) of certain regional Councils. The Council added a series of disciplinary decisions or canons to the existing ones. The “Quinisext” Council laid the foundation for the Orthodox Canon Law.
 - The Coptic Orthodox Church does not accept the Quinisext Ecumenical Council.
7. **Seventh Ecumenical Council** - This was held in Asia Minor in 787 A.D., under Empress Irene. 367 Bishops were present.

The Iconoclast Controversy - This controversy centered around the use of icons in the Church and the controversy between the iconoclasts and the iconophiles. The Iconoclasts were suspicious of religious art. They demanded that the Church rid itself of such art and that it be destroyed or broken (as the term “iconoclast” implies).

The Iconophiles believed that icons served to preserve the doctrinal teachings of the Church. They considered icons to be man’s dynamic way of expressing the divine through art and beauty. The Iconoclast controversy was a form of Monophysitism: distrust and downgrading on the human side.

- **The Council’s Proclamation** - We define the holy icons, whether in color, mosaic, or some other material, should be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on the sacred vessels and liturgical vestments, on the walls, furnishings, and in houses and along the roads, namely the icons of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, that of our Lady the Theotokos, those of the venerable angels and those of all the saintly people. Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their prototype. We define also that they should be kissed and that they are an object of veneration and honor, but no of real worship, which is reserved for Him Who is the subject of our faith and is proper for the divine nature. He who venerates the icon, venerated in it the reality for which it stands.
- The Coptic Orthodox Church does not accept the Seventh Ecumenical Council because it accuses the Copts of being Iconoclasts.
- **Defenders of Orthodoxy**
 - **St. John of Damascus (675 - 745 A.D.)** - John Mansur was educated at the Caliphate Court in Damascus. He held a position comparable to that of a Prime minister. He was a devout Orthodox Christian. He entered the Monastery of St. Sabbas in Palestine, where he wrote many poems, hymns, and treaties, one of which is called “An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith.” This work is a systematic theological summary of all the basic doctrines of the first seven centuries, a monumental work which became a classic in Orthodox Theology.
 - **The Triumph of Orthodoxy** - An Regional Synod was called in Constantinople in 843 A.D., under Empress Theodora. The veneration of icons was solemnly proclaimed at the St. Sophia’s Cathedral. Monks and clergy came in procession and restored the icons in their rightful place. The day was called “Triumph of

Orthodoxy.” Since that time, this event is commemorated yearly in the Greek Orthodox Church on the first Sunday of Lent, called the “Sunday of Orthodoxy.”

Summary of the Seven Ecumenical Councils

Council	Place and Date	Decision
First Ecumenical Council	Nicea, Asia Minor, 325 A.D.	Formulated the first part of the Creed. Defining the divinity of the Son of God.
Second Ecumenical Council	Constantinople, 381 A. D.	Formulated the Second Part of the Creed, defining the divinity of the Holy Spirit.
Third Ecumenical Council	Ephesus, Asia Minor, 431 A.D.	Defining Christ as the Incarnate Word of God and the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos.
Fourth Ecumenical Council	Chalcedon, Asia Minor, 451 A. D.	Defined Christ as Perfect God and Perfect Man in One Person.
Fifth Ecumenical Council	Constantinople, 553 A.D.	Reconfirmed the Doctrines of the Trinity and Christ.
Sixth Ecumenical Council	Constantinople, 680 A.D.	Affirmed the True Humanity of Jesus by insisting upon the reality of His Human will and action.
Quinisext Council	Constantinople, 692 A.D.	Completed the 5th and 6th Ecumenical Councils.
Seventh Ecumenical Council	Nicea, Asia Minor, 787 A.D.	Affirmed the propriety of icons as genuine expressions of the Christian Faith.

A Brief History of the Christian Church

Today, there are over 2600 groups who lay claim to being the direct descendants of the church described in the New Testament. But for the first four centuries of the Christian era, from the foundation of the Church to the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., the Christian Church was essentially one. Four historic Patriarchal centers - Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome - were established in the first century, and Constantinople in the fourth; yet all these five centers formed a cohesive whole of the Christian Church and were in full communion with each other.

There were heretical or schismatic groups going their own way, but the Church, through ecumenical councils, could keep her unity and settle the orthodox faith. The first Council was held in 325 A.D. at Nicea when representative bishops of all Christians, traditionally numbering 318, assembled to discuss the heresy of Arius who taught against the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Nicene Council condemned Arianism and gave Christianity a creed which has survived to this day. Behind the Nicene triumph stood St. Athanasius the Great, the twentieth Coptic Pope of Alexandria, Egypt (died 373 A.D.), who, still a young deacon, came to the Council with his old patriarch, Alexander. The final victory of orthodoxy was achieved at the second ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D., when 150 bishops condemned another heresy. Macedonius claimed that the Holy Spirit is not the eternal Spirit of God but a created one. The council completed the Nicene Creed asserting that the Holy Spirit is the Life-giving Lord Who proceeds from the Father. The following century saw St. Cyril the Great of Alexandria (died 444), who presided in 431 the Council of Ephesus where 200 bishops condemned Nestorius, the formidable Patriarch of Constantinople, who rejected the term Theotokos, the Mother of God, in regard to the Holy Virgin St. Mary.

This idea led to the inference of the dual nature of the Lord Jesus; His divinity and His humanity. This dualism was decreed in the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., in spite of the objection of the Coptic Pope Dioscorus. Thence, the Church was divided into two groups: Rome and Constantinople, who accepted the doctrine of two united natures, on one side, and Alexandria and Antioch who held the belief of one nature out of two natures of the Incarnate Lord. In 589 A.D., in the synod of Toledo, Spain, the filioque, a doctrine claims that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, was added to the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed. This error was later adopted by Rome. The addition of the filioque clause, and the

issue of Rome's claim to a universal (Catholic) papal supremacy, caused a schism between Rome (surnamed the Roman Catholic Church) and Constantinople (surnamed the Greek Orthodox Church). Another schism took place in 1517 A.D. when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Roman Church of Wittenberg, Germany, starting the Protestant Reformation. Then Protestantism was divided into hundreds of Churches holding different doctrines.

Finally, in the 1990's, the two Orthodox families, the Chalcedonian Churches including the Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, Serbian..., and the Non-Chalcedonian Churches including the Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian,... came to an agreement of one faith that The Lord is perfect in His divinity as well as in His humanity, and the unity between both natures is real. By the great effort of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, the recent Coptic Pope, and His fellow Orthodox Patriarchs, this agreement is achieved and the unity of Orthodoxy is accomplished, yet, it will be decreed formally by the orthodox Synods in the near future.

Features of the Coptic Church

1. **The Term "Copt"** - The term "Copt" and "Egyptian" have the same meaning as derived from the Greek word aigyptos. With the suppression of the prefix, the suffix of the word, the stem "gypt" has become part of the words for "Egypt" and for "Copt" in all the modern languages of Latin origin. The Coptic Church then is simply the Egyptian Church.
2. **The Coptic Language** - It is the last shape of the language of the ancient Egyptians. The earlier shapes represented in the Hieroglyphic and Hieratic and Demotic alphabet became inaccessible to the growing needs of daily life. After the spread of Christianity, Egyptian scholars trans-literated Egyptian texts into the Greek alphabet, and adopted the last seven additional letters of the Coptic alphabet from their own Demotic.
3. **The Founders of the Church** - The Copts pride themselves on the apostolicity of their national church, whose founder was none other than St. Mark, one of the four Evangelists and the writer of the oldest canonical Gospel. John Mark is regarded by the Coptic hierarchy as the first in their unbroken chain of 117 popes. He is also the first of a stream of Egyptian saints and glorious martyrs.
4. **Church of Martyrs** - After the martyrdom of St. Mark, the Coptic Church faced severe persecutions. The seventh persecution inflamed by emperor Diocletian; his reign (284-305)

is considered by the Copts as the age of persecution. Under Maximin Daia (305-313), his successor in the East, the massacre continued for eight years of systematic killing. This could account for tremendous number of martyrs. So profound was the impression of the persecution of Diocletian on Coptic life and thought that the Copts decided to adopt for church use a calendar of the martyrs, the "Anno Martyri". The first year of that calendar was 284 A.D., the year of the disastrous accession of Diocletian.

5. **School of Alexandria** - The school of Alexandria was undoubtedly the earliest important institution of theological learning in Christian antiquity. It was a college in which many other disciplines were studied from the humanities, science and mathematics; but its main discipline was religion. According to Eusebius, its founder was St. Mark who appointed Lustus as its dean, (later on, Lustus became the sixth patriarch). Most of the eminent leaders of Alexandria like Clement, Origen, Dionysius, Athanasius, Didymus the Blind and Cyril, were known to have been connected with it, either as teachers or students.
6. **The Church of Monasticism** - The Christian Church heavily indebted for the creation of monasticism which started in Egypt. Although St. Paul the Theban (died 340) is considered the first hermit, the origins of monasticism are ascribed to St. Anthony (251-356) whose fame was spread by his famous biography written by St. Athanasius. The Fathers of the Church from numerous parts of the world came to Egypt for training in the way of monasticism. Monasticism has survived in Egypt and has given the Coptic Church an unbroken line of 117 Popes beginning with St. Mark. Although most of the monasteries have disappeared under the Arab persecution there is a revival in the surviving ones.

Comparative Theology of the Orthodox and Protestant Faiths

- It is very important to know the differences between Orthodoxy and other denominations, including Protestants and Catholics.
 - The word Protestant come from the word protest. The Protestant church arose out of protest over the practices of the Catholic Church in the 16th century, in the year 1517 AD.
 - Martin Luther was the main figure in the protest. He had been a Catholic monk who became disillusioned with the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church had been corrupt in several ways. Martin Luther led the Protestant Reformation which led to the Protestant church.
 - The Protestant Church includes many divisions and denominations including Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Calvinist, and so many others.
 - There are many, many differences between the Orthodox faith and the Protestant faith. The main differences between Orthodoxy and Protestantism are in
 - Dogma (for example, the Sacraments)
 - Faith and Salvation
 - The Church system
 - Prayer
1. The most fundamental differences between the two faiths is in the Sacraments. Protestants do not believe in the Seven Sacraments of the Orthodox Church.
 - **Baptism** - Protestants do believe in a form of baptism, but they do not believe in infant baptism as the Orthodox church believes. There is absolutely no Biblical passage which specifically forbids infant baptism. Through baptism, you become a member of the Kingdom of God. So why shouldn't infants become members of that Kingdom? Who are we to deprive them of such a blessing? Christ says, "of such is the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14).

- **Chrismation** - Protestants do not believe in the Sacrament of Chrismation, that is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the human heart at Baptism. Thus, Protestants do not believe that the Holy Spirit dwells within us through Chrismation.
- **Communion** - Protestants do *not* believe that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus at communion. They believe that the bread and wine are only a symbol of His body and blood and are never transformed into His actual body and blood. Jesus Himself said, “Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:53-54). The Protestant church does not administer Communion every Sunday. It only administers it on occasion.
- **Matrimony** - Protestants do believe in marriage, but they do not treat it as a Holy Sacrament. They also allow divorce under any circumstances. Jesus said, “But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality cause here to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 5:32).
- **Unction of the Sick** - Protestants do not believe in this Sacrament of healing. The Orthodox Church has a Biblical basis for this Sacrament. In the Bible we read “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let him pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5:14, Mark 6:13, James 16:18).
- **Priesthood** - Protestants do not believe in priesthood. Their clergy are called ministers, and are not necessarily devoted to serving God. They may have other jobs, they may be divorced, etc... Protestants also allow women as well as gay ministers. Protestants also do not believe in spiritual fatherhood.
- **Confession and Repentance** - Protestants do not believe in confession to a priest. They believe only in confession to God. The Orthodox church believes that we must confess our sins to God first, then to a priest. There are many passages in the Bible which talk about confession to a priest: “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed (James 5:16, 1 John 1:8-10). There are many verses in the Bible which say that the Apostles and their successors have authority “to bind and to loose” the sins of the people (Matthew 16:19, 18:18. John

20:20-23). Now in order to exercise that power, they have to know the sins of the people. And for them to know the sins, the people have to confess before them.

Repentance is a Sacrament in Orthodoxy, and thus a Holy Mystery. Since Protestants do not believe in Sacraments, they do not believe it is a Holy Mystery. In Orthodox theology, the Church and the Clergy play a large role in one's repentance. Our sins are confessed to the priest and then repentance takes place. Protestants do not do this. The church nor the clergy play any role in repentance. Repentance for Protestants is individualist and comes from one's heart in their relationship to God. This is only partially correct, for repentance starts within and is completed by the church. Repentance in Orthodoxy also plays a major role in salvation, whereas Protestants do not link salvation with repentance. Rather they believe that you are saved only by the blood of Christ and your faith, and thus repentance play no role.

2. **Nature of Christ** - The Coptic Orthodox Church believes that Christ has two natures (human and divine) that are united into one entity. Protestants do not believe that these two natures are united, but rather distinct and act separately.

3. **Tradition** - Protestants reject church traditions and all writings of the Church Fathers regarding church dogma and how the church should be guided. Protestants rely on their own views and guidelines in determining church doctrine and church guidance. St. Paul says, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

4. **Monasticism** - Protestants reject monastic and ascetic life.

5. **Salvation**

- Protestants believe that salvation is by faith *alone*, and heavily rely on the verse "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17, Habakkuk 2:4). The Orthodox church believes that both faith and works are necessary for salvation. We read in the epistle of St. James that "Thus, also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17).
- Protestants also believe in being "born again" in which there is a moment in ones life that they accept Christ as their Savior, and at that moment they are saved. Thus, protestants believe in the notion of instantaneous salvation. The Orthodox church

believes that salvation is a life long process that begins at baptism and ends when we die. Our relationship with Christ is a life long process, and in this process we may be saved or we may lose our way and not be saved. The notion of being “born again” is related to the statement of Jesus, “Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3), and “Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Thus, being “born again” for Orthodox Christians is being baptized. This is how we Orthodox Christians interpret being born again.

6. **Saints** - Protestants do not believe in, or honor the saints. In fact, they believe that we are all saints, since St. Paul often used the word “saint” to address the churches in his letters.
7. **Intercession** - Protestants do not believe in the intercessions or prayers of the saints.
8. **St. Mary** - Protestants do not believe in the perpetual virginity of St. Mary. They believe that Jesus was in fact born of the Holy Spirit, but after Jesus, St. Mary had children with Joseph through human intercourse. This misunderstanding is partly due to Biblical references that say that Jesus had “brothers”. In those days, a “brother” also meant a cousin. James the son of Alphaeus and Joses were Jesus’s cousins. They were the sons of Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary the wife of Clopas was the sister of the Virgin Mary. “While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him” (Matthew 12:46). “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (Acts 1:14). We also have a Biblical verse for the virginity of St. Mary, namely, “And the Lord said to me, ‘This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut’” (Ezekiel 44:2).
9. **The Holy Bible** - Protestants believe that the reader of the Bible has the authority to interpret the Bible any way they want. That is, man has authority over the Bible. They believe in the variety and freedom of dogma. The Orthodox Church interprets the Bible based on Church interpretations and writings of the early Church Fathers. That is, the Orthodox Church believes that the Church has authority in interpreting the Bible.
10. **Fasting** - Protestants do not believe in fasting. There are so many Biblical bases for

fasting: Jesus fasted on the mount, Old Testament examples (Daniel 9:3), and when Jesus said “However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21).

11. **Speaking in Tongues** - Protestants emphasize the gift of speaking in tongues. St. Paul talks about this gift in Chapters 12 - 14 of 1st Corinthians. Speaking in tongues is a heavenly type of language that was spoken in the early Church so that the Gospel could be spread more easily. This gift is always accompanied by an interpreter, as the Apostle Paul says, “Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret” (1 Corinthians 14:13). He also adds, “But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church” (1 Corinthians 14:28). This gift is not needed in modern day Christianity since Christianity has now been around for over 2000 years. Yet, Protestants still practice “speaking in tongues”, which results in meaningless sounds and noises that no one understands. This practice is often demonic in these modern times. The Bible says, “Whether there are tongues, they will cease” (1 Corinthians 13:8). The Coptic Church emphasizes gifts that edify rather than the gift of tongues. In particular, the Coptic Church emphasizes preaching and teaching over the notion of speaking on tongues. St. Paul says, “Let all things be done for edification” (1 Corinthians 14:26), and “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel” (1 Corinthians 14:12). For the sake of edifying the church, St. Paul says, “He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues” (1 Corinthians 14:5) because “he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church” (1 Corinthians 14:4). The word prophesy also means teaching here.
12. **Veneration of the Cross** - Protestants do not make the sign of the cross when they pray nor do they say, “In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.” They do not make the sign of the cross before eating, nor do they use the cross to bless people or clothes. They do not kiss the cross nor do they take a blessing from it. Protestants are content in believing that the cross rests in their heart and does not need to be used. In Orthodoxy, there is much emphasis on the cross in the church, in the liturgy, in prayer, with the priest, and with the congregation. The cross plays a major role in the daily life of the Orthodox Christian believer.
13. **Facing the East** - Orthodox Churches are made facing the East. There are many Biblical reasons for this. In Genesis (Chapter 1), God created the sun on the fourth day and man on the sixth day, and the sun rises from the East. Thus, the East is a source of light for

God. The Lord is also called the “Sun of Righteousness” (Malachi 4:2). God also planted the Garden of Eden in the East (Genesis 8:2). The Magi saw the star of Christ in the East (Matthew 2:2). The star was a symbol of divine guidance. Christianity and the Church began in the East. Jerusalem is in the East. And in Matthew, we read that in Jesus’s second coming, He will come from the East, “The Son of Man will come from the East” (Matthew 24:27). Thus, we face Christ when we pray towards the East. Protestant churches can face any direction and no attention or importance whatsoever is given to the East.

14. **The Sanctuary and the Altar** - There is neither a sanctuary nor an altar in Protestant churches. The reason for this is that there is no sacrifice, that is, the sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus Christ on the cross for our salvation. In the Orthodox Church, the sanctuary and the altar is a very holy place. The altar can only be occupied by the priest and the deacons, and no one else can stand there.
15. **Incense** - Protestants do not use incense or censers in their services, considering them part of Old Testament worship, and hence outdated. Incense plays a very major role on Orthodox worship. The use of incense is mentioned in so many places in the Old Testament (Exodus, Chapters 25 and 30, and Leviticus, Chapter 16) as well as the New Testament (Revelation 5:8, 8:34). Incense represents the fragrant perfume that ascends before the Lord. Incense has many spiritual meanings. It is symbolic of a burnt offering to the Lord. Burning incense ascends upwards. It rises to the sky and points to heaven. Incense resembles the sweet aroma. It also reminds us of the cloud in which the Lord appeared. The Lord says, “I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat” (Leviticus 16:13). The Lord God appeared to Moses in a cloud. In Christ’s second coming, He will come on the clouds (Matthew 24:30).
16. **Lights and Candles** - The Orthodox Church is characterized by its lights. We use candles in our prayers, during the reading of the Gospel, in front of the Icons and saints, on the altar, in the sanctuary. In front of the altar on the Eastern side, the church remains lighted constantly. The Protestant church does not use candles in its service. Candles represent the light (lamp) of Christ, for He is “the light of the world” (John 8:12). The lights and candles in the church also represent the angels in heaven and the saints. The oil that lights the lamps represents the Holy Spirit.
17. **Pictures and Icons** - Protestants do not use pictures or Icons in their church. They

consider them against the second commandment which says, “You shall not make for yourself any carved image, ...” (Exodus 20:4-5). As Orthodox believers, we do *not* worship the icons, but rather venerate (honor) them, and thus venerate those to whom they belong. According to the Lord’s words to His disciples, “If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor” (John 12:26). Thus, if the Father venerates His saints, should we not venerate them? In venerating icons, we are in effect venerating their owners. When we kiss the Gospel, we show our love to the word of God and to God who gave us His commandments for our guidance.

18. **Liturgical Prayer** - Protestants do not use liturgical prayer in their Sunday Church services. Their church services every Sunday are without any format nor do they pray specific prayers. It is a freestyle prayer in which one Sunday consists of only a sermon, another Sunday singing, another Sunday reading from the Bible, etc... In fact, Communion is not even given every Sunday, but only occasionally. They interpret liturgical prayer as “vain repetition,” where Jesus says, “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do” (Matthew 6:7). Liturgical prayer is *not* vain repetition. Vain repetition is a desperate form of prayer. It is prayer without faith. It is the type of prayer that believes that with repeated and desperate pleas to God, He will finally listen. That is not what liturgical prayer is. Liturgical prayer is important. It is beautifully and wholly rooted in the Bible and makes use of the entire Bible for the interpretation of the stages in the mystery of salvation from a Christological standpoint. It is also based on tradition, which is an important element in Orthodox theology. In fact, the variety of church services and liturgical prayer in the Orthodox Church is quite considerable. There is Vespers, Matins, Midnight Service (Tasbeha), and three different Divine Liturgies, according to St. Basil, St. Gregory, and St. Cyril. Moreover, the Fraction, Deacon’s hymns, Doxologies, Bible Readings, Synaxarium, and Deacon’s responses vary accordingly during the Church year.
19. **The Millennium Rule** - There are major differences in the interpretation of the Book of Revelation between the Protestant and Orthodox Churches. The Protestant church has literal interpretations of some of the things mentioned, whereas the Orthodox Church interprets many things as symbolic. One of the biggest differences between the two churches is the interpretation of the “1,000 years” mentioned in Chapter 20. We read in Revelation that “He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:2). First, the phrase “thousand years” is

symbolic, and it is not to be interpreted literally as meaning an actual 1,000 years. The thousand years is symbolic of perfection, a perfect period of time as determined by God in which Satan is bound. Second, the Orthodox Church believes that we are now currently living in this era of the 1,000 years for which Satan is bound. When Christ descended to Hades after His Crucifixion, He bound Satan, and thus since then, Satan has limited powers and can only affect us through thoughts. Thus, for Orthodox Christians, we believe that we are now living in the era of the “thousand years” in which Satan has been bound, and we have been living in that era since the resurrection of Jesus. Our Protestant brethren do not interpret the verse this way and believe that the binding of Satan is still yet to come and that Satan was *not* bound as a result of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

The phrase “thousand years” also occurs in Revelation 20:4, where we read about Christ reigning with the saints a thousand years. We read, “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” Orthodox Christians believe that we are currently living in this period of the thousand years in which Christ is reigning with us. That is, after the resurrection of Jesus, He now reigns with the believers in this perfect period. Again, the 1,000 years is only symbolic of a perfect period of time. Our Protestant brethren believe that this reign has not yet occurred and that Christ will literally come and reign with the believers a period of exactly 1,000 years after the end of the world. Protestants then believe that after this 1,000 year reign, there will be the judgment, and the creation of the new Jerusalem. This interpretation of the reign of Christ for 1,000 years is erroneous according to the Orthodox Church.

Expiation by Substitution - The word expiation means atonement. Our Protestant brethren adhere to the theory of expiation by substitution, that is Christ “died in our place” meaning that He died as a representative, that is, our substitute. Orthodox Christians believe that Christ “died for our sake,” and *not* as a substitute for us. That is, we indeed participate in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and we are not mere bystanders. For example, we participate in the death and crucifixion of Jesus through Holy Communion, as the disciples participated at the Last Supper. We also participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus in baptism. When we are immersed into the baptismal font, we die

with Jesus and when we are raised out of the font, this is our resurrection with Him. St. Paul makes this point very clear in several of his epistles. In the participation of the crucifixion, St. Paul says, “We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed” (Romans 6:6), and “I have been crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). St. Paul also says, “For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the sinful body might be destroyed ... But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Romans 6:5, 6, 8). Also, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

Comparative Theology of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Faiths - Part I

- There was one unified Church from the time of the Pentecost until 451 AD. In 451 A.D. there was a split in the Church into Chalcedonian and Non-Chalcedonian Churches, as a result of the 4th Ecumenical Council. The Coptic Church was one of the Non-Chalcedonian Churches. In the 1990's, the Orthodox Chalcedonian and Non-Chalcedonian Churches came to an agreement of one faith that our Lord Jesus Christ is perfect in His divinity as well as in His humanity, and the unity between both natures is real. By the efforts of Pope Shenouda III, and his fellow Orthodox Patriarchs, the agreement is achieved and the unity of Orthodoxy is accomplished, yet, it will be decreed formally by the Orthodox Synods in the near future.
 - The next split in the Church came in 1054 AD between the Church in Rome and Constantinople. The split resulted in the creation of the Roman Catholic Church, which started in the Church of Rome. This split is known as the Great Schism in the church.
 - In 1517 AD, there was the Protestant Reformation by Martin Luther, which led to another split and resulted in the creation of the Protestant Church, of which there are thousands of denominations.
1. **The Primacy of the Pope of Rome** - One of the most fundamental errors of the Roman Church, which partly facilitated the split of the Church, was the idea that the Bishop of Rome (now the Pope) is the supreme head of the whole Christian Church. The authority of the Church before the split was *not* based in Rome. Rome and Constantinople were the two centers of the Chalcedonian Churches at that time, and the Non-Chalcedonian Churches were based in Alexandria and Antioch. Thus, the Great Schism was the split between the Chalcedonian Churches in Rome and Constantinople.
 2. **Was St. Peter Bishop of Rome?** - The Roman Catholic Church maintains that St. Peter was the first Bishop of Rome. The Orthodox Church does not adhere to this. There is much evidence in the Bible that St. Paul organized the Church in Rome. From the Book of Acts and St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the Roman Church had been fully established at that time, and St. Peter was not present in Rome. At the end of St. Paul's

Epistle to the Romans, St. Peter is never mentioned. The Orthodox view is that St. Paul had found the church in Rome already in existence and what he did is reorganize it and establish it in the fullness of the Faith. St. Peter went to Rome after St. Paul had finished his work there.

Another disagreement by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches is in the interpretation of the verse “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). The Catholic Church interprets this as it is St. Peter himself who is the rock and that the whole Church is founded upon St. Peter, and thus St. Peter has supreme authority over all of the disciples. This is not the interpretation of the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox viewpoint is that Jesus was referring to Peter’s faith in this verse and *not* Peter himself, upon which the Church will be founded.

3. **The Filioque** - One of the great errors that also led to the Great Schism in 1054 AD is the *Filioque*. Filioque is a Latin word, which literally means “and from the Son.” It was a word inserted into the Church’s Creed, so that it would read “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life who proceeds from the Father and the Son.” This insertion was against the ruling of the third Ecumenical Council declaring the Creed complete and forbidding any changes in 431 AD. The insertion “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life who proceeds from the Father and the Son” is completely against Orthodox Christianity, since Orthodox Christians believe that the Holy Spirit proceeds *only* from the Father, and *not* the Son, as stated in the Bible. We read, “The Spirit of Truth, which proceeds from the Father, He shall testify of Me.” (John 15:26).
4. **Purgatory** - Purgatory, the Roman Catholic Church maintains, is a state that occurs after one’s death on earth in which souls which are free from mortal sin, but not free from venial sin, or not having fully satisfied for the temporal punishment due those sins whose guilt has been forgiven, are detained until they are cleansed, and then will be admitted to heaven. The Orthodox Church, on the other hand, holds, as the early Church held, that there are *only two* states in the future: permanent punishment in hell and permanent reward in heaven (eternal life). According to the Orthodox Church, those who depart from this life before the second coming of Christ receive only in part, punishment or reward. It is a foretaste of the everlasting state. At the Final Judgment retribution is received in full; so there is no place for a third state in the Orthodox doctrine. The notion of Purgatory is inconsistent with the Bible and the traditions of the early Church. Certainly the thief on

the cross did not go to a third state after his death to satisfy for the guilt of his sinfulness which was forgiven him. Purgatory also makes a mockery of Christ's suffering on the cross. If there is a need for Purgatory, then Christ's atonement for our sins on the cross is incomplete and deficient.

Indulgences - Closely connected with the doctrine of Purgatory is the doctrine of Indulgences. It is a remission, so to speak, of a part of the punishment in Purgatory for certain devout acts performed on earth. The supreme bestower of indulgences is the Pope, who dispenses, as it were, the excessive merits of the saints and uses them to remit part of the punishment one is bound to suffer in Purgatory. This notion again makes a mockery of the central truth of the atonement on the cross. It is true that the Orthodox Church prays for the dead, but it cannot dictate, control, or guarantee the mercy that God chooses to have on an individual. Orthodoxy believes that God is just; He punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. No man, however, can prevent God from giving His mercies or punishment on whom He chooses. Our duty is to pray for the departed souls, and it is not for us to speculate whether or not God will lessen their punishment.

5. **The Immaculate Conception** - In 1854, Pope Pius IX promulgated this dogma, namely that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived in her mother's womb free from the stain of original sin which all men are born. This is inconsistent with Orthodox doctrine, which believes that the only person born without original sin is Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary. The Orthodox Church honors St. Mary and venerates her more than any other saint, and asks for her intercession more than any other saint, but it does *not* accept the notion of her immaculate conception because it is against the Bible. St. Paul says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The Virgin Mary was *not* exempt from this blemish. She was born *with* original sin like all humanity, and was cleansed from it in preparation for her conception of Christ after Archangel Gabriel greeted her with: "Rejoice, highly favored one. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28). In the Greek translation the verse is translated as "Hail to you O full of Grace. Blessed are you among women." Then she replied, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Also, when St. Mary visited Elizabeth (her cousin) when she was pregnant in her sixth month with St. John the Baptist, Elizabeth said to her, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:42).

6. **Papal Infallibility** - In 1870, the dogma of the Infallibility of the Pope was solemnly promulgated, being an extension of the notion of Papal Primacy. Papal Infallibility is the notion that the Pope speaks infallibly when he makes a declaration on the faith and morals of the Church. Such a dogma is in sharp contrast with the life of the Early Church and it is inconsistent with Orthodox belief. The Orthodox Church believes that it is not infallible in the Pope, but rather is infallible in the totality of the clergy, laity, and the entire Church as a whole. Thus, the Church is not infallible in one person, no matter the position of that person in the Church. The mind of the Church as a whole, and not one person, determines a particular dogma and assumes formal and authoritative expression in Ecumenical Councils consisting of the *totality* of all local bishops representing the entire Church under the infallible guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Comparative Theology of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Faiths - Part II

- In this part, we will focus on the differences between the Orthodox and Catholic faiths with respect to the Holy Sacraments and the Divine Liturgy.
- The Catholic Church believes in the seven Church Sacraments as the Orthodox Church does, but there are some major differences.

1. Holy Communion

- In the Roman Catholic Church, the Blood of Jesus is sometimes withheld from the congregation and only the clergy drink from the Chalice. This is not consistent the Bible and Orthodox doctrine, since Jesus said at the Last Supper, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28). Thus, withholding the Blood from the congregation is a direct violation of the commandment of Christ at the Last Supper. Nothing can be clearer than the words of Christ, “Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53).
- Communion is sometimes administered by the lay people in the congregation. In the Orthodox Church, only the priest can give the Body and Blood. If a deacon is ordained a full deacon or archdeacon, he can administer the Blood, but not the Body.
- The Catholic Church does not use bread in Communion, but rather a little wafer of dried dough, which the Roman Church calls unleavened bread, but which has no resemblance to unleavened bread. The Orthodox Church uses leavened bread, that is, bread made with yeast. The yeast resembles the sin of man that Christ bore on the cross and came to cleanse.
- The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ in the Divine Liturgy at the moment when the priest utters the words of Christ, “Take eat, this is My body” (Matthew 26:26) and “Drink from it all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28). The Orthodox Church believes that the bread and wine

become the Body and Blood (transubstantiation) after the priest invokes the Holy Spirit (Epiclesis), praying to Him to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. The priest says in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy, “And this bread He makes into His Holy Body. And this cup also, into the precious Blood of His new covenant.”

2. **Holy Baptism** - Instead of immersing the infant into the water at baptism three times as was done in the Early Church and currently done in the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church instead pours the water over the head of the infant. This practice goes against the meaning of baptism in which we die with Christ through immersion and are resurrected with Christ when we are raised from the baptismal font. Immersion three times resembles the three day burial and resurrection of Christ. St. Paul himself said, “Therefore we are buried with Him through baptism onto death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

3. **Chrismation**

- The Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation) is the receiving of the Holy Spirit. The Catholic Church has separated the Sacrament of Chrismation from Baptism. In the Orthodox Church, Baptism and Chrismation are performed at the same time, and thus the infant is chrismated at the time of Baptism. The Catholic Church does not believe in infant Chrismation. In the Catholic Church, the newly baptized infants are deprived of receiving the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Chrismation until they reach a suitable age of “discernment and discretion”. Therefore, the newly baptized infant in the Catholic church *cannot* receive Communion until they are chrismated. On the other hand, the Orthodox Church immediately administers Communion to the newly baptized and chrismated infant in the Divine Liturgy which follows directly after baptism, thus completing the rite of Christian initiation according to the apostolic practice. To deprive an infant of Holy Communion is to refuse a regenerated soul the very food of salvation.
- Chrismation in the Catholic Church is administered by Bishops only, whereas in the Orthodox Church, it can be administered by priests.

4. **Priesthood**

- The clergy in the Catholic Church *must* be celibate (unmarried). This is not the doctrine in the Orthodox Church, which requires the priest to be married before being ordained. There are some exceptions in the Orthodox Church, in which the priest *chooses* to be celibate before being ordained. The main difference here is that celibacy is *not* a requirement for priesthood in the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church highly exalts virginity, both among men and women, as superior to marriage (especially in monasticism), but never has compelled the clergy to abstain from marriage. The notion of celibacy of the clergy is not consistent with the Early Church and the Bible. In the Bible, we read, “His disciples said to Him, ‘If such is the case of the man and his wife, it is better not to marry.’ But He said to them. ‘All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it’” (Matthew 19:10-12). Lifelong virginity, consequently, is a gift and vocation that comes from God and not all men and women receive this gift. St. Paphnutius’s wise counsel at the first Ecumenical Council in 325 A.D. saved the Early Church and Orthodoxy from having celibacy imposed on all the Clergy. He said, “Do not impose a heavy burden upon ordained men, for everybody cannot bear the practice of apathia.” Thus, the Catholic Church belittles the Sacrament of Matrimony by forbidding its clergy to receive this sacrament and the graces which accompany it.
- Priests shave their beards in the Catholic Church, whereas in the Orthodox Church, they grow them without cutting or trimming them to indicate that they have given themselves to Christ and do not conform to the ways of this world.

5. **Unction of the Sick** - The Catholic Church administers the Holy Unction only at the deathbed of the sick. This lacks foundation and is not consistent with the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church rightly administers this sacramental rite whenever a member of the Church who suffers sickness asks for it, and it can be repeated on one person during his lifetime. The justification of this practice in the Orthodox Church is found in the epistle of St. James, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let him pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14). Also, see Mark 6:13 and Mark 16:18.

6. **Kneeling** - In the Catholic Divine Liturgy, which they call Mass, there is continuous kneeling, including kneeling during Communion. This is a departure from the Early Church. We stand most of the time during the Liturgy in the Orthodox Church, since it is a joyful day of the Resurrection of Christ, a day of forgiveness and spiritual rejoicing, while kneeling expresses penance and sadness. The Divine Liturgy is a joyful celebration of the Resurrection of Christ. Tertullian of the 3rd century said, "We, according to the traditions we have received, on the day of the Lord's resurrection, and on it alone, ought to refrain from kneeling."

7. **Divine Liturgy**

- In the Catholic Church, the priests and the congregation do not sing the liturgy. It is said in a plain voice. On the other hand, in the Orthodox Church, the entire liturgy is sung by the priest, deacons, and the congregation.
- The Catholic Church uses the same priest and same Altar to conduct several liturgies on the same day. In the Orthodox Church, the priest can only do one liturgy per day and an Altar can only be used once per day. In addition, one can take Holy Communion only in one liturgy on a given day. That is, we cannot partake of Holy Communion in two different liturgies given on the same day. The multiplicity of liturgies on one altar on the same day is offensive to the piety of the Orthodox, since it destroys the significance of the notion of a community of faithful and detracts from the sense of unity of fellowship in the Eucharist.

8. **Fasting** - The definition of fasting in the Catholic Church is not the same as in the Orthodox Church. For example, during Lent, meat, cheese, fish, and dairy products are allowed in the Catholic Church, and even on Friday's during lent, fish and dairy products are allowed. The Orthodox Church does not allow any animal products or fish during lent, and it does not allow animal products in fasts other than lent.

9. **Carved Images and Statues** - Statues are common in Catholic Churches, whereas statues or carved images are not used in the Orthodox Church. Part of the reason that the Orthodox church does not use statues and carved images is that statues or carved images tend to stress the carnal (bodily) presence of the carved figure. Thus, it is not a matter of idolatry which is how the Protestant Church feels about statues as well as icons. The Orthodox Church does *not* believe that statues are a form of idolatry. Statues appeal too

much to the senses, whereas pictures or icons make the soul of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or the Saints more living and real.

10. **Calendar** - The Orthodox Church follows the Julian Calendar and the Catholic Church follows the Gregorian Calendar. Thus, the date of Easter for the Catholic and Orthodox Churches is different.

Between 326 A.D. and 1582 A.D., Christianity determined Easter using an algorithm approved by the First Ecumenical Council in 325 A.D., with the equinox defined as March 21. From 1054 A.D. (when the Orthodox and Catholic Churches split) through 1582 A.D., both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches celebrated Easter on the same date, still using the algorithm from 325 A.D. The Julian Calendar was used by the European (and Christian) communities until the Gregorian reform of 1582. Since October of 1582 (when the Gregorian Calendar was adopted by much of Catholic Europe), the Orthodox Easter usually falls on dates different than the Western Christian Easter. The Orthodox Church currently uses the Julian Calendar to determine Easter.

Saint Mary in the Orthodox Concept - Part I

- Saint Mary is regarded as the highest saint in the Orthodox Church. She is higher than all the heavenly saints and any man or woman saint who ever lived.
- She is called the Theotokos, which is a Greek word meaning Mother of God. Saint Mary is the Mother of God.
- The Coptic church focuses on the life of Saint Mary in the month of August.
- The fast of Saint Mary is from August 7 - August 21.
- The feast of the assumption of Saint Mary is August 22.

We focus this discussion on the life of Saint Mary and discuss the feasts of the Theotokos, as well as some minor feasts of Christ which involve Saint Mary.

1. **The Annunciation of the Birth of Saint Mary** - This is the day celebrating the annunciation of the birth of Saint Mary to Joachim, the father of Saint Mary. Joachim and Anna were the parents of Saint Mary. This day is celebrated on 7 Misra (August 13th). On this day, God sent His honorable angel Gabriel to announce to Saint Joachim of the birth of the Virgin, the mother of the incarnated God. This righteous man and his wife Saint Anna (Hannah) were stricken in years and had no children for Anna was barren. The children of Israel used to insult him because he had not begotten a son. Because of this, these two saints were sad, and prayed continually, and entreated God by day and by night. They vowed that the child they would beget would be made a steward for the temple. While Saint Joachim was praying over the mountain, he fell into a deep sleep and Gabriel, the angel of the Lord, appeared to him and announced to him that his wife Anna would conceive and bear a child, that would delight his eyes and please his heart; and likewise all the world would rejoice and be glad. When he woke from his sleep, he came to his house, and told his wife about the vision, which she believed. Anna conceived forthwith, and brought forth our Lady, the Virgin Mary, and Saint Anna became more honorable than all the women of the world.

2. **The Birth of Saint Mary** - The birth of Saint Mary is celebrated on 1 Bashans (May 9th). On this day the church celebrates the birth of the pure Virgin Saint Mary, the Mother of God (Theotokos), through whom Salvation came to mankind. She was born in the city of Nazareth, where her parents lived. Her father was grieved in his heart for he could not offer an offering to God for he did not have any children. In the fullness of time according to the Divine Will, the angel of the Lord was sent to announce Joachim, her father, while he was on the mountain praying, and said to him: "The Lord will give you offspring through whom salvation comes to the world." Immediately he went down the mountain believing what the angel told him, and he told his wife Anna of what he saw and heard. She rejoiced, gave thanks to the Lord, and vowed that the child who was to be born to her would become a servant in the house of the Lord all the days of her/his life. She conceived, and gave birth to this Saint and called her Mary who had become the Queen of all women of the world, and through her we have received the grace.

3. **The Entrance of Saint Mary into the Temple at Jerusalem** - The Entrance of Saint Mary into the Temple at Jerusalem is celebrated on 3 Kiahk (December 13). On this day we commemorate the entrance of our holy Lady, the Virgin, Saint Mary, the Theotokos, into the Temple when she was three years old, for she was dedicated to God. Her mother, Anna (Hannah), was childless. The women who were in the Temple stayed away from her. She was exceedingly sad and so was her husband Joachim who was a blessed old man. She prayed to God fervently and with a contrite heart saying, "If You give me a fruit, I will devote the child to Your Holy Temple." God answered her prayers and she brought forth this pure saint and called her Mary. She reared her for three years, after which she took her to live with the virgins in the Temple. Saint Mary dwelt in the sanctuary for 12 years. She received her food from the hands of the angels, until the time when our Lord Christ came into the world, and was incarnated through her, the elect of all women. When she had completed 12 years of age in the sanctuary, the priests took counsel together concerning her, so that they might entrust her to someone who would protect her, for she was consecrated to God and they were not allowed to keep her in the temple after this age. They decided that she be engaged to a man who could take care of her and who would look after her. They gathered 12 righteous men from the house of David of the Tribe of Judah so they might place her with one of them. They took their staffs inside the Sanctuary, and a dove flew up and stood on the staff belonging to Joseph the carpenter who was a righteous man. They knew that this was God's will. Joseph took

the holy Virgin Saint Mary, and she dwelt with him until Gabriel, the Angel of the Lord, came to her and announced to her that the Son of God was to be incarnated from her, for the salvation of Adam and his posterity.

4. **The Annunciation of the Birth of Christ** - This is one of the 7 minor Lord's feasts, celebrated on 29 Baramhat (April 7th). On this day the church commemorates the Annunciation of our Lady, the Theotokos, the Virgin Saint Mary. When the appointed time by God since eternity for the salvation of the human race had come, God sent Gabriel the Archangel to the Virgin Saint Mary, who is from the tribe of Judah the house of king David, to announce her with the Divine conception and the Glorious Birth as the Holy Scriptures testifies: "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." Then the angel gave her the proof of the validity of his message: "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. "For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1:26-36). When she had accepted this Divine Annunciation, the Only Begotten Son, the Word of God, who is One of the Three eternal Persons, came and dwelt in her womb, a dwelling, the human race cannot comprehend. And straightway He united with perfect humanity a complete unity inseparable and unchangeable after the unity. This day then is the first-born of all feasts, for in it was the beginning of the salvation of the world which was fulfilled by the Holy Resurrection of our Lord, saving Adam and his offspring from the hands of Satan.

5. **The Entry of the Lord Christ into Egypt** - This is one of the 7 minor Lord's feasts. This feast is celebrated on 24 Bashans (June 1). This is the day when Joseph, Saint Mary, and the baby Jesus fled to Egypt to escape from Herod, who wanted to kill Jesus. On this day, our Lord Jesus Christ came to the land of Egypt when He was a two year old child, as the Bible says in (Matthew 2:13) that the 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." This was for two reasons: A. If He fell in the hand of Herod, and Herod could not kill Him, he would have thought that His flesh was a phantom. B. The second reason was to bless the people of Egypt by being among them, so that the prophecy of Hosea (11:1) could be fulfilled which says: "out of Egypt I called My Son." And also the prophecy of Isaiah (19:1) be fulfilled: "Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt, the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst." The Lord Jesus came to Egypt with Joseph, and His Virgin mother, and Salome. They passed in an estate called "Basta" where the Holy Family drank from a well, and the water of the well became a curing water for all sicknesses. Then they went to "Meniet Samannoud" and crossed the Nile to the western side. In this place, the Lord Jesus put His foot on a stone, and the trace of His foot appeared, and the stone was called "Picha Isos" in Coptic (or The heal of Jesus). From there, they went westward to Wadi El-Natroun, and Saint Mary blessed the place, for her knowledge that many monasteries would be built there. Then they went to "Al-Ashmoneen" where they settled for several days, after which they went to Mount "Qosqam", where the monastery of Saint Mary was later built, which has been known with the name "El-Moharrak monastery". When Herod died, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying: "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." (Matthew 2:20-21). They came back to Cairo, and on their return they stayed in a cave which is today located in the church of Abu-Serga in Old Cairo. Then they passed by El-Mataryia, and they washed there from a well, and the well has been blessed since, and a tree of Balsam grew beside it, from its oil the Chrism (El-Myroun) is made which is used to consecrate new churches. From there, the Holy Family walked to El-Mahama (Mustorod), and from there to Israel. We ought to celebrate this feast spiritually with joy, for Our Lord Jesus honored our land.
6. **The Wedding at Cana** - This is one of the 7 minor Lord's feasts. It is 13 Tubah (January

22). On this day, the church celebrates the commemoration of the miracle that our Lord Jesus Christ performed at Cana of Galilee. It was the first miracle that our Lord Jesus performed after His baptism. He was invited to the wedding with His virgin mother, Saint Mary, and also some of His disciples. When they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." There were set there six water pots of stone. Jesus said to them, "Fill the water pots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the master of the feast." When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, he said to the bridegroom, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine and when the guests have well drunk, then that which is inferior; but you have kept the good wine until now." This was the beginning of the signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him (John 2:1-11).

7. **The Dormition of Saint Mary, the Theotokos** - Saint Mary departed to the Lord on 21 Tubah (January 29th). As she was always praying in the holy sepulcher, the Holy Spirit informed her that she was about to depart from this temporal world. When the time of her departure arrived, the virgins of the Mount of Olives came to her, with the apostles, who were still alive, and they surrounded her bed. The Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is the glory, with a host of thousands and thousands of angels came to her and comforted her and told her about the eternal joy that was prepared for her, and she rejoiced. The apostles and the virgins asked her to bless them. She stretched her hand and blessed them all, and she gave up her pure spirit in the hand of her Son and God, and He took her spirit to the heavenly mansions. The apostles prepared the body in a fitting manner and carried it to Gethsemane. Some of the Jews blocked their way to prevent them from burying the body. One of the Jews seized the coffin with his hands, which were separated instantly from his body and they remained attached to the coffin. He regretted his evil deed and wept bitterly. Through the supplications of the saintly apostles, his hands were reattached to his body, and he believed in the Lord Christ. When they placed the body in the tomb, the Lord hid it from them. Saint Thomas the Apostle was not present at the time of Saint Mary's departure. He wanted to go to Jerusalem and a cloud carried him there. On his way, he saw the pure body of Saint Mary carried by the angels and ascended to heaven with it. One of the angels told him, "Make haste and kiss the pure body of Saint Mary,"

and he did. When Saint Thomas arrived where the disciples were, they told him about Saint Mary's departure and he said to them, "You know how I conducted myself at the resurrection of the Lord Christ, and I will not believe unless I see her body." They went with him to the tomb, and uncovered the place of the body but they did not find it, and everyone was perplexed and surprised. Saint Thomas told them how he saw the holy body and the angels that were ascending with it. They heard the Holy Spirit saying to them, "The Lord did not will to leave her body on earth." The Lord had promised his pure apostles to let them see her in the flesh once again. They were waiting for this promise to be fulfilled, until the 16th day of the month of Misra, when the promise was fulfilled and they saw her. The years of her life on earth were 60 years. She was 12 years old when she left the temple. She spent 34 years in Joseph's house, until the Ascension of the Lord, and 14 years with Saint John the Evangelist, according to the commandment of the Lord which he told her at the cross, "Behold, this is your son," and to Saint John, "Behold, this is your mother."

8. **The Assumption of the Body of Saint Mary** - On this day, 16 Misra (August 22), was the assumption of the body of our pure Lady Saint Mary, the Mother of God. August 22 also marks the end of the fast of Saint Mary, and is a big feast day. Two other people in the Bible were also assumed. These are Enoch and Elijah, who were both assumed *before* their death. Regarding Enoch, we read "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). Regarding Elijah, we read, "And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11).

While Saint Mary was keeping vigil, praying in the Holy Sepulcher, and waiting for the happy minute of her liberation from the bonds of the flesh, the Holy Spirit informed her of her forthcoming departure from this vain world. When the time drew near, the disciples and the virgins of the Mount of Olives (Zeitoun) came and the Lady was lying on her bed. Our Lord, surrounded by thousands and thousands of angels, came to Her. He consoled her, and announced her with the everlasting joy which was prepared for Her. She was happy, and she stretched out her hands, blessed the Disciples, and the Virgins. Then, she delivered up her pure soul in the hand of her Son and God, Jesus Christ, Who ascended her to the higher habitations. As of the pure body, they shrouded it and carried it to Gethsemane. On their way, some of the Jews blocked the way in the face of the disciples to prevent the burial. One of them seized the coffin. His hands were separated from his body, and remained hanging until he believed and repented for his mischievous deed. With

the prayers of the holy disciples, his hands were reattached to his body as they had been before. Saint Thomas was absent at the time of Saint Mary's departure, but he came after the burial. On his way back to Jerusalem, Saint Thomas saw angels carrying Saint Mary's pure body and ascending with it to heaven, and one of the angels said to him, "Hurry and kiss the pure body of Saint Mary." When he arrived to the disciples, they informed him about Saint Mary's departure. He told them, "I will not believe, unless I see her body, as you all know how I did doubt the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ before." They took him to the tomb, to uncover the body but they did not find it, and they were perplexed and amazed. Saint Thomas told them how he saw the pure body ascending to heaven, carried by angels. The Holy Spirit then told them, "The Lord did not Will to leave Her Holy body on earth." The Lord had promised his pure apostles that they would see her in flesh another time. They were waiting for the fulfillment of this truthful promise, until the sixteenth day of the month of Misra, when the promise of seeing her was fulfilled. They saw her sitting on the right hand of her Son and her Lord, surrounded by the angelic Host, as David prophesied and said, "At your right hand stands the queen" (Psalm 45:9). Saint Mary's life on earth was sixty years. She was 12 years old when she left the temple (she stayed in the Temple 9 years), then spent 34 years in the house of the righteous Saint Joseph, and spent 14 years in the care of Saint John the Evangelist, as the Lord commanded her saying, "Woman behold your Son," and to Saint John, "Behold your Mother."

9. **The Commemoration of the First Church for the Virgin Mary in the City of Philippi** - On this day, 21 Baounah (June 28th), the church celebrates the commemoration of the first church to be built in the name of the Virgin Lady, the All pure Saint Mary, the Theotokos (Mother of God), through whom the salvation of Adam and his posterity was fulfilled. When the two apostles Paul and Silas preached among the gentiles, many believed of them in the city of Philippi. They built a church there in the name of the Virgin, the Mother of God, and its consecration was on that day. It is appropriate for us to celebrate for her a spiritual festival, for she has borne the Savior of the world.
10. **Consecration of the Virgin's Church in the Mouharaque Monastery in Kuesquam Mountain** - On this day, 6 Hatour (November 15th), was the consecration of the church of the Holy Virgin, in the Mouharaque Monastery, in Kuesquam Mount. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ blessed this church with His presence along with His disciples, during

the time of its consecration, as was testified to by the Saints Philotheos and Kyrillos, Popes of Alexandria.

11. **The Apparition of Saint Mary in the Church of Zeitoun (Cairo)** - This day is celebrated on 24 Baramhat (April 2). On the eve of this day of the year 1684 A.M. which coincides with Tuesday the second of April 1968 A.D., during the papacy of Pope Kyrillos VI, the hundred sixteenth Pope of Alexandria, our Lady and the pride of our faith started to transfigure in luminous spiritual forms in and around the domes of the church dedicated to her immaculate name in Zeitoun, a suburb of Cairo. This transfiguration continued in following nights in a manner that was never known in the East or the West. This transfiguration in some nights was as long as many hours, without stop, in front of tens of thousands of people from every race and religion, with every one seeing her, pointing at her and interceding to her with songs, hymns, tears, prayers and hails and She was looking to them in a compassionate way raising her hand at times to bless them in all directions. The first one to notice this transfiguration was the workmen at the garage of the Public Transit System which was across the street from the church. The watchman Abdel-Aziz Aly, who was in charge of guarding the garage at that night, saw a luminous body over the dome of the church. He started shouting: "light over the dome" and he called the other workers in the garage. They all came and saw the bright light over the large dome of the church. When they looked closely, they saw a young lady in white, kneeling by the cross at the top of the dome. Because the dome had a round, smooth, and very sloping surface, it held the men as though they were nailed in their places watching the fate of the lady. Few seconds passed then they saw the kneeling lady as she stood over the dome. They gave out a cry of fear that she might fall down. They thought she was a girl in despair trying to commit suicide and they cried warning that person not to jump down and some of them called the police. The pedestrians, men and women started to gather around. The view of the lady was getting more clear and she appeared as a beautiful girl in a bright gown of light and had branches of olive tree in her hand, and around her flew white doves. Then they realized that they were seeing a heavenly spiritual view. They directed flood light to the luminous picture to remove all doubt from their minds, but instead it became more clear and bright. They cut the electricity off all the area but the lady remained in her heavenly illumination and her bright gown of light became more clear. She started moving around in a circle of light radiating from her body to all the directions around her. All the people then realized that this lady in front of them, without no doubt is the Virgin Mary. They

started to shout and cry saying: “She is the Virgin ... She is the Mother of Light ... ” They prayed with songs, hymns and hails all the night until the next morning. Since that night the pure Virgin had transfigured in different spiritual views in front of thousands and ten of thousands of masses, Egyptian and foreigners, Christians and non-Christians, men, women and children. Spiritual beings formed like doves would appear before, during and after the transfiguration zooming through the sky in a way raising the human from a materialistic to a heavenly atmosphere. This transfiguration was in different forms. One of the most significant ways this apparition took place was that; the head of Saint Mary under the veil looking down as in the picture of the sad Virgin and she was looking toward the Cross and that view would stay like this at times or slowly bow before the Cross at other times. The Cross itself will shine and illuminate although it was made of concrete. And some times an angel would appear standing behind her spreading his wings. That view might stay as long as many hours. Another view was the view of the Mother of Light standing as a great Queen in a beautiful spiritual portrait radiating dignity, elegance and beauty. On her head was a crown of a queen as if it were made of diamonds and some times there appeared on the top of the crown a small luminous cross. And some times she appeared in the same way but carrying Christ, to Him is the Glory, in the form of a child on her hand and on His head a crown. And on other times she raised her both hands as She was blessing the world moving to the right, to the front, and to the left in a dignified way. Many spiritual signs appeared before, during, and after the apparition of the Virgin the mother of the Lord’s transfiguration. The appearance of tongues of yellowish flame would flash over the church and then subside and that repeated several times. Another form of the signs were the spiritual beings formed like doves, larger than the doves that we know, appear about midnight or after, flying in the middle of darkness illuminating in a fast speed, appeared suddenly from no where, and also disappeared suddenly. These spiritual beings appeared in different formations and in varying numbers. A fact we should be aware of that pigeons do not fly during the night. Another sign was the shooting stars which were constantly falling and were seen very close to the apparition on many occasions as if coming down to glorify her from heaven. Another sign was the fragrance of incense. The smoke of the incense poured out of the domes in large quantities. Substance resembling clouds, thick fog or smoke would roll in toward the church and completely cover the church. Also the illuminated cloud that appeared over the domes of the church in large volume and often proceeded the transfiguration of the Virgin or at times the cloud slowly formed in the

shape of the virgin. Sometimes the apparition of the Virgin would appear from the clouds. This transfiguration and all the spiritual signs were a forerunner and announcement for serious or important events to come in the near and far future. Or it might be a spiritual gesture from heaven to indicate the Lord's caring for His church and His people and our country.

- **Saint Mary's Apparition in the Church of Saint Demiana (Cairo) - May 25, 1986.**
- **Saint Mary's Apparition in Saint Mark's Church, Assiout, Egypt - August, 2000.**

Saint Mary in the Orthodox Concept - Part II

- In this discussion, we will focus on the titles of Saint Mary, most of which come from the Old Testament.
- There is no woman about whom the prophets prophesied more about than the Virgin Mary. Many titles of Saint Mary are contained in the Old Testament.
- Many of her titles are recited in the Sunday Psali for the Virgin and the Sunday Theotokia in the Midnight Psalmody.
- Saint Mary is the one whom the Church elevates over the rank of the archangels, as we say in the hymn, “O Mary, you have been raised above the cherubim, and have become higher than the seraphim, O Mary.”

Titles of Saint Mary

1. **Theotokos** - Theotokos is a Greek word meaning Mother of God. This title was given to her in the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431 AD. Saint Kyrillos the Great insisted on that title in his response to the heresy of Nestorius. Saint Elizabeth, her first cousin, addressed her with this title as she said, “the mother of my Lord” (Luke 1:43).
2. **The Queen Who is by the Right Side of the King** - This title comes from David the Psalmist, as he said, “At your hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir” (Psalm 45:9). This is why in her Icon, she is portrayed at the right hand of Christ our Lord and King. In the Divine Liturgy, in the Gospel Response, we also say “The Lady and the Queen of us all...”
3. **Our Mother the Holy Virgin** - When Jesus was on the Cross, He said to the Apostle John, “Behold your mother” (John 19:27).
4. **The Ladder of Jacob** - Saint Mary is a symbol of the ladder which “was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven” (Genesis 28:12). This is the symbol of the Virgin, who by giving birth to Christ, made the inhabitants of the earth reach heaven.

5. **The Bride** - She is called the Bride because she is the true bride of the Lord of Glory. The word of the Lord in the following Psalm was realized in her: "Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him" (Psalm 45:10-11). This is why she is called the friend of Solomon, who is the Virgin of the Song of Songs. It was said of her in the same Psalm: "The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the king in robes of many colors" (Psalm 45:13-14).

6. **The Beautiful Dove** - The title is in remembrance of the beautiful dove that carried to our father Noah a branch of an olive tree, as a symbol of peace, bringing to him the good news of the deliverance from the waters of the flood (Genesis 8:11). With this title, the priest burns incense in front of her icon when he goes out of the sanctuary and says: "Hail to you, O Virgin Mary, the beautiful dove". In the Praxis response, the deacons chant in Coptic "Hail to you, Mary, the fair dove, who bore to us God the Logos."

Saint Mary is compared to the dove in her simplicity and purity, and the action of the Holy Spirit in her. She resembles the dove which brought the good news of the deliverance after the flood, because she brought the good news of our deliverance (salvation) in Christ.

7. **The Cloud** - The Virgin Mary also has the title of The Cloud because of her high status and because the prophecy of her coming to Egypt compared her in this manner. This was mentioned in the book of Isaiah: "The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst" (Isaiah 19:1). The expression "cloud" is a symbol of the Lord who will come upon the clouds (Matthew 16:27).

8. **The Golden Censer** - We call her "Ti Shori" which means the Golden Censer in Coptic, and is one of the Coptic hymns sung by the deacons in the Divine Liturgy. The Golden Censer is sometimes referred to as the "Censer of Aaron" (Numbers 16:46). Also, the coal in the Censer symbolizes the human nature of Christ, and fire symbolizes His divine nature. Saint Paul says, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). The censer symbolizes the womb of Saint Mary, where divinity was united with humanity. The censer being made of gold points to the greatness and the purity of the Virgin, and this is why we call her The Golden Censer in the hymns.

9. **The Second Heaven** - She is called the second heaven because as heaven is the home of God, the Virgin Mary was the home of God during her sacred pregnancy.
10. **The City of God** - The prophecy of the following Psalm is realized in her: “Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God” (Psalm 87:3). It is also said of her, “the city of the great king.” Also, certain prophecies which were said about Jerusalem are realized in her: “And of Zion it will be said, this one and that one were born in her; and the most High Himself shall establish her” (Psalm 87:5).
11. **The Vine where was Found the Cluster of Life** - The Cluster of Life is Christ. The Church asks for her intercession with that title in the prayer of the third hour in the Agpeya, saying to her: “O mother of God, you are the true vine who bears the cluster of life...”
12. **The Mother of the True Light** - It was said of Christ that He is “the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:9).
13. **The Golden Lamp** - She is called the Golden Lamp because she bears the Light, Christ.
14. **The Mother of the Holy One** - When archangel Gabriel appeared to Saint Mary to announce to her the birth of Christ, he said to her: “also that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).
15. **The Mother of Our Savior** - She has this title because Christ is the Savior of the world; “and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).
16. **The Burning Bush** - The burning bush appeared to Moses in Exodus 3:2. In the song of The Burning Bush that we sing during the month of Kiahk, we say:

The burning bush seen by Moses

The prophet in the wilderness

The fire inside it was aflame

But never consumed or injured it.

The same with the Theotokos Mary

Carried the fire of Divinity

Nine months in her holy body

Without blemishing her virginity.

Again it was said of Christ that He is a “consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). The fire burning inside the bush is a symbol of Christ and the bush itself symbolizes the Virgin.

17. **The Ark of the Testimony** - This title refers to the sanctuary that God told Moses and the Israelites to build for Him in Exodus, Chapter 25. The ark was made of acacia wood that cannot be moth-eaten, and was covered with gold from inside and outside (Exodus 25:10, 22), which is a symbol of the purity and greatness of the Virgin. Christ was inside the Ark of The Testimony, and thus the Virgin is called the Ark of the Testimony because she carried Christ in her womb.
18. **The Golden Pot of Manna** - The manna is a symbol of Christ, who is the live bread who came down from heaven. Everybody who eats from Him lives by Him, and He is also the bread of life (John 6:32, 48, 49). Since Christ is compared to the manna, Saint Mary is compared to the pot of manna, who carried this celestial bread inside her.
19. **The Rod of Aaron that Budded** - The Virgin miraculously “sprouted and carried the buds of life”, (Numbers 17:6-8), as did Aaron’s rod. A rod, of course, has no life in it that can produce blossoms and yield fruit, except by a miracle. This symbolizes the Virgin, who could not sprout or produce fruit, except through a miracle.
20. **The Dome of Moses** - The Dome of Moses is also known as the Tabernacle of Meeting, which was the place upon which the Lord used to come to speak to Moses (Exodus: Chapter 40, Leviticus: Chapter 1). Likewise, the Virgin is she upon whom the Lord came. God manifested His love in “The Dome of Moses,” who is the Virgin Mary. This is why we say in the Midnight Psalmody: “You have been compared, O Virgin Mary, to the tabernacle which Moses made on the mountain of Sinai, where God was inside.”
21. **The Gate in the East** - This is the gate that Ezekiel saw, in which the Lord said, “This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it therefore it shall be shut (Ezekiel 44:1-2). The prophet saw the glory of the Lord at his gate which is in the East, and the house was filled with it (Ezekiel 43: 2, 4, 5). This gate symbolizes the virginity of Saint Mary who was from the countries of the East (Nazareth); and how this virginity remained sealed.
22. **The Gate of Life** - It was said about Saint Mary in the book of Ezekiel: “As for the prince, because he is the prince, he may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall

enter by the way of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the same way” (Ezekiel 44:3). Since the Lord is the Life, she is the Gate of Life. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). That is why the virgin is the gate of life, the gate out of which the Lord came out, granting life to all those who believe in Him.

It is not surprising that we call Saint Mary “the gate” because the Church is also called “the gate.” Jacob said about Bethel: “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” (Genesis 28:17).

23. **The Holy of Holies** - This is the temple in which the chief priest entered once a year, to make atonement for all the people (Leviticus: Chapter 16). The Lord of glory came once inside the Virgin Mary for the redemption of all the world.

Saint Mary in the Orthodox Concept - Part III

- In this discussion, we will focus on the virginity of Saint Mary and issues related to her virginity.
- The word Mary means Royal Incense, because she would become a special offering to God.

The Perpetual Virginity of Saint Mary

1. Saint Mary was a virgin before giving birth to Christ and after giving birth to Christ, and remained a virgin in her life on earth and remains a virgin to this day. The word perpetual means everlasting or continuing forever.
2. Saint Mary never married Joseph. She was only “betrothed” to him. Joseph took care of Saint Mary after she had to leave the temple at age 12. He continued to take care of her for 34 years after the birth of Christ.
3. There are two primary verses in the Bible that address the perpetual virginity of Saint Mary. These are Ezekiel 44:1-3 and Isaiah 7:14. Matthew 1:23 quotes the verse in Isaiah 7:14.
4. Also, in Luke 1:26-27, we read about the virginity of Saint Mary. The verse reads “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26-27).
5. In Ezekiel 44:1-3, we read “Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut. And the LORD said to me, “This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the LORD God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut. As for the prince, because he is the prince, he may sit in it to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the same way.”

6. The “shut gate” here refers to the womb Saint Mary. Her gate is shut, and hence forever a virgin. The prince in Ezekiel 44:1-3 is Christ Himself, who is the only one who has “entered the gate” through the Holy Spirit. Her gate was not opened by any other child.
7. Since Christ was born of the Holy Spirit, the virginity of Saint Mary was kept intact and the “gate was shut.” She did not lose her virginity as a result of the birth of Christ.
8. The other verse that refers to the perpetual virginity of Saint Mary is Isaiah 7:14, which says, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” Notice here that the prophet Isaiah says “the virgin” and *not* “a virgin.” The phrase “the virgin” refers to a continual and everlasting state of virginity.
9. In addition to the Bible, many Church Fathers also noted the perpetual virginity of Saint Mary.
10. Saint John Chrysostom writes, “We are ignorant of many things, as for instance, how the Infinite is in the womb, how He that contains all things is carried, and born, by a woman, how the Virgin gives birth and continues a Virgin.”
11. Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes, “The womb of the holy virgin, which ministered to an immaculate birth did not annul the virginity, nor did the virginity impede so great a birth.”
12. Saint Jerome says, “Only Christ opened the closed gates of her virginal womb, and yet the gates remained unfaithfully closed.” Saint Jerome also says, “Let them tell me how Jesus entered when the doors were closed and I will answer how holy Mary is both mother and virgin; virgin after childbirth, and mother before she was married.”
13. Saint Augustine says, “If in His birth her virginity has been destroyed from that moment, He would not have been born of a virgin, and the whole church would falsely have proclaimed, which God forbid, that He was born of the Virgin Mary.”
14. Saint Ephraim the Syrian writes, “Just as the Lord made His entrance when the doors were closed, in the same way did He come forth from the Virgin’s womb, because this virgin really and truly gave birth without pain ... Her virginity remained safe and sound.”

- As we have discussed before, the Protestant church believes that Saint Mary married and had other children after giving birth Christ, and hence eventually lost her virginity. For example, Protestants believe that James the son of Alphaeus is the son of Saint Mary and hence the brother of Jesus. Of course, this is false.
- There are several verses and phrases in the Bible that Protestants refer to to support their claims that Saint Mary lost her virginity and hence is not the perpetual virgin. These verses are seriously misunderstood by Protestants and others.

1. **her firstborn son** - This phrase is mentioned in Luke 2:7 and Matthew 1:25. Here, Protestants think that the word “firstborn” means the first of His siblings. The Holy Bible clearly defines the meaning of the word “firstborn.” Prior to the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood, the divine Inspiration had said: “Sanctify to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of animal; it is Mine” (Exodus 13:2). Thus every firstborn was consecrated to God and dedicated to Him, whether or not a brother was born to him later. The parents did not wait until they begot him a brother, nor did the owner of the livestock wait until another offspring was born before offering and consecrating the firstborn to the Lord. But from his birth the firstborn was consecrated because he was the first offspring of the womb. Therefore, there was a great possibility that any firstborn was an *only* son.

Thus Christ was the firstborn and the only Son. Saint Jerome writes, “Every only son is a firstborn, but not every firstborn is an only son.” The expression firstborn does not mean that another is born after him but it means that no sibling was born before him. That is why the firstborn of the unclean animals could be redeemed when they were one month old (Numbers 18:16-17), and the first offspring of the clean animals were to be offered as sacrifices to God without waiting until the birth of another offspring. He is the firstborn, whether or not one is born after him, because he is the first offspring of the womb.

In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ is the firstborn of the Virgin. For when the Virgin and Joseph offered a sacrifice 40 days after His birth, the Bible tells us, “Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (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 2:22-24). It is clear that the law of the firstborn was applied to Christ 40 days after His birth. Saint Jerome also writes, “When God struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians, did He strike only those who had siblings or every male who opened the womb whether he had siblings or not?” Thus, there is no relation at all between the firstborn and the birth of siblings.

2. **your wife** - This phrase was said to Joseph in Matthew 1:20. Also, the word *woman* often refers to the Virgin Mary as in Matthew 1:24. The word *wife* or *woman* was the title given to a betrothed maiden immediately after her betrothal. The angel said to Joseph, “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). Saint John Chrysostom says about this verse, “Here the angel calls the betrothed “wife” because the Holy Bible always calls the betrothed couple “man” and “wife” before their marriage. The angel also says “take her to you” which means keep her in your house, as she has been entrusted to you by God and not by her parents; because you are entrusted to take her, not to consummate the marriage but to be her guardian. In the same way, Jesus entrusted the Virgin Mary to His disciple John.”

Saint Jerome also says that the title “woman” or “wife” was given to a betrothed maiden. The Biblical proof of this is found in the book of Deuteronomy. We read, “If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you” (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). And we also read, “And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her” (Deuteronomy 20:7).

Thus, the Bible uses the words “woman” and “wife” to mean a pledged virgin. They are used to signify femininity and not the state of being wedded. In fact, Eve was first called “woman” because she was taken out of man (Genesis 3:20). So the word “woman” signifies her creation and femininity and the word “Eve” signifies her motherhood.

Further proof that the word “wife” attributed to the Virgin Mary meant pledged and not married, are in the Gospel of Saint Luke, “Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he

was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.” Therefore, the phrase “your wife” means “your betrothed one.”

We also notice that the angel did not use the word “wife” after the Virgin had given birth to the Lord Jesus, but said to Joseph, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead,” (Matthew 2:20). We also read, “When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt” (Matthew 2:14), and “Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel” (Matthew 2:21). The phrase “his wife” was used only *before* the conception so that the Jews would not stone the Virgin Mary because she conceived a Child while she was not a man’s wife. But after giving birth to Christ, the Divine Inspiration did not use that expression; not in the angel’s words to Joseph, nor in describing what Joseph did, nor in talking about the Magi, of whom the Holy Bible says: And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother (Matthew 2:11), nor in talking about the shepherds who found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger (Luke 2:16).

3. **“...did not know here till she had brought forth her firstborn Son” (Matthew 1:25), and “... before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18)**

Saint Matthew the Evangelist aims at proving that Christ was conceived of a virgin who did not know any man, for two reasons:

- (a) The fact that Christ was not born through the natural way from two parents as all people are, but was born of a virgin, is proof of His Divinity; proof that He was born of the Holy Spirit as expressed by the angel: “...for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20).
- (b) His birth from a virgin convinces us that He did not inherit Adam’s sin. Thus He would be able to save us since the One without sin is able to die for the sinners.

Therefore the Apostle concentrated on the Virgin not knowing any man before giving birth to Christ in order to prove the Lord’s Virginal Birth. But the fact that the Virgin Mary did not know any man after giving birth to Christ is a self evident truth.

The sentence “did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son” can be interpreted as follows:

The word 'till' refers only to the precedent clause, and does not imply that the subordinate clause it introduces is opposite in meaning to the precedent clause.

Some examples to illustrate this:

(a) The Holy Bible says that Michel, King Saul's daughter, had no children to (till) the day of her death (2 Samuel 6:23). Of course she did not bring forth children after her death.

(b) The Lord Jesus Christ says: I am with you always, even to (till) the end of ages (Matthew 28:20). Of course, and after the end of ages as well.

(c) The Lord says to Christ: "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool" (Psalm 110:1). Of course Christ will continue to sit at the right hand of God the Father forever.

There are numerous examples of this point. Therefore, the word 'till' does not necessarily imply the opposite meaning of what precedes it.

Joseph did not know the Virgin Mary till she gave birth to her firstborn Son, neither did he know her after she gave birth. If he withheld to touch her before she gave birth to Christ, how would he feel after she had given birth to Him; after he had seen the miraculous signs, the angels and the Magi, and after knowing that He is the Holy One, Emmanuel and the Savior?

Joseph realized that the Child was Christ who completed the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah who said: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel" (Isaiah 7:14), and "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever (Isaiah 9:6-7). The angel must have quoted the last part of this verse when he appeared to the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:31-33).

4. **His brothers** - This phrase is mentioned in Matthew 12:46, Matthew 13:54-56, Acts 1:14, and Galatians 1:18-19.

In Hebrew expressions, the word 'brother' may signify close relatives or step brothers. There are numerous examples of this in the Holy Bible, such as:

(i) Jacob and his uncle Laban: The Holy Bible says about the meeting between Jacob and Rachel: “And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother’s brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother’s brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother’s brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s brother” (Genesis 29:10-12). Thus Jacob called Rachel’s father his brother although he was his mother’s brother. The phrase ‘mother’s brother’ was repeated many times in this chapter. The word ‘brother’ was used to mean close relatives.

Laban talked to Jacob in the same manner, saying: “Because you are my brother, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be? (Genesis 29:15) Thus Laban called Jacob his brother although he was his nephew.

(ii) Abram and Lot: Lot was Abram’s nephew, the son of his brother Haran (Genesis 11:31), yet the Holy Bible says: “Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants” (Genesis 14:14). Here Abram considered Lot his brother although he was his nephew, due to their near relationship.

In like manner, the phrase ‘brothers of Jesus’ was used in referring to the cousins of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who are the brothers of Christ?

When the Lord went to His own country, the people were astonished and said: “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?” (Matthew 13:55-56); (Mark 6:1-3).

Saint Peter the Apostle mentions that he saw James, the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19). This James was called ‘the Less’ (Mark 15:40) to distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee. He was also called the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3) and was one of the Apostles (Galatians 1:19).

Saint Matthew the Apostle says in his Gospel that at the cross many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons (Matthew 27:55-56). Who then was Mary, mother of James and Joses? Was she the Virgin Mary? Is it reasonable to assume that the Virgin Mary begot all those children? The mother of James and Joses was Mary, the wife of Alphaeus or Clopas, of whom Saint

John the Apostle said: Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (John 19:25).

Let us compare this verse with Matthew 27:55-56: "Mary the mother of James and Joses was with Mary Magdalene at the cross of Christ" (Matthew 27:55-56). They were the same two persons present at the Lord's burial and saw where He was laid, and it was they who brought spices to anoint His body when the Sabbath was over (Mark 16:1). They were the same persons of whom Saint John said in his Gospel: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (John 19:25).

Therefore, the brothers of Jesus are His cousins, the sons of Mary, the Virgin's sister, the wife of Clopas or Alphaeus and mother of James, Joses and the rest of the brothers.

Regarding the difference between the names Clopas and Alphaeus it may be a difference in pronunciation or, as Saint Jerome said, it is not uncommon for the Holy Bible to give more than one name to a person. Moses' father-in-law was called Reuel (Exodus 2:18) and was also called Jethro (Exodus 4:18). Gideon was called Jerubbaal (Judges 6:32), Peter was called Simon and Cephas, and Judas the Zealot was called Thaddeus (Matthew 10:3).

It is thus quite obvious that Mary the mother of James and Joses is not the Virgin Mary, who was never called by that name in the Holy Bible.

We also read in Matthew 13:55 that Jude (Judas is the same name as Jude), the writer of the Epistle of Jude, was one of the "brothers" of Jesus. Matthew 13:55 says, "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon and Judas?" Note that Judas is the same name as Jude. We also read in Jude 1, "Jude a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James." So James the son of Alphaeus and Jude were brothers and sons of Mary, the sister of the Virgin Mary.

Remarks:

- It is unreasonable that the Lord Jesus Christ commanded the Virgin Mary to His Apostle John when He was on the cross if she had all those sons and daughters. Undoubtedly, her children, if she had any, should have been the ones to look after her.
- We notice that during the journey of Saint Joseph and the Virgin Mary to and from Egypt, there is no mention of any other children of the Virgin Mary except the Lord Jesus

(Matthew 2:14,20,21). Neither is there any mention of the sort during their journey to and from Jerusalem when the Lord Jesus was twelve years old (Luke 2:43).

- It is unsound to hold, as some people do, that the 'brothers of Jesus' are the sons of Joseph whom he begot from another wife after whose death he became a widower, because the Holy Bible mentions that Mary the mother of James and Joses was present at the time of Christ's crucifixion and burial, as we have previously explained (Mark 15:47).

Saint Mary in the Orthodox Concept - Part IV

- In this discussion, we want to focus on what is said about Saint Mary in the New Testament.
- No other personality from the New or the Old Testament has been venerated like Saint Mary. She has been raised in status above the Cherubim and the Seraphim, for she has said through the Holy Spirit, "...behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name" (Luke 1:48-49).
- Saint Mary the Virgin is the Mother of God, the Theotokos (Luke 1:43). Theotokos is a Greek word composed of two syllables: 'Theo' meaning 'God', and 'tokos' meaning 'bearer'; that is, 'she who bore God in her womb'. This theological term has its origins in the Bible, in the following places: The archangel Gabriel announced to Saint Mary saying, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Elizabeth said to Saint Mary, "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). Isaiah prophesied concerning St. Mary and said "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel." (Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23).
- Only the Gospel of Luke records the annunciation to Saint Mary by archangel Gabriel, and only the Gospel of Luke records Saint Mary's visit to Elizabeth's house (Luke 1:1-80).
- The Gospel of Luke also records the birth of Jesus, His circumcision, the presentation of Jesus in the temple, and when Jesus was 12 years old in the temple (Luke 2:1-52).
- The Gospel of Matthew records the appearance of archangel Gabriel to Joseph, as well as the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-25). We read, "Now 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. And she will bring forth a Son, and

you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:18-21).

- The Gospel of Matthew is the only Gospel that records the flight into Egypt, and the wise men and Herod (Matthew 2:1-23).
- The Gospels of Mark and John do not record the annunciation to Saint Mary or Joseph, nor do they record the birth of Jesus.
- She was the seed of David (Romans 3:1).
- She was the bride-to-be of Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25).
- She was the kinswoman of Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:36).
- She attended to ceremonial purification (Luke 2:22-38).
- She fled into Egypt with Joseph and Jesus (Matthew 2:13-15).
- She lived in Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-23).
- She took twelve-year old Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-50).
- She was at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11), where Jesus performed His first miracle since starting His ministry.
- She was concerned for Jesus’ safety (Matthew 12:46, Mark 3:21-31, Luke 8:19-21).
- She was at the cross with her sister (Mary) where she was entrusted by Our Lord Jesus Christ to the care of John the Evangelist (John 19:25-27).
- She was in the Upper Room praying with the disciples where the Holy Spirit came down upon them (Acts 1:14).
- We get a glimpse of the virtues of Saint Mary in Luke 2:18-19, where we read, “And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:18-19). We again read of Saint Mary, “but His mother kept all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51).

Hymns For Saint Mary in the Liturgy

- **The Hymn of Blessing (Ten-o-ousht)** - This hymn is sung as the deacons are putting on their vestments.
- **The Hymn of the Censer (Tai-Shori)** - This hymn is sung right after the offertory prayers.
- **The Hymn of the Intercessions (Hiten Nepresvia)** - The first one is “Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, Saint Mary, O Lord, grant us the forgiveness of our sins.”
- **The Praxis Response (Shere Maria)** - This hymn is sung right before the reading of the Acts.
- **Rejoice O Mary (Efrahi ya Marium)** - Sung occasionally in the beginning of the reconciliation prayer.
- **Communion Hymns** - There are many including Rashi, O Kirios, and Shere Maria.

Creation and Evolution - Part I

Background

- The word evolution means a process of change in a particular direction. The theory of human evolution claims that humans descended from other kinds of animals (namely apes) that lived in earlier times and that the differences are due to inherited changes that took place over many millions of years.
- The field of human evolution is called physical anthropology.
- The primary author of the Theory of Evolution is Charles Darwin (1809-1882). Darwin was the British scientist who became famous for his theories of evolution and natural selection. Like several scientists before him, Darwin believed all the life on earth evolved (developed gradually) over millions of years from a few common ancestors.
- His research led to several related theories: i) evolution did occur; ii) evolutionary change was gradual, requiring thousands to millions of years; iii) the primary mechanism for evolution was a process called natural selection; and iv) the millions of species alive today arose from a single original life form through a branching process called “specialization.”
- It is the theory of natural selection that postulates that humans evolved from ape-like creatures over a period of millions of years. Specifically, the theory of natural selection is grounded in the belief that each new species is produced by having some advantage over those with which it comes into competition, and the consequent extinction of less-favored forms almost inevitably results.
- There are two primary forms of physical human evolution: i) the evolution of upright walking, and ii) the evolution of larger brains.
- The word “hominid” in anthropology refers to members of the family of humans, Hominidae, which consists of all species on our side of the last common ancestor of humans and living apes. The hominid fossil timeline is given as follows:
 - Sahelanthropus Tchadenis (7.5 million years ago)
 - Orrorin Tugenensis (6.1 million years ago)

- Ardipithecus Kadabba (6 million years ago)
- Ardipithecus Ramidus (5 million years ago)
- Australopithecus Afarensis (4 million years ago)
- Australopithecus Africanus (2.8 million years ago, “Lucy”).
- Homo Erectus (1.1 million years ago)
- Homo Neanderthalis (50,000 thousand years ago)
- Cro-Magnon Man (30,000 years ago)
- The Missing Link
- Modern Man (7.500 years ago)

The Biblical Response to the Theory of Evolution

The Biblical response to the theory of evolution is God’s creation found in the book of Genesis, Chapter 1.

- God created the universe in six days. According to the writings of our Church Fathers, the six days are not six literal days as we know them today (24 hours per day), but rather six periods, taking place over millions of years. Thus, the word “day” in Genesis 1 is symbolic and not literal. The Bible says that God’s “day” is very different from the human day. We read, “For a thousand years in Your sight are as the yesterday which is past, and as a watch in the night,” (Psalms 90:4), and “Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your notice, that a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day,” (2 Peter 3:8). The “thousand years” in these verses is, of course, also symbolic. Thus, fossils of dinosaurs and other animals dated millions of years ago are completely consistent with the creation of animals in the Bible.
- We note in the Book of Genesis that God made the animals before man. God began His creation of animals (birds and sea creatures) on the 5th day, then God created the “creeping things and cattle” at the beginning of the 6th day, and then He created man on the 6th day after the animals (Genesis 1:25-26). Thus i) animals appeared before man, and ii) God made man after the animals to emphasize the class distinction between man and animal. Man cannot be classified with the animals. They are of a completely different creation.

- The first mistake that science makes which contradicts the Bible is that it attempts to classify man as an animal, which is against the Bible. Science classifies man as a primate and attempts to attribute his intellectual and physical properties through scientific comparisons and similarities with other animals. This is erroneous and not according to the Bible, since the Bible makes it clear that man is in his own class, and he has no relation to animals in any way, either physically, mentally, spiritually.
 - How does the Bible tell us that man has no relation to animals?
1. **Man was Created After the Animals** - As noted earlier, man was created long after the animals. God began His creation of animals (birds and sea creatures) on the 5th day, then God created the “creeping things and cattle” at the beginning of the 6th day, and then He created man on the 6th day after the animals. So the creation of man and animal were in completely different periods of God’s creation.
 2. **God Created Man in His own Image and Likeness** - In Genesis 1:26, we read that God created man in His own image and likeness. God did *not* create animals in His own image and likeness. Thus, apes are created in their own image and likeness, not in the image of God. We read, “Then God said, ‘let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness’ (Genesis 1:26). What does it mean to be made in the “image and likeness of God”?
 - We were created to communicate with God and animals were not.
 - We were created to worship God and animals were not.
 - We were created with a conscience and the intellect to know differences between right and wrong, the ability to discern between what is moral and what is immoral, and animals were not. That is, man was created with the natural law of God written on his heart and animals were not. As we read in Romans 2:14-16, “For when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing them or else excusing them in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Romans 2:14-16).
 - We were created with an intellect far superior to that of any animal, with the capability of reading, writing, speaking, and worshipping.

- God created man with a spirit, which will never vanish or be annihilated. Animals do not have spirits, and thus their physical death is their final state, in which they are annihilated.
- Jesus came in the “likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7), not animals.
- Jesus came for the salvation and eternal life of man, not animals.
- Only man is capable of a life of righteousness through Jesus Christ, and not animals.
- The Holy Spirit can only dwell in man through Baptism and Chrismation and not in animals.

3. **God Created Man to Rule and Have Dominion Over the Animals** - Again, we read in Genesis 1:26 that God created man to rule and have dominion over the animals, so man cannot be considered in the same class as animals. In Genesis 1:26 we read, “..let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God repeats this notion of dominion of man over animals in Genesis 1:28. God not only created man to have dominion over the animals, but to have dominion over “all of the earth.”

4. **Man is in the Image of Christ** - Genesis 1:26 thus tells us that the image of Christ is our image and not in the image of anything else. Being made in the image of God implies another distinction between the class of animal and man, namely that man has a spirit, whereas the animal has only the physical body and no spirit, which is annihilated at death. Man will be raised at death to either eternal life or eternal punishment. Since animals do not have spirits, they cannot be raised again, and thus remain as dust at death and are thus annihilated. Thus, only man can be saved and animals cannot be saved. Christ came for the salvation of man, not animals. The whole Bible is about the salvation of man, who is distinct and in a different class from every living thing on earth. If man truly descended from apes, then they would be our ancestors, and thus it would not be fair to the apes that they would not be saved!

5. **Man Was Created 5,500 BC** - The creation of Adam was about 5,500 BC, and therefore, man could not have existed in any form before approximately 7,500 years ago. Thus, claims that “cave men” dwelt on the earth 20,000 - 50,000 years ago (Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal) could not be consistent with the timeline in the creation of Adam in the Bible. These “cave men” must of been animals, according to the timeline of the Bible.

6. **The Missing Link** - The scientific evolutionary timeline is incomplete. There is a “missing link”, that is there is an enormous physical, intellectual, and unexplainable gap between Cro-Magnon and modern man that scientists cannot explain, and such fossils that would fill in this gap have not been found to this day. For those who believe in the creation in the Bible, this missing link is indeed inevitable and will never be resolved. This missing link, in some sense, demonstrates scientifically that man and animal are indeed in a different class (creation) and their bones cannot be reconciled. This notion of a missing link gives great truth to Genesis 1:26.

7. **Faith** - To reject evolution and believe in God’s creation also requires faith. We cannot scientifically prove everything in the Bible, and thus we as Christians should never resort to scientific explanations in explaining all of God’s work. God’s work requires and demands faith from us. God completely intended it this way since He wants faith to play a major and dominant role in our relationship with Him, and thus faith is critical in believing what is in the Bible. Thus, in rejecting evolution, there is the demand of faith in God on our part, that He created man separately from animals for an entirely different purpose. We should never rely on science alone to believe in God’s creation, since for example, if the missing link is somehow “found” by scientists some day, we must have other means to rely on to reject evolution, namely our faith in God and His word in the Bible.

The Nature of Christ

Introduction

- The Early Church was always plagued by heresies against the nature of Christ, whether He was Divine, Human, both, or neither.
- Many councils were held between the Churches in the period 250 - 475 AD, which at that time, were still united.
- The nature of Christ is not something that is important only to theologians and various church heads, but is an essential topic to every Christian and their salvation. For this reason, Saint Athanasius stood firm against the whole world, as we will see shortly.
- In order to fully understand the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will trace the heresies about the nature of Christ as well as study the Church's true teachings which withstood all attempts to defame our salvation.

Heresies

1. **Arianism** - This is the heresy that says that Jesus was not God, but merely an intermediate of God.
 - This heresy **Denies the Divinity of Christ**.
 - The Council of Nicea was called in 325 AD, where Saint Athanasius defended the unity of Christ and God the Father in the holy Trinity, from which we also received the first part of the Creed.
2. **Heresy of Apollinarius** - This heresy believed in the divinity of Christ, but it did not completely believe in His humanity.
 - This heresy **Denies the humanity of Christ**.
 - The heresy stated that the human nature of Christ was incomplete and that Jesus did not need a soul, as God provided the need of life.

- The Council of Constantinople was called in 381 AD to address this heresy and it condemned it, and also formed the second part of the Creed.
3. **Nestorianism** - Nestorius was a patriarch of Constantinople in 428 AD. He brought up the debate of whether to call Saint Mary the “Theotokos” (Mother of God) or “Christokos” (Mother of Christ).
- The Council of Ephesus was called in 431 AD to address this heresy, which was headed by Saint Cyril. Nestorius was condemned and excommunicated for this heresy.
 - This heresy **Denies the Divinity of Christ at birth**, saying that the Divinity descended upon Him at some point later. Thus, this heresy denies the hypostatic union of Jesus’s humanity and divinity.
 - Saint Cyril wrote his *Twelve Anathemas* condemning this heresy.
 - Thus, the birth of Christ from Saint Mary is understood by the Church to affirm that, “She gave birth to the Incarnate Logos and not that she was the source of the Divine nature,” as asserted by Pope Shenouda III.
4. **Eutychianism** - Eutyches was an archmandrite who was very well respected for his way of life.
- In an attempt to counter Nestorius’s claim against the Divinity of Christ, Eutyches went in the complete opposite direction by denying the Humanity of Christ.
 - Thus, this heresy **Denied the Humanity of Christ**.
 - As monks try to subdue their body completely, Eutyches understood that the Humanity of Christ was completely engulfed in the Divinity of God, analogous to a drop of vinegar in the ocean.
 - Eutyches was excommunicated by Pope Dioscorus. Eutyches pretended to return to the faith and was accepted back in the Church only to keep on preaching this heresy. As a result, he was excommunicated again by the Church.

Pre-Chalcedon

- The heretical issues mentioned above rose up in the Middle East and were major concerns for Alexandrian and Antiochian churches, since many monasteries are in that region.

- Saint Cyril entered into conversation with John of Antioch who defended Nestorius's views.
- This caused many problems between the schools of Alexandria and Antioch.
- Saint Cyril and John of Antioch came to an understanding following the first session of the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD and made a joint statement to the different schools.
- Saint Cyril explained how we believe in the "Mia-physis" of Christ, which means "united one", instead of "Mono-physis" which means "singular one". This is the terminology he received from Saint Athanasius's writings.
- However, shortly after reaching an agreement in thought, both Saint Cyril and John of Antioch departed, leaving their followers without much resolve on this issue. Therefore, there was still a lot of tension between the two groups.
- Saint Dioscorus succeeded Saint Cyril and tried to explain the union between the two natures of Christ as **inward and real, without any division, change, or confusion.**
- Antiochian theory said that it was more like an "indwelling," "conjunction," or "close participation," which is not sufficient.
- At the same time that the Alexandrians and Antiochians were discussing this, Archbishop Flavian of Constantinople wrote (in Greek) to the Bishop of Rome, Leo, and told him of the discussion, to which Leo responded with the "Tome of Leo" which was written in Latin and had a heresy within it.
- The Tome of Leo said, "Each nature performs what is proper to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what is proper to the flesh." Thus, as Pope Shenouda III explains, "but the Tome of Leo says also that Christ is two: God and man, the one astonished us with miracles and the other received disgrace and suffering! What then? If that one being is alone the receiver of suffering, then where is the salvation we gained?"
- Saint Dioscorus requested a call for another council, and the second session for the Council of Ephesus was held in 449 AD under the leadership of Saint Dioscorus.
- Rome sent only a few delegates who demanded the Tome of Leo read, although there were 130 bishops who all spoke Greek and the Tome of Leo was in Latin. Thus, it was not read, making Leo of Rome very upset and calling the council, "a council of robbers."

- The council of Ephesus ended with the excommunication of some bishops, who appealed to Leo of Rome, saying they would accept his Tome if he restored them to their see.

Council of Chalcedon - 451 AD

- With the change of political power moving from East to West with the departure of Theodosius the Emperor, Leo pleaded with the new emperor to sway power towards Rome.
- A new council was held in Chalcedon, near the Emperor's home, in 451 AD, in which Leo ordered Saint Dioscorus to be arrested and the Council proceeded as a trial of Saint Dioscorus.
- Saint Dioscorus immediately defended himself and professed the same same assertion as Saint Cyril, of Mia-Physis and the united One nature of God the Word. The historian V. C. Samuel notes, "It should be noted in this context that at Chalcedon it was Dioscorus who for the first time made a statement implying the four famous adverbs of the Chalcedonian definition. For on the 8th of October, he said: 'We do not speak of confusion, neither of division, nor of change; let him who says confusion, change or mixture be an anathema.'"
- After his trial, Saint Dioscorus was allowed to return to the Council, but he was held by the Roman soldiers who beat him. Saint Dioscorus excommunicated Pope Leo of Rome who ordered his arrest and composed the Tome of Leo, to which Leo excommunicated him.
- Thus, Saint Dioscorus never returned to the council and he was exiled to the island of Gangra on September 4th, 454 AD by the Romans. There is a tradition which states that Saint Dioscorus sent back to Alexandria some of his hair and teeth which had fallen out during his beatings, and he said that these were the price of Orthodoxy.
- Other bishops who remained with Leo and the Chalcedonian thought out of fear of Leo noted that it was not because of Saint Dioscorus's theology that he was excommunicated, but because he did not return to the council and because he excommunicated Leo of Rome.
- We note that Leo of Rome appointed a new Patriarch of Alexandria, from which the Greek Orthodox church of Alexandria comes.
- Bishops from the Coptic church remained at the council but never signed the final canon, because without their Pope, they refused to sign.

- Thus, this is why our church has been condemned as “monophysites”, meaning we only believe in one nature of Christ.
- Maltreatment of Copts followed the Council, and many monasteries were take over.

After Chalcedon

- In recent discussions between the churches, Pope Shenouda III said, “Two elements should be realized concerning Chalcedon: the first one is the theological debate, and the second is the maltreatment which followed the council. After the council, there was an attempt to exterminate the followers of the one unified nature. Patriarchs were dismissed and others were appointed instead; persecutions mounted by Emperors and Patriarchs of Constantinople. Despite what we we say about our friendship with our brothers the Chalcedonians today, what happened then cannot be justified. But in order to continue in a relationship of love and understanding, we should not insist on history.”
- Pope Shenouda III also put forth his book *Nature of Christ* in which he discussed the church’s Orthodox belief.
- The foundation called *Pro Oriente* was started by the Catholic Church in which dialogue between the churches was organized, leading to the *Common Declaration of H. H. Pope Paul VI and H. H. Pope Shenouda III* on May 10, 1973, which put an end to the Christological debate between the churches.
- Also, Pope Shenouda III was also named Co-protector of *Pro Oriente* for his sincere and holy effort in working with the churches. He is also one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches.
- In October, 1991, Pope Shenouda III received over 120 delegates from different churches in the Monastery of Anba Bishoy in Wadi El-Natroun.

Understanding the Nature of Christ

- During the meeting in October, 1991 in Wadi El-Natroun, Dr. Amin, under the direction of Pope Shenouda III, made reference to the prayer of confession prayed by the priest before Holy Communion in the Coptic Orthodox Liturgy, saying, “Amen, Amen, Amen. I believe, I believe. I believe and profess until the very last breath that this is the Life-giving Body that Your Only Begotten Son, Our Lord, Our God, and Our Savior Jesus Christ, took from Our Lady and Queen of us all, the Holy Mother of God (Theotokos), the Saint, Pure Mary. **And He made it One with His Divinity, without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration,** and professed the good profession before Pontius Pilate. And gave it on our behalf, on the Holy Cross, of His own will for us all. **Truly I believe that never did His Divinity separate from His humanity, for a moment or the twinkling of an eye.** This is given for us; salvation and remission of sins, and eternal life for whomsoever partakes of it. I believe. I believe. I believe that this is true. Amen.” Thus, using this type of “liturgical theology,” one can see that our church has always professed the true faith.
- H. H. Pope Shenouda III continued in his lecture to explain the nature of the Union using the example of the union between iron and fire, as Saint Cyril and Saint Dioscorus asserted, saying, “In the case of ignited iron, we do not say that there are two natures, iron and fire, but we say iron united with fire. Similarly, we speak about the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, and we do not say ‘God and man.’”
- Pope Shenouda III also refers to the birth of Christ and the Theotokos, citing Saint Athanasius the Apostolic who wrote regarding Jesus Christ, saying, “He is not bi-natured, to one we kneel down and to the other we do not, but He is rather of One Nature, the Incarnate Logos, that is one with His Body and before whom we kneel down.” Our belief is reflected in our creed, as we say, “We believe in one God, Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, who was born of the Father before all ages ... who for us and our salvation descended from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, became Man, and was crucified for our sake.”
- Thus, this proclamation in the Creed opposes the heresy of Nestorius who claimed that Jesus was born only a man and was later filled with the Divine. This cannot be true since Jesus said, “Before Abraham was I AM” (John 8:58).

- In defending the Oneness of Christ's nature, His Holiness speaks of the suffering which Christ faced. There is a great difference between saying that the human nature alone underwent suffering on the cross and suffering from the people who beat Jesus. The One nature is important and key to our salvation in the Crucifixion of Christ. "We say that, essentially, the Divine nature is not susceptible to suffering yet He suffered due to His humanity, and was physically crucified. He, the man, united with the Godhead, physically died and His death provided unlimited atonement." If one were to say that the human nature only suffered, then it would be impossible for the salvation of the world to be attained. Further argument is made of the unity in the affirmations of the "Son of Man" in the Bible where reference is given to the Divinity of Christ. First, the term "Son of God" illustrates the representation of the Divinity of Christ, while the "Son of Man" is noted to refer to the humanity. For example, when Christ explains that the "Son of Man" has power on earth to forgive sins in Matthew 9:6, reference is given to a Divine act, namely forgiving sins. Yet, Christ says the "Son of Man" and not the "Son of God." By intertwining those two titles, Christ proclaims the unity of His Divine and human nature, as believed by the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- In maintaining One unified nature in Christ, the Coptic Orthodox Church also affirms One will. Saint Cyril the Great proclaimed, "We believe in One Will and One Act." Many verses from the Bible demonstrate Christ proclaiming His will to be that of the Father's. If there was not unity between the will of the Divine and the human, there would have been an internal conflict in Christ, which is not possible. Thus, the crucifixion was the choice of the Divine *as well* as the human nature. Hence, it is stated that "He died of His own will for us all" in the Creed.
- The importance of Jesus being fully Divine and Human is crucial to our salvation. Had not Jesus been both man and God, we could not have been reconciled to God and achieved salvation.
- This topic of the nature of Christ is a target for the devil, to knock down this true belief and ruin our salvation. This is why the Apostle 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).
- Also, we see in Hebrews how Saint Paul compares the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins in

comparison to Moses' offering on Mount Sinai: one was of the Son of God, the other was of animals. There was no other way to achieve salvation, no other sacrifice for our sins which could bring about salvation except Jesus Christ, and this is what the devil tries to hide from people. Thus, the Church has endured and defended the true faith for us in the many heresies throughout its history.

- It is no small issue which has amazing repercussions.
- For example, if Jesus's humanity and divinity were not always together without confusion or mingling, then we should take another look at the story of the Samaritan Woman, and in particular when Jesus says, "Give Me a drink?" in John 4:7. Was Jesus' humanity thirsty? Or His Divinity? Or both?
- Jesus was fully human *and* fully divine, *without* any confusion or mingling, and was born of the Theotokos. His Humanity did not separate from His Divinity for a moment nor the twinkling of an eye. Without Jesus being fully Human and fully Divine at the *same time*, we could not have salvation.

On the Mount of Temptation

- The Gospel reading for the second Sunday of Lent is Matthew 4:1-11, where Jesus is tempted by the devil after having fasted 40 days in the wilderness.
- The temptation of Jesus on the mount is recorded in three of the four Gospels. It is recorded in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13.
- There are many spiritual and theological issues that are contained in the temptation of Jesus on the mount.
- In Luke 4:1, we read “And Jesus being full of the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan”. **But how could Christ be filled with the Holy Spirit while being God?** - Christ did not receive the Holy Spirit at the Jordan for His own sake, for His is One with the Holy spirit in essence without any division, for He is the Son of God. However, just as it was said at first on His Incarnation that He was born of the Holy Spirit and of the virgin, it is likewise said here that the Holy Spirit descended on Him once again after baptism.
- It should be carefully noted that the Holy Spirit is always involved in Christ’s work, and thus His presence is essential as Christ starts His ministry. The Holy Spirit is involved in the process of the Incarnation, and consequently in that of redemption and salvation as a basic factor from beginning to end. He attended the nativity, the baptism, temptation, signs and wonders, always testifying of Christ; “He will bear witness of Me” (John 15:26) and “He will take what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14).
- “... and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:1-2).
 - Christ did not seek temptation for Himself. He Himself said, “Lead us not into temptation.” Yet, when temptation did come, He did not shun it, but faced it with all readiness, for it is to this very purpose that He came.
 - **Why led by the Spirit?** - The Holy Spirit intervenes here as a main element in declaring the righteousness of Christ. The testimony to Christ and the declaration of His Lordship does not come from Him, but rather from the Holy Spirit, because this is His job.

- **And why should the Spirit wish to be tempted by Satan?** - We read in Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God” (Isaiah 61:2). Thus, the year of the Lord’s favor must necessarily begin with driving the enemy away. Thus, it was the Spirit who planned this day of vengeance against Satan as the first step in the plan of redemption. Satan here is on the run. It was Christ who sought Satan in the desert, his home, to seek vengeance against him, to “undo” the sin of Adam as the first step in the process of reconciling man to God. It was not Satan who sought Christ to tempt Him. Christ here defeats Satan, unlike Adam, who was defeated by Satan in the Garden of Eden.
- **How could Christ be tempted by the Devil while being God?** - We note here that Christ is God, who can never have the potential, will, or propensity to sin. Christ’s body is free from Adam’s original sin *and* willful sin. We read in James 1:13 that “God cannot be tempted with evil.” So at no point can Christ enter into temptation by the evil one. Thus, the word “temptation” as it refers to Christ cannot be linked to sin. The tempter (Satan), however, approaches all people, without exception, boldly. He violates their territory, as he did with Adam. In the case of Christ, we find the opposite as what happened with Adam. It was Christ who sought Satan in the desert and stepped into his territory to defeat him.
- Another way of describing the above point is as follows: there are two types of temptation, i) external temptation and internal temptation. External temptation is a temptation from the external surroundings. It is a temptation that is visible with our eyes. Internal temptation is the temptation that penetrates the mind and our thoughts. Christ was tempted externally, as the devil did appear to Him on the mount. But Christ *cannot* be tempted internally, that is, temptation cannot penetrate the mind of Christ, and thus there can never be a point where Christ struggles with temptation or ponders temptation and sin mentally. Thus, this is what we mean by saying that Christ is not susceptible to temptation and does not have the potential or propensity for it. Thus, Christ was not only sinless, but He also did not have the propensity to sin. Man on the other hand *has* the propensity and potential for both internal and external temptation, and falls in both cases, as did Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were first both externally tempted by the sight of the Tree of Knowledge. Then Satan penetrated their thoughts by what he said: “You will surely

not 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 3:4-5). After Satan put these cunning and deceptive thoughts in the mind of Eve, she sinned. She fell as a result of internal temptation, though her external surroundings were absolutely perfect, for she was in the Garden of Eden, the place of the Lord!

This Gospel passage also teaches us several practical things:

- The importance of fasting in overcoming temptation and sin, and in particular, overcoming the devil (Matthew 4:2).
- Being filled with the Holy Spirit as a result of fasting. Fasting raises our spiritual awareness, and as a result, the Holy Spirit is active in our life (Matthew 4:1, Luke 4:1).
- We see a one on one confrontation between Christ and Satan, in which Christ is victorious. This gives us great comfort and joy in knowing that Satan is defeated, doomed, and his days are numbered. Christ is always victorious and He will be victorious again in His second coming.
- This Gospel passage shows us the trickery and deceit of the devil. He twists words and meanings to fit his own definitions. He even twists words and meanings from the Bible.

Satan tempts Jesus three times here: i) he commands Him to turn the stone into bread, ii) he commands Him to jump off the pinnacle of the temple, and iii) he commands Him to worship him.

- The first temptation is an attack on the body, for Jesus was hungry after His fast, and the devil tempted him with food so that Jesus would satisfy His physical needs.
- The fact that Jesus is hungry shows the physical needs of Christ’s flesh, which is in accordance with the normal limits of human nature.
- However, the Bible never mentions any inclination toward appetite on Jesus’s part. He never had the desire to eat though He was hungry. Such a desire would indicate a drop to the earth, and a submission to the physical needs of the body. Rather, Christ shows us how one can have control over the body and the desires of the flesh.

- We read, "... and afterward He was hungry and the devil came to Him" (Matthew 4:2-3). When the flesh felt hungry, Satan moved for the encounter, for he now had a key to try in a door which seemed closed to him. Satan always tries to attack when we are weak and most vulnerable.
- "And the tempter came and said to Him, if You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Matthew 4:3). Christ's response was "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). We discover, at once, that the enemy was trying to instill in our nature the delusion that our life is totally dependent on the earth. He exploited hunger, which seemed life threatening, and linked it to gratification which consequently seemed the only means to life. Satan tries to deceitfully convince us that food is life-giving.
- The second temptation was an attack on the soul of Christ, which glowed with fasting and prayer, in which the devil tells Jesus to jump, thus defying the laws of gravity and defying the capability of humanity. The second temptation is more serious than the first.
- By the fasting of the flesh, and after the successful endurance of the pain of hunger in such an amazing manner, the soul is inevitably elevated to its ultimate height, entering into a state of exaltation. It is here that the devil tries to be deceptive and get us to fall.
- Although this temptation was based on the previous one, it is in fact its very opposite. For the first is based on being confined to the earth and gratifying the flesh and having regard for human physical needs, whereas the second temptation suggests spiritual elevation of the soul, without any regard for the laws, weight or demands of the flesh.
- The proposal here is offered to the soul to become ego-centered and exalted beyond human limitations.
- Christ responds to the second temptation by saying, "Again it is written, 'you shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (Matthew 4:7). Christ here exposes the element of guile in Satan's counsel. Satan here demands us to work for our own glory and self-righteousness without being humble and submissive to God's counsel. Satan wants man to force God to sanction his work, and compel Him to perform a miracle. This cannot be, since God will not sanction any work in which man is glorified and He is not glorified.

- Then the third temptation is the ultimate one, and most serious, in which the devil asks Christ to worship him, thus commanding Him to be in complete submission to him.
- In this temptation, Satan becomes desperate. The devil realized that he was defeated in the battle against the flesh and the soul. His arena became now very small, being confined to only one remaining section of Christ's nature.
- This temptation is the most serious, as it is an attack on Christ's divinity, His nature, and His Oneness with the Godhead.
- In this temptation, Satan, knowing that Christ is hungry and weary, wants Christ to take the easy way out. Rather than achieve the level of the divine, the devil offers a compromise to live the easy life of sin.
- In these temptations, we see that the devil is not only cunning and deceptive, but we see that he is also a liar. He tells Jesus that he will give Him the kingdoms of the world if He worships him (Luke 4:6). This, of course, is a lie, since the devil does not have authority whatsoever over anything of this world, but rather it is Christ who has the authority over all. This is why Christ calls the devil, "the father of lies" (John 8:44).
- Thus, as far as man is concerned, this temptation was leveled at the personality of man. Satan wants us to live the life of comfort and ease, and a compromise to sin. A life of quick glory through a surrender to the devil. The devil offers, rather than the hard life of struggle against sin and worship to God, a life of sin and ease in worship to the devil.
- Christ responds to this temptation by saying, "Away with you Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve'" (Matthew 4:10). Christ here made an end to all arguments; for there is no true rest or any valid existence of the human self except in worshipping God. And the ultimate aim of man can never be realized except through worship.
- Christ is victorious over Satan! Christ's "undoing" of Adam's sin is now complete.
- And now, after Christ has undone the bonds of sin with which our nature was bound through Adam, by His fasting, hunger, and temptation, there remains nothing but to annul sin by His death on the Cross!

Judas and the Last Supper

- The Last Supper is one of the most important events of the Holy Week, and Holy Thursday is one of the seven minor Lord's feasts.
- The Last Supper took place in the Upper Room, which is the house of Saint Mark.
- The Last Supper is recorded in all four Gospels, and it is in the Last Supper that Christ instituted the Eucharist (Communion, also known as the Passover of the New Covenant) for the disciples for the first time.
- An issue that has generated a lot of confusion and discussion is that of whether Judas participated in the Eucharist or not. Here, we must study what the Coptic Orthodox Church says about this issue.
- The Coptic Orthodox Church stands firm on its belief that Judas did *not* participate in the Eucharist (the Body and Blood of Jesus) at the Last Supper.
- In order to understand why this is true, we must very carefully read the four Gospels and carefully examine the chronological order of the events in the Last supper.
- According to the article by Metropolitan Bishoy, the following major events occurred at the Last supper, in the following order:
 - **The Passover Meal**- This is the Passover meal of the Old Testament, in which Jesus and His disciples were celebrating the Passover feast. The Coptic Orthodox Church believes that Judas attended the Passover meal.
 - **The Washing of the Feet** - The washing of the feet is recorded only in the Gospel of Saint John and occurred as the disciples were eating the Passover meal. After the washing of the feet, the disciples continued and finished the Passover meal. Judas attended the washing of the feet also.
 - **The Eucharist** - This was the last event of the Last Supper in which Jesus gave His Body and Blood to the disciples. The Eucharist is also referred to as the Passover of the New Covenant. Judas did *not* attend the Eucharist, since he left immediately after he dipped his hand in the dish with Jesus as Jesus gave him the dipped piece of bread.

- **Singing the Hymn** - Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn. Judas was not present.
- **Mount of Olives and Garden of Gethsemane** - Jesus and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives and then to the Garden of Gethsemane. Right before they He went to the Mount of Olives, Jesus told the disciples about the Holy Spirit, He prayed for His disciples, and revealed to His disciples that He is One with the Father and told them about His death. This is recorded in John, Chapter 14-17. After Jesus told His disciples these things, they then went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Of course, Judas was not present at the Mount of Olives either. It was during all this time that Judas went and told the Pharisees where Jesus was and led the officers and the soldiers to the Garden of Gethsemane.

The Last Supper as Recorded in the Four Gospels

The Gospel According to Saint Matthew

- Our teacher Saint Matthew the Evangelist states, “So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. 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 by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for 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’.” (Matthew 26:19-25).
- It is apparent in these verses of the gospel that Christ the Lord declared His betrayal by one of His disciples (namely Judas) as they were eating the Passover meal of the Old Testament. This is evident in the words of Jesus when He said, “He who dipped his hand with me in the dish.” It is also written in the gospel, “As they were eating” meaning, as they were eating the Passover which they had prepared.
- The Lord Jesus Christ did not wish to expose Judas before his peers, the disciples, so He told Judas secretly that he was the one who would betray Him. Jesus also informed both of His disciples John and Peter of the betrayal in a concealed manner when John the disciple questioned Him in the Gospel of John.

- Saint Matthew, after the previous passage, continued his narration saying, “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.’ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” (Matthew 26: 26-30).
- It is clear from this passage in the gospel that the Eucharist took place after Christ spoke of the betrayal of Judas, and after He spoke about Judas himself. Christ the Lord did not mention this subject after offering His body and blood to the disciples; but rather, they praised and went out to the Mount of Olives immediately afterwards.
- These praises (hymns) were part of the worship; it occurred directly after the sacred interval which the Lord spent with His disciples around the table of the Lord’s Supper.
- Meanwhile, the conversation regarding the love between the disciples and the subject of the Holy Spirit took place (see John 14-16).
- On the way to the Mount of Olives, until they reached Gethsemane, Jesus Christ spoke of His disciples’ being made to stumble because of Him and of Peter’s denial (Matthew 26:31-36).
- Note how Jesus conceals His betrayers identity. Had Jesus revealed Judas to the other disciples, Judas would not have made it out of the upper room alive.
- Jesus, till the last minute, was encouraging Judas to repent, and was trying to win him over by love. We note the one on one encounters Jesus has with Judas in each of these four Gospels in the last supper, where Jesus talks to Judas in a concealed manner letting Judas know that He is aware of what is happening, warning him, and encouraging Judas to repent.
- By saying “but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born,” Jesus is not cursing or criticizing Judas for betraying Him, but rather Jesus is sorrowful because He knows that Judas in the end will not repent and hence his salvation is lost. Thus, for every soul that is lost, Jesus says “It

would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” Jesus never wants to see anyone lose his/her salvation.

- Note when Jesus told the disciples that He will be betrayed, each of the disciples looked at himself and said in the most humble way, “Lord, is it I?” A servant is truly humble, pure, and holy when he always examines himself first and honestly feels that he may be the true cause of what is wrong in service.
- Also note that by saying “Is it I?”, the disciples really had no idea who was going to betray Jesus. It says in John’s gospel that “they were perplexed” (John 13:22). It shows how one can conceal his thoughts, and how one’s outside appearance may look great, but on the inside, one may be rotten. The disciples had very high regard and respect for Judas, and when Jesus told Judas in the Gospel of John to “do it quickly,” the disciples thought that He was telling Judas to buy things for the feast or give money to the poor (John 13:29).
- Note how Judas asks the same thing (Is it I?), but in a deceptive way, trying to see if Jesus truly knew who the betrayer was and what he was up to. Although Judas’s deception, way of life, and sin were hidden from the disciples, it was not hidden from God. Nothing can be hidden from God.

The Gospel According to Saint Mark

- Our teacher Saint Mark the Evangelist narrated how Judas sought to betray Christ the Lord. He wrote, “Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.” (Mark 14:10-11). This narration closely coincides with that of Saint Matthew the Evangelist on the same subject.
- The events of the Passover according to Saint Mark, are identical to those in the gospel of Saint Matthew in all details. These include, the prediction of the Lord’s betrayal by one of His disciples during the Passover of the Old Testament, the institution of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, going out to the Mount of Olives, the Lord speaking about the disciples being made to stumble because of Him, and Peter’s denial. Thus, the same incidents that are found in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, are re-emphasized.

The Gospel According to Saint John

- We will discuss the Gospel according to Saint John prior to the gospel according to Saint Luke, since Saint Luke's Gospel requires special attention.
- The Gospel of Saint John does *not* mention the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.
- Saint John wrote his gospel approximately thirty years after the three Synoptic Gospels were written. The Lord's Supper and the rite of the Divine Liturgy had already spread among the churches; and what Christ had said on the Lord's supper table on the eve of His suffering, was also well known.
- Therefore, Saint John mentions the words of Jesus Christ regarding communion at the beginning of his gospel. They can be found in Chapter 6 (John 6:53-56) during the Lord's debate with the Jews, and after the miracle of the feeding of the multitude with five loaves and two fish.
- Christ the Lord told the Jews, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).
- Here, the Lord identified the link between the body that He would give on the cross, with the body that He offers in the Holy Sacrament - it is the same body. When the Jews were astonished at His words, He said, "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).
- As we have observed in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, during the Last Supper, the Lord told His disciples what He had formerly mentioned to the Jews concerning the offering of His broken body and His shed blood. He said, "Take, eat; this is My body. Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:26-28). This is the connection between the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the act of the redemption upon the cross; it is the same body given and the same blood shed. It is, "...food indeed and drink indeed for the remission of sin, the firmness in Christ and eternal life. Given for us unto salvation and remission of sins and everlasting life for whom so ever partake of it..."

- Saint John in his gospel, outlines what was not mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels regarding the body and blood of Christ. This includes details of the last supper, the service of the washing of feet, and some passages of the Lord's conversation with Judas Iscariot. The Lord's words, "Take, eat ...Drink from it" which are mentioned in the other gospels and are used in the Divine Liturgy, are not mentioned in Saint John's gospel.
- In his gospel, Saint John clarified without any doubt that Judas went out of the upper room during the Jewish Passover meal and before the institution of the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper).
- However, Judas was present when Christ washed His disciples' feet. This is apparent because the Lord told Peter and the disciples, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you. For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, 'You are not all clean.'" (John 13:10-11).
- After Saint John's recount of the washing of the disciples' feet during the Jewish Passover, we read the following, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me. Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus's bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Then, leaning back on Jesus's breast, he said to Him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.' 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.' But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, Buy those things we need for the feast, or that he should give something to the poor. Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night. So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. 'If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.'" (John 13:21-32).
- **"He to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it"**
 - It is clear from the recount by Saint John (which corresponds to the narratives in the gospels according to Saints Matthew and Mark) that Christ the Lord spoke about the betrayal of Judas as they were eating the Jewish Passover. The evidence for this

is that He dipped a piece of bread and gave it to Judas. This is different from taking the body and blood which He gave to each disciple individually. He did not dip the body in the blood. However, He said, “Take, eat; this is My body... Drink from it for this is My blood”. He gave them the blood in the cup saying “Drink from it, all of you...” (Matthew 26:27). Christ never dipped the body in the blood.

- Saint John writes that Judas, after taking the Jewish Passover piece of dipped bread, “He went out immediately” (John 13:30). He did not wait until the institution of the Eucharist.
 - When Judas went out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified” (John 13:31). In other words, at this moment, Christ the Lord accepted death by His own will, since He acknowledged that Judas would go to those who were plotting to kill Him.
- **“What you do, do quickly”**
 - The Lord pitied Judas, and tried to prevent him from carrying out the betrayal. He also awaited his repentance. We read that the Lord was “troubled in spirit” (John 13:21) before declaring to the disciples that He would be betrayed. Christ lovingly warned Judas several times, and even went to the extent of declaring His knowledge of His betrayal by Judas to him.
 - However, when Judas took the piece of bread and did not deviate from his evil intentions, Satan entered him and he refused the Lord’s advice and warning. Subsequently, the Lord told him, “What you do, do quickly” (John 13:27). In other words, Christ implied, “If you are insisting on betrayal, do not remain on the table from which only the pure who are washed by repentance will partake. If you intend to repent, this should be carried out quickly and before the institution of the Lord’s Supper which is now ready to commence.” Instead, Judas went out quickly guided by the the devil who had possessed his heart.
 - Thus, the verse “What you do, do quickly” was a final appeal by Jesus to Judas to repent. It is as if Jesus told him, “you need to make up your mind quickly, either repent and partake of the Body and Blood, or betray Me.” This verse is not to be interpreted as Jesus telling Judas to hurry up and get the betrayal over with because Jesus wanted to finish it as soon as possible.

- **The relationship between Judas and Jesus**

- Jesus confronts Judas with his sin in all four Gospels. He tries to make him stop and think about what he is doing. Jesus is trying to get Judas to recognize his shocking ways.
- Second, Jesus confronts Judas with Himself, by making eye to eye contact with Judas, and try to make him aware of what he is about to do. Jesus’s hope is that the love Judas sees in His eyes will stop him from sin.
- Jesus could of used His power to destroy Judas and his plan. However, He would not do this because Jesus respects our free will, and Jesus only uses love as an appeal to fight sin. Jesus never coerces; He only appeals to us with love.
- Love has the greatest respect upon man’s free will and love is the easiest thing to reject for a sinner.
- Despite all of this, Judas went on. Even when he was confronted with his sin and confronted with the face of Christ, he would not turn back.
- Judas committed the worst kind of sin: a cold, calculated, ruthless, and deliberate sin. Sin is sin, but there is a difference between a sin committed out of the impulse of the moment from a passionate heart, and a sin that is callous, deliberate and knows precisely what it is doing.

- **The relationship between Judas and Satan**

- This was not the first time that the devil had worked inside the heart of Judas. Saint John the Evangelist at the beginning of his account of the Last Supper and of the washing of the disciples’ feet said, “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.” (John 13:1-4).
- In this passage, it is apparent that Satan worked with great power in the heart of Judas; even to such a point that he was not affected when the Lord washed his feet in inexpressible humility.

- Moreover, Saint Luke mentions in his gospel that Satan entered Judas Iscariot prior to this. He stated, “Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he promised and sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude.” (Luke 22:3-6).
- Therefore, Satan commenced his work in the heart of Judas in different stages. Firstly, we read, “...the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him...” Secondly, it is written, “Then Satan entered Judas, so he went his way and conferred with the chief priests...” And then we read, “Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him...”
- Each time the degree of Satan’s influence on Judas became stronger. It started with a thought, then with a plan of betrayal, followed by the start of carrying out the conspiracy, then executing the plan, and finally reaching full betrayal.
- Satan led Judas to the stage of complete loss in the hope of God’s mercy, and so he killed himself and will perish eternally with no opportunity for salvation. This is why the gospel of Matthew states, “It would have been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24).

The Gospel According to Saint Luke

- In Saint Luke’s gospel, several incidents are recounted according to subject matter rather than being presented in the sequential order in which they occurred.
- This is clear in the narrative of the baptism of Christ. Saint Luke mentions the story of John the Baptist, his sermons, his preaching for repentance by baptism, and his baptizing of the multitude in the Jordan River.
- He then mentions that King Herod arrested John the Baptist and shut him up in prison, because John had rebuked by him for his marriage to Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. Saint Luke wrote, “But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison” (Luke 3:19-20).

- It is well known, as mentioned in the gospels, that Christ was baptized by John in the Jordan before he was shut up in prison, and before John's martyrdom which followed his imprisonment. However, Saint Luke after mentioning the imprisonment of John, continued saying, "When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him" (Luke 3:21-22).
- It is evident that Saint Luke wanted it to be understood that Jesus was baptized in the presence of the multitude, who were baptized by John before John's imprisonment. However, he mentions this incident when he started speaking about the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The ministry of Christ followed His baptism and His going out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Before this, Saint Luke retold the story of John the Baptist, including what Herod had done to him. So, he adhered to the subject matter rather than the sequential order of the events.
- In other words, Saint Luke narrates a whole subject before shifting to another. According to sequential order, the incidents of two subjects combine. This is not unusual, and does not contradict the accounts of biblical events presented by the other evangelists.
- The same notion applies to Saint Luke's narrative of the Last Supper. He mentioned the betrayal of Judas after he had written of the events relating to both the Jewish Passover and the Lord's Supper. As a consequence, some believe that Judas was present during the institution of the Eucharist; but the gospel of Saint Luke does not mention that Judas participated in the Lord's Supper, or that he was present.
- Saint Luke started his account of the Supper and the Passover by stating what the Lord said when he sat with His twelve disciples, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). He began by talking about the Passover of the Old Testament. Thus it was not convenient for Saint Luke to abandon the narration of the Passover event in order to discuss the betrayal of one of the twelve, only to return to the topic of the Passover of the new covenant once more. This may have led the reader to believe that Christ, by His words, was referring only to the Old Testament Passover. So Saint Luke, after completing his recount of all aspects of the Lord's Supper, transferred the focus to Judas Iscariot's plan of betrayal.
- As mentioned, Saint Luke, for various events in the gospel, narrates according to subject

matter rather than order of occurrence.

Concluding Remarks

- In all four gospels, if we study the sequential order of events concerning the going out of Judas from the upper room where the Passover supper took place, it is clear according to the Holy Bible that Judas Iscariot did not partake of the divine sacrament of the Eucharist.
- The Lord attempted to lead him to repentance, but he refused. Therefore, Judas disqualified himself from taking the Body and Blood of Jesus. It is not so much that Christ prevented him but rather it was Judas who made that decision.
- It is logical, fitting, and consistent with the rest of the Bible that Judas, who insisted on committing a sin and refused to repent, not partake of the Body and Blood, for Holy Communion as is taught by Jesus, the Apostles, and the Church is only for repentant sinners. Saint Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:27, “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord”.
- The Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches maintain that Judas did partake of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, arguing that Christ sought by all means to save him. The footnote on page 72 in the Orthodox Study Bible for Matthew 26:26-28 is not consistent with Coptic Orthodox Church doctrine.

Prophecies of the Birth of Jesus - Part I

- As we know, the entire Bible is centered around the life of Christ.
- We should be aware that the Old Testament, which was written over a period of 1000 years and written several hundred years before the time of Christ, contains approximately 300 prophecies of the coming Messiah.
- It is important for us to know and understand the prophecies of Christ as they serve to strengthen our faith and they help build a bridge between the Old and New Testaments.
- The prophecies about the birth of Christ in the Old Testament confirm that
 - He is the Messiah, the Redeemer.
 - He is the Son of God and Savior.
 - He is the only way to forgiveness of sins and salvation.
 - Christ alone is the one in which all of these prophecies are fulfilled.
- How do we know the Jesus of the New Testament is the one that is being spoken of in the Old Testament? Jesus Himself gives several verses to confirm this. He says,
 - “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets, I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).
 - “And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27).
 - “Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).
 - “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me” (John 5:39).
- Thus the Scriptures in the Old Testament not only promise a Messiah, but it does so in such a way that we can precisely identify Him.

- Once sin had entered humanity through the sin of Adam and Eve, the plan of salvation immediately started and hence the prophecies of Jesus began. The consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve were as follows:
 - Whereas man and woman had life, now death rules.
 - Whereas there was joy and pleasure, now pain was introduced.
 - Whereas there was a joyous occupation with abundance, now a meager subsistence by toil has become the rule along with pain in childbirth.
 - Whereas there was perfect fellowship with God and each other, now we see alienation and fear, blaming, hiding, and attempting to cover their nakedness with fig leaves.

We will now list the major prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the birth of Christ.

1. Prophecy 1: The Promised Seed (Genesis 3:15)

- Genesis 3:15 states that “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel”.
- We note this verse contains a judgment on Satan, a promise to mankind, and a prophecy of Jesus. We note that God is speaking to Satan and Eve in Genesis 3:15. The enmity is between Satan and Eve. “He shall bruise you on the head” refers to the seed (Jesus) of Eve defeating Satan. The seed of Eve, Jesus, shall be victorious over Satan and bruise Satan on the head. “He shall bruise you on the heel” refers to the suffering of the seed and humanity, but it is not defeat. Note here that Adam is not at all mentioned in the battle between Satan and Eve, because the virgin birth of Christ was accomplished with the Holy Spirit through a woman and with no help of a man. It is the seed of the woman alone who will accomplish victory and no help from man is needed to attain victory.

2. Prophecy 2: The Line of Seth - The Godly Seed

- “And Adam knew his wife again, and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for she said, “God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel; for Cain killed him. And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:25-26).

- Jesus was from the line of Seth, the godly seed. Seth is from a Hebrew word which means to set or to appoint. Eve says, “God has appointed me another offspring” implying that the child becomes the one appointed to be the godly line, the line out of which the seed of the woman will come.
- “Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord” refers to the logical consequences of the birth of Seth and the establishment of the godly line of men from which the seed of woman would come. This stands in contrast to the ungodly line of Cain who “went out from the presence of the Lord” (Genesis 4:16).

3. Prophecy 3: Blessings of Shem (Genesis 9:26)

- “He also said, ‘Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem, and let Canaan be His servant’”. (Genesis 9:26).
- In verse 25, Noah said, “cursed be Canaan” and in verse 26, Noah said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem.” The point here is that Shem’s good fortune was the product of his relationship to the Lord as his God. This is not only a prophecy and a pronouncement of blessing upon Shem and his posterity, but in it God declares that Shem’s posterity would know and serve the one true God. His descendants would become the godly seed or line. From Shem would come the Deliverer, the seed of the woman and the means of blessing the other brothers. As we read in Genesis 9:27, “May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant.”
- The descendents of Shem became the Semitic people, many of whom dwelt in the East around the land of Babylon. Abraham was a descendant of Shem.

4. Prophecy 4: The Call of Abram and the Abrahamic Covenant

- “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Genesis 12:1-3).
- From this verse, we see that God called Abram to leave his father’s house and serve Him. Abram is in the line of Shem from whom the seed would come.

- From this verse, several bits of information are obtained about the coming Messiah. (1) A specific portion of land is now in view, one that will become the center of the world as God views it. The seed of the woman will come out of a special parcel of land, the land of Canaan, later to be known as Palestine. (2) A specific nation is now in view, one that would come out of the loins of Abram. So we look for a nation that will arise out of the descendants of Abram. (3) Universal blessings would become a channel of blessing to all the world. This means that we look for a Redeemer and promised Seed to come from Abram's people.
- Thus, we are to look for our Savior, the seed of the woman, in the small piece of land along the Mediterranean Sea, the land of Israel.
- God would later make a Covenant with Abram, and change Abram's name to Abraham, which means father of a multitude (Genesis 17:4-7).

The Cross of Jesus in Our Life

- A fundamental aspect of the Christian life in following Jesus is to bear His Cross. We all must bear a cross in our life in order to imitate Christ, to follow Him, to fully develop our Christian spiritual life, and to develop a relationship with Him.
- Jesus speaks powerfully in several places in the Bible on the necessity of bearing a cross in our life. He says, “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:38). Also, we read, “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me’” (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34).
- What does it mean to bear (or carry) a cross in our life? There is not a simple definition of what carrying a cross in our life means, but generally speaking, a cross is typically associated with pain and suffering in our life, whether that pain be just or unjust, deserved or undeserved. However, that pain and suffering only becomes a cross in our life when we begin to walk the path of Jesus, otherwise our pain and suffering is futile and it belongs to the world.
- The cross we all carry is different for everyone, and the definition of the cross is different for everyone. Only Jesus knows and can define the cross in a persons life, and He defines it and allows it according to His precise will for each and every person who desires to follow Him.

Pain and Suffering

- The concept of pain and suffering is a very difficult concept to understand and accept. In the Old Testament, and in particular, before the crucifixion of Jesus, suffering was a direct result of sin. A person who sinned had to suffer. Thus, suffering was a punishment as a direct result of sin.
- Before Jesus came into the world, sin ruled over man instead of God, and sin knows no law. The law of sin is injustice; its rule is inequality and its principle is tyranny. In the

rule of sin, there is no just distribution of suffering. The evil man may suffer less than the good man, or vice-versa.

- Jesus then came to suffer unjustly so that sin would no longer rule man, and that unjust suffering would no longer be a result of sin or anything else, but rather it would be a gift and a participation in the life of Christ.
- Christ abolished sin through His crucifixion and resurrection, and reconciled and brought us to life. In doing so, Christ broke the link that bound suffering to sin. For suffering is no longer a participation in the sin of Adam, but a participation in the love of Christ.
- As a result of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, if we are in Christ, no matter how much we suffer, and no matter how severe our pain, our suffering is in no way related to whether we deserve that pain. Suffering is no longer a penalty for anything, nor is it a means of atoning for anything, or a punishment for anything.
- It was sin that decreed that suffering should be a form of penalty or atonement or punishment, but Christ eliminated sin after paying its penalty, atoning for it, and bearing its punishment.
- We must be careful in that suffering may be self-induced as a consequence of our sin, as was the case of the prodigal son and the man at the pool of Bethesda. But suffering can never be the result of sin for those who are in Christ.

Applying the Suffering of Jesus to our Life

1. Bearing a cross is inevitable to those who embrace the truth

- The truth in our life is Jesus, for He Himself declared that “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). After Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests immediately sought to kill both Jesus and Lazarus.
- The chief priests could not bear to see Jesus reveal his identity (the truth). It is by absolute rejection, humiliation, and extreme hatred that His Passion began (Lazarus Saturday), and it is the same for all those to cling to the truth. And it is in this sense that defines the narrow way of the Christian life.

2. Suffering is acceptable and must not be avoided

- The cross to Christ was voluntary and acceptable. Christ says, “Shall I not drink the cup my Father has given Me?” (John 18:11). Also, not only was the cross voluntary and acceptable, it had become an aim in itself: “For this purpose I have come to this hour” (John 12:27).
- Thus we must learn from Jesus two important things about pain and suffering: i) accept suffering with joy as a part of our faith, and when it comes, never question it, but rather welcome it, and ii) never run from it, avoid it, or shun it, but rather welcome it and be joyful in it, for suffering is a gift from Christ for those who are in Christ. The person who avoids suffering is depriving themselves of a gift and their portion in the suffering of Christ.
- Recall St. Peter when he first ran from Nero after Nero had sentenced Peter to death. Jesus appeared to Peter and asked him, “Would you like Me to go and be crucified for you once again?” Peter was ashamed and immediately returned. Those who evade their cup of suffering are asking Christ to be crucified for them once again.
- The cross did not come by chance in the life of Jesus. He was born for it! “For this purpose I have come to this hour” (John 12:27). Likewise, man was born for suffering and suffering was born for man.
- The concept, understanding, and acceptance of pain is very different for the Christian compared to that of a person of the world. For those who think in a worldly way, pain is a big stumbling block to the human mind, which cannot accept pain as a means of acquiring anything good.
- The worldly mind believes that pain can be removed by knowledge, so people strive in the field of medicine, for example, to try and abolish pain and bring relief to humanity. Indeed, if we consider carefully all aspects of the educational process, we find that education is basically an attempt to avoid pain and weariness and need.
- Pain for a person of the world (a non-Christian) is therefore a very difficult subject for the mind and is impossible to accept because to accept pain is to cancel out the mind and all mental activity. So to those of the world, the cross is indeed “foolishness and a stumbling block to the Greeks” (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).
- Pain then, is a stumbling block to philosophy which strives to reach “God” through

meditation, knowing nothing of sacrifice and believing that pain leads to death. The world cannot understand the notion or benefit of sacrifice through pain.

3. Keep our eyes on Christ in times of suffering

- Jesus never took His eyes off God the Father during all of His suffering. Christ never paid attention to the evil hands bearing the hammer nor did He pay attention to the chief priests who cried, “Crucify Him, Crucify Him.” Because of Christ’s total focus on the Father, He said to Pilate, “You would have no power over Me unless it had been given to you from above” (John 19:11).
- This teaches us that when we go through pain, suffering, and tribulation, we should always fix our eyes on Christ, and never fix our eyes on those who do us harm. For if we concentrate on those who do us harm, then the pain and suffering can never be acceptable, received with joy, and never a gift. Rather focusing on the those who do us harm will lead to anger, resentment, hatred, and loss of peace and spirituality.
- Another example of a person who never took his eyes off God during his troubles is Joseph. In being beaten and sold as a slave by his brothers, Joseph never developed a grudge against his brothers. In being imprisoned in Potiphar’s house, he never lost hope and always remained in good standing with those around him. In all his sufferings, Joseph saw the invisible hand of God that weaved all these incidents together, and this is why when he met his brothers at the end, he was able to say, “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:22).
- Another example of a person who never took his eyes off God during his suffering is Job. Job lost his family, his farm, his cattle, his workers, and his health. Yet Job never cursed God, but rather he said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong” (Job 1:21-22). However, Job’s wife said, “Do you still hold to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9)

4. Focusing on Christ in our suffering enables us to forgive others

- Because of Christ's total focus on the Father during his pain and suffering throughout His trial and crucifixion, Christ said on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Thus, it is not out of a vacuum that Christ asks us to forgive others in the Lord's prayer. Christ Himself has performed the ultimate forgiveness on the cross.
- Christ teaches us here that forgiveness of those who do us harm is much, much easier when we focus on Christ during our tribulations, otherwise forgiveness may become impossible.
- We can more easily forgive others if we can envision the gift and the glory of those in heaven who suffered for the sake of Jesus. If we fix our eyes on heaven and the heavenly gift that awaits us, forgiveness of others will become much easier for us.

5. Pain and suffering often result from envy and jealousy

- The envy, jealousy, and the stance of the pharisees against Christ resulted from the dazzling success of the service of Christ in elevating the spirits of the people, His teachings of the Law, and in infusing joy among the people in general, especially among sinners.
- Jesus threatened the livelihood of the pharisees and chief priests. He made them look bad, and He exposed them for what they are: hypocrites and falsehoods. Thus, their hatred, resistance, and hostility towards Christ grew all the more.
- This type of envy and jealousy often exists in service today when a God fearing servant is successful in elevating the spirits of those he/she serves and bears fruits in his/her service, while others are dead in their service as well as in their spiritual life.
- The devil always takes advantages of such situations to try and turn a successful service upside down.
- Such envy and jealousy also may exist in the workplace, at home, and amongst family members.
- The same kind of hostility displayed by the powers of darkness and their prince towards Christ still exist today by those who are motivated by personal motives of profit, by malice, and by blind fanaticism. Such malice, folly and blind fanaticism always find a target in anyone bent on witnessing and tracking Christ in his own life.

6. Suffering is our path to glory

- Jesus says in the beatitudes “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:11).
- Eternal life with Jesus, life after death, will involve no more tears, no more pain, no more injustice, no more weakness, no more death, and no more suffering.
- The cross we bear in our life cannot be compared with the glory it will bring forth. St. Paul says, “For I consider, that the sufferings of the present time, cannot be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Practical Aspects of the Holy Trinity

1. Introduction

- The Holy Trinity is a complex topic. Understanding and explaining the Holy Trinity in a practical and simplified way is an important aspect of our service to the kids.
- There is often confusion about what the Holy Trinity is, who is God, and what the definitions and roles are of the persons of the Trinity.

2. Understanding the Holy Trinity in Practical Terms

- The Holy Trinity consists of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which are the three persons (forms) of God, who have existed from eternity in a complete union and oneness.
- Each person of the Holy Trinity is correctly called God: the Father is God, Jesus is God, the Holy Spirit is God.
- Although each person in the trinity has a certain role, there is no hierarchy, they are absolutely and eternally *equal* and united.
- No one person in the Trinity ever acts on their own, but rather in complete unity.
- To understand the Holy Trinity in practical terms, think of the three forms of H_2O : liquid, ice, vapor. Thus, there are three forms of H_2O , but all have the exact same chemical composition, H_2O . Same with the Holy Trinity. The three forms are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but all are the same God.

3. Who is the Father?

- God the Father is a spirit, who has never been seen by any man. “No one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18).
- In the Old Testament, anyone who sees God must die.
- It is *only* Jesus who has made God the Father known to humanity. “The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18).
- Also, we read, “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

- The Father’s role in the Godhead is that everything proceeds from the Father, as we read “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).
- Jesus says, “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world” (John 16:28).
- As the Creed says, God the Father is the Almighty who “created the heaven and the earth, all things seen and unseen”.
- The Father created the heaven and the earth, all things seen and unseen in total unity with the Son and the Holy Spirit. As God says, “let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26).

4. Who is Jesus?

- As the Creed says, “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.”
- Begotten means “having brought into being.”
- “Of one essence” means “having identical properties”, hence Christ has the full divinity and image of the Father.
- The Creed calls on us to Worship the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Worship can belong only to God. Thus, Christ is God, the Holy Spirit is God, God the Father is God.
- In simple terms, this phrase in the Creed implies that Christ is God, Christ is the eternal Son of God the Father. He is called the Son of God because he was begotten from eternity from God the Father from which all things proceed.
- Some titles clearly label Jesus as God. These include Emmanuel, which means God with us. St. Mary is known as the Mother of God (not the Mother of Christ, which is the Nestorian heresy that led to the 3rd Ecumenical Council). Other titles include God in the flesh or Son of Man.
- Some verses in the Bible clearly indicating that Jesus is God along with His oneness with God the Father and the Holy Spirit include:
 - “I and My Father are One” (John 10:30).

- Jesus speaking of his life says, “No one takes it from Me. I have power to lay it down of Myself. I have the power to lay it down and power to take it again” (John 10:18).
 - “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).
 - “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also, and from now on you know Him and have seen Him” (John 14:7).
 - “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Jesus also says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44).
 - “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me” (John 14:11).
 - St. Paul says, “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”, (1 Corinthians 12:3).
- The primary roles of Jesus in the Godhead is that i) He facilitated our salvation by His crucifixion and resurrection, ii) He forgives repentant sinners, and iii) He will judge the world.
 - We must never give the impression that any person of the Trinity ever acts on His own. We should not single out any person of the trinity and ignore the others in our discussions and prayers. Rather when mentioning any Godly act, we should emphasize the total unity, oneness, and equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the accomplishing this act. Examples include salvation, creation of man, the judgment, etc...
 - On a practical level, when we pray, we should pray to Jesus, in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the God we can touch, see and feel, and hence develop a relationship with. Speaking of God in a general sense makes God abstract and unreachable, and hence very difficult to develop a relationship.
 - We feel spiritually uplifted by just repeating the word “Jesus”, as in the book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the Russian peasant kept repeating the Jesus prayer, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner.” This is the prayer of the Publican in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.
 - Of course, we can also offer prayers to the Father and the Holy Spirit, but for kids and for those who are young in their spiritual life, it is often easiest and most practical to think of praying to Jesus. Of course, we still must always stress and mention the unity and equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at all times.

- Before the Incarnation, that is before Jesus took on flesh and came as a man, His form was a spirit from eternity. He was fully divine, that is, fully God. He is known from eternity as the Word (Logos).
- At a certain point in time, when Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary in the Incarnation, the nature of Jesus changed. He became fully man and fully God, two natures that are mysteriously fully united into one nature. St. John says, “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14).
- Jesus never lost anything in His divinity by becoming fully man. We read about this in Philippians 2:5-11, when St. Paul says, “who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation and coming in the likeness of men.” That is, Jesus in all His glory with the Father before the incarnation, never diminished any of his glory by becoming a man and did not consider his becoming a man a “threat” or “loss” of His glory or loss of His full and equal divinity with God the Father. Robbery in the above verse refers to an object that is stolen and tightly clutched. Christ has equality with God not by seizure but by nature, and with absolute security. There is, therefore, no threat, loss, or any change in the divine nature in the Son of God when He takes our humanity to Himself and offers us salvation.
- Philippians 2:5-11 is sometimes called the Incarnation Song of the Apostle Paul. It was song in the early Church which summarizes the human and divine natures as well as the theology of Christ. Philippians 2:5-11 gives the entire theology of Jesus Christ.
- There came then a certain point in time, the Incarnation, when Jesus became fully man and full God, and He will remain this way for eternity.
- When Jesus died, he did *not* lose His humanity. When Jesus died, it is His physical human body that died, which must happen to every human body. This is a property of the human physical body, that it must die. Thus the death of the physical body of Jesus is overwhelming proof that he was not only fully God, but also fully man. That is, it is clear evidence for the full humanity of Jesus.
- When the physical body of Jesus died, the soul of Jesus, of course, was alive. That soul went to Hades to free the righteous. That soul is the soul of a nature that is fully human and fully divine, so that not even for a moment or the twinkling of an

eye did his humanity or divinity die, nor did his humanity separate from his divinity.

- The proof of the full humanity and divinity of Jesus is also in the resurrection. In talking about the death of the physical body of Jesus, we must simultaneously talk about the resurrection of Jesus. For the resurrection only occurs for those who have a human nature. No other being can or will be resurrected. The spirits, angels, animals, or any other being is not resurrected, but only humans. Thus, for Jesus to be resurrected shows that he retains his human nature, and that since He has the power to resurrect Himself, this shows that he is full divine. In fact, His resurrected body is now called a heavenly body or spiritual body by St. Paul (1 Corinthians 15:42-48). This spiritual body is the exact kind of body we will have at our own resurrection. This is further proof that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. It is only humanity that can experience the resurrection. As St. John says, “It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). Though we will have identical heavenly bodies as Jesus at the resurrection, we will not be fully divine as Jesus is. Our nature will be the resurrected heavenly body based on our full humanity, but not endowed with any divinity. The resurrected body of Jesus is based on his full humanity united with his full divinity.
- When we read verses in the Bible about Jesus, they are of three types. They
 - show Him as fully God (His miracles and statements about his power and oneness with the Father)
 - show Him as fully man (Jesus wept, hunger in the wilderness, pain on the cross, sweating drops of blood).
 - show Him as setting examples of humility and obedience to the Father, such as washing the disciples feet, His baptism, verses concerning his obedience to the Father in the crucifixion, and doing the will of the Father.

5. Who is the Holy Spirit?

- The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God.
- The Holy Spirit is God, as He is referred to as “Lord, giver of Life” in the Creed.
- In the Creed, we read that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son, is Worshiped and glorified.”

- The role of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead is to teach, educate, bring to memory, give us spiritual words and speech, and stir us up spiritually. The Holy Spirit activates and stirs up the heart and mind towards God.
- The Holy Spirit activates and sharpens our conscience.
- The Holy Spirit is our helper who teaches all things. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26).

6. Conclusion

- Whenever we read the word “God” in the Bible or in other spiritual books, we must train our mind to immediately and simultaneously think of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God = (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). The Son, of course, is Jesus Christ.
- Whenever we read about the work of God in the Bible or in other spiritual books, we must train our mind to immediately and simultaneously think of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- The work of the Father can never be accomplished or be apart from the Son and the Holy Spirit. The work of the Son can never be accomplished or be apart from the Father or the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit can never be accomplished or be apart from the Father and the Son.
- The Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is not separable in anything.

Guidelines for Prayer - Part I

1. Christ Waits for Us

- Prayer is a gift granted to man to enable Him to know and love God.
- The more often and sincerely we pray, the closer our will and His become. Christ meets us in prayer and we come to know His will.
- Unless we pray, Christ can never meet us, nor can we come to know His will. He waits for us to pray and He looks forward to it” “behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Revelation 3:20).
- Christ declares in the Gospel the vital importance of prayer, urging us to pray at all times, tirelessly and ceaselessly. Why is this? It is while we are in prayer that Christ can get in touch with us, make His will known to us and grant us His grace.
- Repentance of sins is done through prayer and forgiveness of sins is accomplished through prayer. God seeks the humble and contrite heart in prayer. Thus, when we pray, we should present ourselves before Christ with the consciousness and humility of a sinner, bowing the head. Yet at the same time, we should be confident in Christ’s forgiveness, compassion and delight in us.

2. In the Presence of God

- When we pray, we must realize that we are standing in God’s presence. Thus, we must stand in awe and attention.
- Dread of God, anguish from frequent sinning, or doubts resulting from tribulations or illnesses make us insensitive to the presence of God.
- This does not mean, however, that God is not present during such a prayer. Whenever a person begins a contrite prayer, God can never shun him; the love of God is not put off by the sins of the penitent sinner, or his impurity or his doubts. For God’s love has infinite power to forgive and purify.
- **Firmness in faith beyond feelings and emotions**

- When we pray, it is imperative that we have total faith, beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is present when he or she prays.
- One must trust that God hears the petitions of men and women and receives the words of prayer with pleasure - that He is not fickle as humans are.
- God’s love endures and His promise is true. Once He sets His love on a person, He will never turn back from helping him or her.
- Sometimes God lets a person sense His love, sometimes He chastens him or her with a feeling of loneliness, until that person’s salvation is complete.
- We should not depend on sentiment in our relationship with God. Instead, we should be fortified by a faith that goes beyond our feelings.

- **Excuses for Evading Prayer**

- The flesh is the enemy of the human spirit. It finds no comfort in prayer, especially when that prayer is truly prayer, performed in the genuine spirit of worship with denies the self and mortifies lusts, ambitions, and false worldly aspirations.
- The flesh makes up excuses for avoiding prayer, such as headaches, bodily pains, or the pressing need to sleep.
- If a person forces him or herself to pray, the flesh tries to curtail his prayer; if he or she forces him or herself to go through with the prayer, the flesh tries to obscure the meaning of the words. The tongue falters, the minds is distracted this way and that and becomes dulled.
- The Lord knows these struggles and this is why He taught us, “always to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1).
- However, you will not find these struggles in a prayer performed for the sake of reward, praise, or admiration from people. Far from it. In this setting, the flesh gladly accepts prayer and gets keen about it.
- The practitioner gets up early to perform it in public. He or she makes it a pint standing long hours in front of people and raising his or her voice.
- such prayers are easy to do because they delight the human ego. These prayers reap a carnal reward, and they promote self-assertion rather than self-denial and self-deification rather than mortification.
- In this way, this type of prayer gets to be as attractive as making money; the flesh never gets bored with it, any more than with delicious food.

- Christ anticipated this when He said, “but when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret” (Matthew 6:6). The shutting of the door here means that the prayer must be inaudible and invisible to people.

- **The Curbing of the flesh Enkindles the Spirit**

- The curbing of the flesh before and during prayer is a matter of the utmost importance if we wish to release the spirit and let it out in fervent prayer.
- This is achieved in a twofold action: the first is passive, such as frequent prostration, fasting, silence, abstinence from luxury or worldly pleasures. The second is active; the offering of genuine and cordial love to Christ in terms of affection, longing, and ceaseless untiring dialogue with Him day and night, together with meditation on His words and commandments.
- Effective prayer depends on the two actions of curbing the flesh and enkindling of the spirit. We must have both. One without the other is inadequate. The curbing of the flesh paves the way for igniting of the spirit, and when the spirit is on fire facilitates the curbing of the flesh. By these two acts, prayer is safeguarded against distraction, frigidity, and boredom.

- **Prayer and Time**

- True prayer is time-redeeming and is a transformation of dead time into an immortal divine act.
- Therefore, a genuine engagement in prayer is inevitably accompanied by the abolishment of the sense of the value of time whether humanly or materially, and exchanging the movement of time for that of the spirit.
- Haste and boredom in prayer are a deviation to earthly time which is void of the blessings of the Spirit and the breath of eternity.
- Haste and boredom during prayer strip it of its spiritual nature, turning it into one of the physical and mental acts similar to having an interview with the boss or reading a letter or taking breakfast.
- Christ therefore reminds us “to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). It is better, then, to pray five minutes with a peaceful and serene spirit than a full hour in haste or three hours with boredom.

The Critical Balance Between Faith and Works

- The concept of faith and works is a major concept in Christianity. It is precisely this issue that led to major divisions in the church. The Protestant Church emphasizes faith more than works. The Catholic Church emphasizes works more than faith. The Orthodox Church, in all its wisdom, emphasizes a perfect balance between faith and works and believes that the two concepts are united together through balance. That is, the Orthodox Church stresses the *equal* importance of faith and works, and that salvation *cannot* be attained by doing only one of them. They must be in total balance and that faith must lead to works and works must lead to strengthen our faith.
- The Orthodox Church believes that the only way for our spiritual life to grow is that we must have a balance between faith and works. Indeed, St. James says that “Faith is made perfect in works.”
- Our spiritual life should consist of a perfect harmony between faith and works, and this is the whole theme of the Epistle of St. James.
- When we speak of works, we are mainly speaking of “good deeds,” that is, putting our faith into action. These actions may involve physical work, mental work in serving others one-on-one, or in general, the giving of our time and possessions to help others.
- What is faith?
 - Prayer
 - Reading the Bible
 - attending the liturgy
 - partaking of the sacraments
 - being a deacon
 - giving a Sunday School lesson
- What is works?

- Doing good deeds for others - helping others, giving to others, serving the poor, listening to others, helping others with their problems and concerns.
 - Giving one on one service to others outside of church
 - giving tithes
 - Doing active work-related services in the church such as administration, maintenance, cleaning, cooking, etc...
- James 2:14-26 has the key verses on the critical balance between faith and works. In James 2:14-19, we learn that the faith that saves is a complete faith; not just the mind believing and the tongue confessing, but the whole man trusting in the living God. This means our faith and our relationship with God - our justification - are dynamic and living. Our faith grows and affects our actions, or else it dies. “Faith alone” (James 2:17), static faith, does not save according to St. James. We must nurture our faith in God and love for Him through our works. This point is well made by St. Maximus the Confessor when he said, “Do not say you are the temple of the Lord, write Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7:4), nor should you say that faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ can save you, for this is impossible unless you acquire love for Him through your works. As for faith itself, the devils also believe and tremble.”
 - In James 2:20-24, St. James talks about Abraham as the perfect model of balance between faith and works, that is, faith that is perfected in works. The faith of Abraham is indeed living and active:
 - In Genesis 12:1-3, when Abraham was 75 years old, he received a call to forsake all and follow God.
 - In Genesis 15:6, when Abraham was almost 85, after he had proven his faith through years of renouncing his land, family, property, and privileges, God promised him that he would ultimately regain everything he had given up. Abraham’s faith in God in God’s promise was “reckoned to him as righteousness” (James 2:23). God fulfilled Abraham’s faith by making a covenant with him.
 - In Genesis 22:1-19, Abraham was at least 110 years old. He had been tested for years concerning God’s promise of a son. Now, after the covenant sacrament of initiation (circumcision) had been given in Genesis 17, came Abraham’s supreme test: the sacrifice of Isaac, his son of promise (Genesis 22:1-19).

- St. James reveals that Genesis 15:6 is fulfilled in Genesis 22, in which Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac his son. Thus, Abraham’s faith in God is made perfect in his works as he is prepared to sacrifice Isaac his son. His works here is the act of sacrifice of Isaac which he was prepared to do. His faith here is represented by his lifelong relationship with God for which Abraham left everything under God’s call.
 - This is a crucial lesson for us in our understanding of justification by faith. Neither Abraham’s faith nor his justification is merely momentary, static, or once-and-for-all. It is a dynamic growth process which finds its natural and normal realization in good works.
 - Far from being just a point-in-time, Abraham’s justification is realized at least 25 years after God declared Abraham just. It is living and active faith which saves!
- Abraham’s faith led to his works. Another example in the Bible representing a balance between faith and works is Ruth. Ruth’s works led to her faith. Ruth’s great works consisting of taking care of her mother-in-law led her to meet Boaz, who is the prototype of Christ (faith), and Jesus was a descendant of Ruth.
 - Yet another example of a perfect balance between faith and works is seen in the Apostle Peter. On the day of Pentecost, Peter gives a powerful sermon (Acts 3) that led to the conversion of 3000 souls. This is his faith. His faith is put into action when he converts and baptizes the Gentile Cornelius and his family. Peter’s works here are major as it was Peter who had strongly believed that one must go through Judaism to be converted to Christianity. Peter had not understood the conversion of Gentiles until his vision and it was this vision that changed his way of thinking and enabled him to convert Cornelius and his family to Christianity (Acts 10).
 - So we see three great examples in the Bible of the perfect balance between faith and works, which is a fundamental belief in the Orthodox Church. The example of Abraham, who by his faith was led to great works. Also, Ruth, by her great works, was led to her great faith, and by St. Peter who always put his faith into action by his works. There are many, many more examples in the Bible that illustrate the perfect balance and union between faith and works.
 - In summary, St. James says faith without works is dead. The Church Fathers say that works without faith is also dead. Our works must be done with a spiritual purpose and

a spiritual foundation based on the love of God. If they do not have this foundation, our works will become self-centered works seeking only to glorify ourselves. Our works will have no meaning and will receive no blessings from God. Self-centered works count for nothing, as if we had not done them at all.

- Also, faith without works is a dead and meaningless faith. It is a static and empty faith. Our faith can only be alive and dynamic when it is put into action through works.

Repentance - Part I

1. Repentance is Harmony with God

- A man cannot return to God by his own ability alone. Jesus says, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). Nevertheless, God only draws those who are striving and longing for Him. Human will is a vital factor in repentance, because God, out of respect for human freedom, summons us without coercion or constraint (Matthew 11:28, John 6:37, John 7:37, Jeremiah 3:12-14).
- Repentance is the coming together of the tranquil will of the God of love, which draws sinful man through the efficacy of the blood of Christ and the will of the weary, fearful man who has a genuine desire to return to God. This meeting between the will of God and the will of the sinner is a breakthrough. It enables human nature to receive earnestly the acts of divine mercy, love, and kindness, to feel them deeply and be greatly moved by an overwhelming mixture of feelings - thankfulness, helplessness, regret, love, amazement - so that in the end we can do nothing but surrender ourselves as captives to God forever.

2. Repentance is Constant Change

- The word repentance is derived from a Greek word which means “change of thinking.” In practical terms, the Church understands it as a renewal of being, granted by God after baptism, through confession. It is a process of constant upward progression in human nature, built on an individual’s sense of sin and regret and confession of it.
- These are all means of self-abasement and humility, just as the act of repentance, which we call metania, is a total prostration with the face to the ground, whether it be directed to God or to man, as an expression of self-abasement and contrition.
- So repentance conforms in practice to the Gospel: “whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12), for in so far as one continues in humility, he will continually progress on the upward way, and in this tension there is constant change.
- Repentance is a constant process of change in our being that abases us by our own will, but raises us up by grace. This is the vital meaning of the word metania. An

so repentance is the opposite of self-righteousness. The latter produces a sense of self-sufficiency, so the process of inner change and upward progress is brought to a halt by the lack of a need to change.

- The “righteous” man considers that he is in a state of grace and has no sense of need for humility. This conforms with a contrasting saying in the Gospel, “whoever exalts himself will be humbled” (Matthew 23:12), since a change takes place in the reverse sense and one is in a state of constant spiritual decline.

3. Repentance is a Work of Grace

- The soul that does not practice inner change through a repentance built on contrition before God cannot enter into grace or perceive it. This is a sign of our hardness of heart, and is a harbinger of death. This is why repentance is of vital importance, drawing the line between life and death, just like baptism.
- The weeping over one’s sins are a work of grace and are not due to the striving of the individual. Tears are a gift, not a discipline. St. Isaac the Syrian calls it “the gift of tears” and it is a sign of fruitful repentance. Tears are a mystical indication of true joy, as the Lord showed when He said, “Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh” (Luke 6:21).
- Tears that spring from hope are part of the mystery of repentance; they are evidence that the penitent has entered into grace and a secret sign that the state of true joy has been attained.
- From this we can understand how tears can wash away sins, not because they are a work of the human will, since the greatest human work cannot atone for even the smallest sin, but because they are a gift of the Holy Spirit and a pure work of grace and reveal that the power of God has begun to penetrate deeply into our being.
- Tears are a clear sign of the process of inner change and also evidence of the truth and power of the mystery of repentance.

4. Repentance is a Second Victory of Faith, and is Itself a New Testimony

- Repentance is like returning to the faith and life formerly held, which is a greater joy than embracing it for the first time. Look at the widow’s joy after finding the lost penny (Luke 15:8-10), look at the shepherd whose joy over finding his one lost

sheep was greater than the knowledge that he had ninety nine more in the sheepfold (Luke 15:4-7). The Lord teaches us here that the return of a penitent to the bosom of Christ is equal in its power and honor to the pleasure of having a whole sheepfold, that is, a whole Church.

- God desired to endow repentance with double the honor, happiness, and joy so a sinner would not be despondent or bashful at coming to the bosom of Christ, so that the glory of the cross would prevail over the ignominy of sin, and so that the meek God who is ready to justify the ungodly would be glorified.
- Although a repenting sinner could hardly be noticed by the world, the Bible says that the whole heaven welcomes a sinner's repentance and rejoices at a person's justification. Jesus says, "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" (Luke 15:7), and also "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).
- It is as if repentance is the greatest of works humanity can take pride in, for a penitent is that individual who has responded to God's power of forgiveness and justification and has thus gained through anguish the fruit of the cross and the sanctification of God. Look how the penitent through contrition can give joy to all of heaven and to the heart of God!

5. Christ Came to Justify the Ungodly

- St. Paul says in Romans 4:5 that Christ came to "justify the ungodly." Sometimes we think that it is our righteousness that introduces us to God, and that our virtue, piety, learning, service, and zeal qualify us for communion with the heavenly. We do not realize that "all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13), that we have nothing good to approach God with: "None is righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:10), and that "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64:6).
- We need to know that Christ came to "justify the ungodly" (Romans 4:5) and to call "her beloved who was not beloved" (Romans 9:25). If we deeply believe this, then we would renounce all our righteousness, all our false piety, all artificial ostentation, and would pose at once as ungodly, not deeming our sin to be too great to be washed away by His blood, nor our uncleanness to be too great a burden for His love.

- It is no business of our to justify the ungodly, for we cannot. This is a divine action, a supernatural ability incomprehensible to us. It is the richness of heaven that has been poured out with the blood of Christ into our hearts. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners!

The Positive Side of Repentance

1. Introduction

- According to a legend, God once said to His angels, “I want to play a game of hide-and-seek with humankind. Where you do think I should hide?” One angel suggested the deepest ocean, another the top of the highest mountain. Others the far side of the moon or a distant star. Finally, one angel came up with the answer that God accepted. He said, “Hide in the human heart. That’s the last place they will think of.”
- Jesus said, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand (Matthew 4:17). For the kingdom of God to become a reality for us we must first repent. Repentance is Godly sorrow for the sins we have committed. Godly sorrow is not like the worldly sorrow which leads to despair, depression, and even suicide. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, repentance leads to forgiveness, forgiveness leads to salvation, and salvation establishes the kingdom of God, the rule of God, in our hearts.
- Where there is no repentance, no Godly sorrow for our sins, the kingdom of God will never come. For we cannot have the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil ruling in the same heart.
- Repentance is not merely a negative battling against sin and evil; it is also and primarily a positive progress toward God. Repentance is preparing the human heart for God to enter. For God came to establish residence not in the moon or the stars but in our heart and mind. Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).
- There once was an old farmer who became a millionaire overnight when oil was discovered beneath his land. The wealth had always been there, but the farmer never knew it. This describes many Christians who have been baptized but have never claimed the treasure God has given them. They have never claimed the presence of God within them.

2. What the Church Fathers Say

- Here is what St. Isaac the Syrian says about the kingdom of God within us: “Enter eagerly into the treasure house that is within you, and so you will see the things that are in heaven. The ladder that leads to the kingdom is hidden in your soul. Dive into yourself and there within yourself you will find the stairs by which to ascend.”
- The heavenly chamber of which St. Isaac speaks here is another name for the kingdom of God, the presence and rule of God in the human heart.
- St. Augustine spoke of the presence of God within him as follows: “I, Lord, went wandering like a strayed sheep, seeking Thee with anxious reasoning without, whilst Thou wast within me... I went round the streets and squares of the city of this world seeking Thee; and I found Thee not, because in vain I sought without for Him, who was within myself.”

3. How the Kingdom of God Comes

- One way by which the kingdom of God becomes a reality in us is by doing God’s will. Jesus told us so in the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done!” Jesus is telling us here that the kingdom of God comes when we do His will. Kingdom of God and will of God are tied together. The one does not come without the other. One makes the other possible. “Thy kingdom come!” How? It comes when God’s will is done: “Thy will be done.”
- When Christ comes to rule as King in our heart, He will govern our heart so that we may love only what He loves. He will govern our mind so that no unholy thought be allowed to take root within us. He will govern the books we read, the TV shows we watch, the companionships and the friendships we form, our work and the methods of our business, our money, the way in which we spend our leisure - all will be under the governance of His Kingdom. For He will not be king unless He is king of all.

4. Let us Speak to Christ Who is Within Our Heart

- If we truly believe that God is indeed within us, then we need to take time to become acquainted with this important Person Who dwells within. If God is within us, is He there as a stranger or as a loved one? St. Gregory Palamas said, “There is a real kingdom within us - the Kingdom of God. It is our privilege to explore this kingdom

through prayer.” We must make time to establish an intimate prayer relationship with the God Who is within, through quietness and solitude.

- It takes a lot of practice to become mentally quiet and physically relaxed. But once we have touched this innermost center of our being we will always remember it; and we will never be satisfied until we have come into closer communication with the God Who loves us so much that He has come to establish residence within us.
- If we develop this practice, we will soon find ourself “plugging in” often to His inner presence. We will find ourselves becoming quiet during the day for short periods of time. These periods of meditation will help establish a mental, emotional and spiritual balance in our life as we come to experience the “peace of God that surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15).
- Here is a great quote from the book “The Invitation of Christ:” “If you desire true contrition of heart, enter into thy secret chamber and shut out the tumults of the world. In silence and in stillness, shut the door and call upon Jesus, the Beloved. Stay with Him in the closet; for thou shall not find so great peace anywhere else.”

5. Is the Kingdom of God Within us?

- If the kingdom of God is within us, then within us is the power of God. If the kingdom of God is within us, then within us is the love of God. If the kingdom of God is within us, then within us is the peace of God. If the kingdom of God is within us, then within us is forgiveness, joy, truth, light, and eternal life.
- We close here with this great story of repentance by St. Sisoë. The Desert Fathers tell us about St. Sisoë who lay dying when the Lord appeared to him. He pleaded with the Lord, “Give me time to repent, O Christ.” His brethren standing around his sick bed said, “You mean you have not repented yet?” And St. Sisoë replied, “Believe me brothers, I have not yet begun to repent.” The brethren interpreted this as proof that St. Sisoë had attained the uttermost perfection and holiness possible on this earth. Holiness comes through sincere and daily repentance. For it is through repentance and confession that we are cleansed of our sins and made pure in the eyes of God.

An Invitation to Rest: Meditation on Matthew 11:28-30

1. Introduction

- We would like to meditate on the verses in Matthew 11:28-30, where Jesus says, “Come to Me, all 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. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”
- These verses are some of the most comforting verses said by Jesus in the Bible. They are verses that reveal who Christ is and what His mission is for humanity.
- In these verses, Christ once again reveals the greatest Messianic mystery He had come to fulfill on this earth. These words stand in opposition to the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees concerning the ordinances and obligations of the law which demand obedience.
- These things had burdened the people and worn out their souls and spirits. St. Peter criticized the Apostolic Council urging them to remove the yoke of the law from the disciples:
“Now therefore why do you make trial of God putting a yoke (the law) upon the neck of the disciples (believers in Christ) which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? (Acts 15:10).
- Christ Himself testified to the heaviness of the loads of the commandments, teachings, and legalistic details which the Pharisees laid on the backs of people by which they wore out their spirits: “They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger” (Matthew 23:4).
- In these verses, Christ addresses the horrible yoke of sin. “And by Him every one that believes is freed from every thing from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).
- Especially in the hands of the scribes and the Pharisees, the law became an unbearable burden. Moreover, it formed a deadly sense of sinfulness in man’s conscience while being unable to offer any advice or action to comfort his heart” “Wretched man that I am! who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

- In these verses, Christ offers rest to whoever comes to Him, and comfort to whoever takes His yoke upon himself.

2. Come to Me all who labor

- What draws our attention here to the words of Christ is the open invitation: “all.” This is the most prominent of Christ’s features, namely, that He concerns Himself with all sinners and those who labor.
- Those who labor are especially those who exhaust their minds, hearts, spirits, and bodies. They labor in order to find rest from the detrimental effects which sin has left man’s conscience such as feelings of guilt, iniquity, impurity, and lostness, with no one to support, comfort or heal.
- The words “come to Me”, i.e., coming to Christ, means to believe in Him with faith touching the heart. The moment one believes in Christ, all one’s worries and labors come to an end, for Christ takes hold of the reins of life.
- Later on, man will see what Christ has accomplished for him, and he will get to know the gospel. But the focus here is on Christ in His Person. Christ challenges all those who labor and are heavy laden to take the risk and come to Him to see how He will immediately give them rest.

3. And I will give you rest

- Rest, here, is not mere words or promises; for He who establishes, perpetuates, and ensures it is “I”. Christ here gives the perpetual and everlasting promise that whoever comes to Him, no matter how weary, will find rest. This is the function of Christ.
- Emphasizing the power of “I” to give immediate rest, Christ had previously said: “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father” (Luke 10:22). A related verse explains it: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” (Matthew 28:18).
- It’s as if He were saying, “I will give you rest: I have already told you and My words are truthful, I will definitely give you rest, but believe in order to witness it. Take hold of My promise for it to become yours. This is my job. Throw the burden of your worries on Me and I will carry them for you and give you peace.” “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

- We must take note in these verses that Christ reveals the depth of His divinity without an explanation. The greatest significance in this invitation is the relief from the weight on man's shoulders and the burden on his conscience so that he can become a child again who enjoys life without any burden or worry, a new creation!
- The prophet Isaiah did not know the Person of the Messiah (Jesus) but yearned to see Him. Though he lived without seeing Him, this desire remained in him, and the Messiah never left his heart or spirit, even though he had never studied His divinity or seen His form: "Thy memorial name is the desire of our soul. My soul yearns for thee in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee" (Isaiah 26:8-9).
- The "rest" that Christ gives us is beyond all comprehension because it renews everything in man. St. James expressed it by saying: "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures" (James 1:18). It is a new creation or, as Christ expressed it, "a birth from above."

4. Take My yoke upon you

- The yoke that Christ refers to here is that of principles and doctrine. Christ here invites us to become His disciples. In its totality, Christ's yoke is the gospel, faith, and following Him.
- As a teacher, His teaching is comforting to the soul, and He leads His children to drink knowledge from secret springs just as a mother feeds her suckling from her breast.
- Christ is in labor pains with those who love Him until He brings them to heaven and makes them new, children of the free Jerusalem: "Shall I bring to the birth and not cause to bring forth? says the Lord; shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb? says your God; Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for all you who mourn over her; that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breast that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory" (Isaiah 66:9-11).
- When Christ teaches, He does not use scholarship or writing to teach but asks us to look at Him: "Turn to Me and be saved" (Isaiah 45:22). "Look to Him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed" (Psalm 34:5).
- "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- He offers Himself, only asking of him who follows Him to open his eyes and ears, for without feeling it or wracking his brain or mind he will change into that very image.

5. Learn from Me

- "Learn from Me" is here in the form of an order as are all God's commandments. For Christ does not give an order without the duty to carry it out.
- Anyone who listens to and obeys Christ's order "come" will enter into His presence. "Carry my yoke" means that all who follow will carry.
- "Learn from Me" means that whoever hears and sees will learn and do. Christ therefore, carries to humanity a new energy which acts for free and brings something new and unlike the ancient law that only heaped burden's on man's back, nagging all the time at his conscience.

- Instead, the joy He brings is the joy of heaven. Christ came to our world with joy and cheer, glorifying God and bringing peace on earth. He left earth to go and prepare us a place in God's bosom.

6. For I am gentle and lowly in heart

- Christ embodies meekness and humility which are the two main features needed for entering the Kingdom. He had previously identified them with the traits of a child saying, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mark 10:15).
- Now Christ has embodied these two features in Himself in a manner which has made Him effective in offering Himself, as if He were saying, "I am the origin of childhood and the source of the Kingdom." In them, He summed up the Beatitudes of the first three verses of His Sermon on the Mount.
- In fact, if man bears these two attributes in his heart, the heart being the center of meekness and the spring of humility, he will immediately find the yoke of God easy and light to carry. Rest will indwell his heart, mind and whole life.
- This is a practical expression of the qualifications of the Man of heaven in contrast with the labors of the scribes and pharisees. Their concern was the old way which aimed at propitiating God by heavy duties, offerings, punishments and threats. Christ Himself stood calling out: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).
- Thus, Christ says to us: this is My yoke: My gentleness. This is My burden: My humility. Whoever accepts Me walks through Me to God's heart, and is qualified for the Kingdom. Their rest was the Sabbath; My Sabbath which I offer you is "I." Come to Me and I will give you rest. Learn from Me and you will find rest for your souls.
- Christ's humility draws upon His very nature, and He can, therefore offer us His humility.
- It is not out of a vacuum that He promises us rest when inviting us to come to Him. His meekness and humility qualify us for taking our position with Him no matter how sullied and sinful we are. His evangelical attribute of being "a lover of tax collectors and sinners" is not theoretical.

- His gentleness and humility made His love sincere, acceptable, and sweet, and in it sinners cannot find any discord with their weakness. Herein lies the the secret of our ability to lay the weight of our burdens, however great they are, on Him and find rest with Him.
- The mystery of Christ’s invitation to come and find rest depends on His words: “For I am gentle and lowly of heart.” Therefore, we should increase the weight of our burdens as much as we want and describe to Him the bitterness of our sorrows and troubles to their uttermost. All of it will dissolve when we meet Him, “For because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).
- By His words, “and you will find rest for your souls,” He does not mean a rest for our thoughts, body or nerves. It is a rest that will settle in the soul and be distributed throughout the whole of man’s being. It is not a one-time event, rather, a new nature which the soul acquires out of His nature. And so rest settles in the inner man from whom rest is absent.
- However, the thing that is very precious in the Lord’s promise is that the type of rest given lavishly here by Christ, is a downpayment or a pledge of the greater rest on high, on which He made His invitation “Come to Me.” It is a rest for the present and the future; the rest of soul, spirit, and eternity.
- Christ does not merely carry our burdens, but rather He carries us with our burdens. Finally, “Come to Me” ends appropriately with His words elsewhere, “you in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20).

7. Conclusion

- In plain English, the church fathers interpret Matthew 11:28-30 as follows: Christ makes an open invitation to us all to come to Him and have faith in Him. He tells us that the burdens of the world are made heavier and worse when we rely on man or anyone else except Him. Christ tells us to take a chance on trusting Him with our problems and to not trust the world. Christ invites us to put all of our heavy burdens, sins, concerns, and whatever else completely on His back. He wants us to unload every possible thing we can on Him. He assures that He will accept our burdens because He is “gentle and lowly of heart.” He will unconditionally welcome us and accept us

despite our great many sins, because this is His very nature. Christ always accepts us the way we are but He loves us too much to leave us the way we are, and thus He seeks to give us rest. For us to find true rest, Christ asks of us two things: i) to have complete faith in Him and trust Him completely with our burdens, and not rely on others to lift our burdens and ii) to follow Him and become His disciples. Christ then promises us a divine rest that is experienced from now until eternity.

From Dust to the Image of God

A well known Theologian described dust in the following way:

“Dust - truly a splendid symbol. Dust, this is the image of the commonplace. There is always more than enough of it. One fleck is as good as the next. Dust is the image of anonymity; one fleck is like the next, and all are nameless. It is the symbol of indifference: what does it matter whether it is this dust or that dust? It is all the same. Dust is the symbol of nothingness: because it lies around so loosely, it is easily stirred up, it blows around blindly, it is stepped upon and crushed - and nobody notices. It is a nothing!”

We read in Genesis 2:7 that God in fact made us out of the dust of the ground! We read, “And the Lord God made man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

Now, what does it mean that we were made out of the dust of the ground? It means first that we were created out of nothing, for dust is nothing, and that we are kept alive constantly *only* by God’s good gift of breath. As we read in Psalm 104:29-30, “When You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When You send forth Your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the earth.”

Secondly, that we are made of dust means that we are to honor the limits of our humanity by obeying God’s laws and always standing before Him in awe! We are to resist the kind of ambition which seeks to make us like God, that is, pride. For we are dust!

Thirdly, how easily we forget that we are dust! We hide behind the masks of our possessions or our intellectual smartness. We forget that we are going to die and we push aside our mortality. Forgetting that we are dust, we imagine ourselves to be more powerful and more capable than we really are. It is precisely this forgetting that we are dust that lies behind the greed, the selfishness, the anxiety, and the brutality that drives our common life.

Fourthly, we forget what God remembers! God never forgets that we are dust. As we read in Psalm 103:14, “For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” And because God remembers our dustiness, He surrounds our dust with His massive “steadfast love” (Psalm 103:11).

As we beautifully read in Psalm 103:10-17, “He does not deal with us according to our sins; nor requite us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting for those who fear Him.” Thus, God “knows our frame.” And “He remembers that we are dust.” And because He remembers that we are dust, He therefore surrounds us with His massive “steadfast love.”

We are indeed dust, but we are also more than dust. We are also the image of God. As we read in Genesis 1:26-27, “Then God said, ‘let us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air . . .’ God created man in His own image. In the image of God created He them.”

When Jesus became one of us, He actually became dust, for us! For when the great God of the universe takes on flesh and blood means exactly that, that He becomes dust for us. And He did it in order to raise us from dust to the glory of God. As God took dust, and breathed His breath into it to make us alive, so He breathes His Holy Spirit into us today through the Sacrament of Chrismation at Baptism and through prayer each day to make us living images of God. From dust to image of God, and from dust to icon of God. Because the real icon that we should venerate is not merely the one that is made of wood, but rather the icon of God engraved in the human heart by the Holy Spirit at Baptism. Here is what one person said about the living icon of the image of God in each one of us: “If we were able to see God’s image in our neighbor, do you think weapons and generals would be needed?”

In Christ, and through the Holy Spirit, the dust in us is *animated*, and by God’s grace, we rise from dust to the image of God; from dust to the likeness of God; from dust to sons and daughters of God; from dust to heirs of God’s eternal kingdom; from dust to “partakers of God’s divine nature” sharing His glory (2 Peter 1:4), and from dust to an ultimate union with God, that is, becoming like God in Christ.

Is it true then that we are dust and to dust we shall return? Yes, but only, only partially. The body which was made of dust will indeed return to dust at death, but that will not be the

end! At the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus, He will raise this dusty body of ours, and then it will no longer be a body of dust, but a glorious heavenly body exactly like the body of Jesus after His resurrection. We turn here to 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 47-49. It is here where St. Paul talks so beautifully about the body of dust and the heavenly body. This is the Pauline Epistle reading in the Liturgy of the Resurrection on Easter eve in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

“So it is with the resurrection of the dead.

What is sown is perishable. What is raised is imperishable.

It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power.

It is sown a physical body. It is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a physical body, then there is also a spiritual body.

The first man Adam, was from earth, a man of dust. The second Man Christ is from heaven.

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the Man of heaven.”

Does St. Paul tell us we go from dust to dust? No! We go from dust to the image of God. And from dust to the likeness of God. And from dust to the resurrection of the dead. And from dust to a glorious heavenly body, with whose eyes we shall behold the glory of God eternally.

“For He knows our frame.” He knows it. And “He remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14). Since He remembers that we are dust, He therefore surrounds us with His massive “steadfast love” and forgiveness (Psalm 103:11). But He knows also that we are more than dust. We are also the image of God. Since we are in His image, He therefore expects us to strive for heaven, to strive for “perfection” (Matthew 5:48), to strive for union with God, to strive for the likeness of God, to strive for the holiness of God, to strive for the “prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Philippians 3:14), and to strive for the “crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8).

How exalted then is our image and our destiny: from dust to the image of God. From dust to partakers of God’s glory, by God’s grace, and by God’s grace alone.

The Gift of Giving

There was an article in the newspaper recently reporting a nationwide interview concerning the many difficult events that are now happening in the world. In the article, most people said that they were moved by the suffering of many, but they were also overloaded, overwhelmed, confused, and even made numb by so much anxiety, pain, and sorrow from so many different places all at the same time: i) the war in Iraq, ii) the SARS epidemic, iii) the space shuttle disaster, and iv) the famine in Africa.

Many of these people said that they could not take it anymore. It was just too much for them. And some of them were just going to turn the TV off and not watch anything any more. But one waitress from Oakland California made a very refreshing statement. She said that she gives her tips to the homeless. She says, "I figure somebody just gave it to me. I might as well just pass it on."

This statement reminds us of the great verse in Acts 20:35, in which St. Paul quotes Jesus, but the verse is not found anywhere in the four Gospels, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Somebody once compared Socrates, Cicero, and Jesus in the following manner:

"Know thyself," said Socrates, a wise old sage of Greece. He gave us one of three gold keys that open the doors to peace.

"Control thyself," said Cicero, an orator of Rome. This key into each lock must go to make a happy home.

"Give thyself," said Jesus Christ of far off Galilee. To give is living at its highest. It is the master key.

We know that Jesus had much to say in the Bible about giving, not only by His words, but especially by His example.

Giving is Divine, for God is the greatest giver of all. As we read in John 3:16, "For God so loved that world that He *gave* His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Those people who truly follow Jesus are above all, *givers*. Giving is therapy for the soul. It keeps our hearts open to others, and sensitive to their needs. Giving is the secret of a mentally and emotionally healthy life. A well known Christian psychiatrist once said, "I suppose all the ills of the human personality can be traced back to one thing, namely not understanding the meaning of the words of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." A famous theologian said once, "People are sick not only because they have not received love, but also because they are not able to give love."

We need to give for our mental and physical well being. A child becomes an adult when he or she stops taking and starts giving. In fact one of the best signs of maturity is the ability to give. So Jesus was indeed correct when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

During a church retreat once, one of the servants complained to the priest that Christianity is one continual give, give, give! And the priest replied, "Thank you for the finest definition of Christianity I have ever heard! Christianity is indeed one constant and continual give, give, give. That's the way it all began. God gave, He gave His only Son. His Son gave, He gave His life on the cross so that we might have eternal life. His disciples gave. They left their homes and their businesses to devote themselves full time to Christ as spreaders of His good news throughout the world. And nearly all of the twelve apostles died a martyrs death. They gave their very lives for the Lord Jesus. And through the ages, the the work of Christ has prospered to the extent that Christians have been willing to give, give, give."

A well known writer wrote the following on the joy of giving:

"If you love me, tell me so. The realm of silence is large enough beyond the grave. Give flowers now to the living. Praise the one who does something good and worthwhile, and do it today. The one thing we know definitely is that love, only if it is expressed, grows and gives out fragrance all about it here in this life. And one of the greatest joys of life is to give, and giving is itself flavored with divinity."

Now what are some of the gifts we can give to others? Here is small list of just a few.

1. The gift of praise - giving someone a sense of their own worth through a sincere and honest compliment.
2. The gift of understanding - giving a compassionate response to a heart that is hurting.

3. The gift of compassion - giving the others the right to be right. Sometimes we win by not winning.
4. The gift of gratitude - giving a thank you that can brighten someone's day.
5. The gift of attention - giving your undivided interest no matter what the distractions are.
6. The gift of inspiration - giving a positive thought or a promise from God's word that encourages and uplifts a person.
7. The gift of personal presence - giving yourself to be with someone to share a moment of joy or sorrow.
8. The gift of example - trying to show my family and others what I believe what life's most important things to be, not just by word, but by example.
9. The gift of humility - I'll try to admit my mistakes and say often those healing words, "I'm sorry, I was wrong."
10. The gift of forgiveness - I will always be soft-hearted and always remember the words of Jesus on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).
11. The gift of thoughtfulness - I promise to think before I speak, and to give very little advice, even if I'm asked.
12. The gift of patience - There's time, there's time I'll tell them. Time for mistakes, time for beginning again.
13. The gift of self-esteem - We give love whenever we make someone feel better about being themselves. Self-esteem is one of the greatest of all emotional needs that we have. And when we help anyone to raise his or her self-esteem, we are producing and giving a gift of love.
14. The gift of caring - Mother Teresa said once, "The greatest hunger of the West is everywhere, and it's not always hunger for food. It is hunger for love. The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for, deserted by everybody. The greatest evil is lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference towards ones neighbor.

15. The gift of Christ - To those who do not know Him, it is a gift that brings life eternal, and we can share Christ with them. This is why St. Paul says, "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

The following is a great story about giving:

Time before time, when the world was young, two brothers shared a field and a mill, each night dividing evenly the grain they had ground together that day. One brother lived alone, and the other brother had a large family. The single brother thought to himself one day and said, "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly. You know, I'm by myself and my brother has a whole family to look after." So each night, he secretly took some of his grain and put it in his brother's granary to see that he was never without. But the married brother thought to himself one day, "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly as we are doing now because I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother has no one. What will he do when he is old?" So every night he secretly took some of his grain and put it in his brother's granary. As a result, both of them always found their supply of grain mysteriously replenished every morning. Then one night in the darkness as they were going back and forth, they bumped into each other. They met each other half-way in between their houses. They suddenly realized what was happening and they embraced each other in love. And God witnessed their meeting and proclaimed, "This is a Holy place, a place of love, and here it is on this spot that My temple shall be built."

This story tells us that the Holy place where God is made known to His people is the place where human beings discover each other and give to each other in love.

A great lesson about giving can be learned from the following make-believe conversation between these four rivers.

The Danube river boasted that she carried the heaviest load of all rivers of the world. "Look at all the ships I carry every day," she said.

The Nile river said, "I am the largest river. I travel nearly 4,000 miles each day."

The Ganges river said, "I help people to be Holy. Many come to wash away their sins in my Holy water."

Finally, a meek, insignificant little river said, "I cannot boast of the things that you larger

rivers can. But every year, my banks overflow, and I freely give water to needy fields so that they can become fertile and help feed hungry people.” “All I do is overflow,” said this tiny, insignificant, meek little river.

And this is exactly what Christ calls on us to do constantly, is to “overflow” with His love. It is indeed more blessed to give, mentally, emotionally, physically, than to receive.

The Widow of Nain

The story of the widow of Nain is a wonderful story illustrating one of the great miracles of Jesus. The story is found in Luke 7:11-17. This is the Gospel reading of the 4th Sunday of Babah (beginning of November) in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The reading is as follows (Luke 7:11-17):

“Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He was moved with compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried *him* stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us,” and, “God has visited His people.” And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.”

Here we read about a young man who had died and was being carried out in a procession to the cemetery to be buried. As this was happening, Jesus and His disciples happened, that is, happened by divine providence, to walk by. Outside the city of Nain these two processions met: the procession of life, led by the Lord Jesus, meets the procession of death heading toward a cemetery to bury the only son of a widowed mother. At the head of one procession is a corpse, symbolizing the despair, grief, sorrow, and the hopelessness and helplessness of man. At the head of the other procession is Christ the Savior, sent to interrupt life’s tragic trek to the cemetery, to the grave, and to offer us instead salvation, hope, peace, and eternal life. And we see that the procession of life *triumphs* over the procession of death! We read that Jesus touches the casket of the dead man and says, “Young man, I say to you, arise,” and then “he who was dead sat up and began to speak.” And one can imagine the happiness that evening as the widowed mother prepared dinner for the very son whom that morning she had set out to bury in the cemetery.

Many times a miracle such as this one is referred to in the New Testament, and especially in the Gospel of St. John, as a *sign*. This miracle is thus a sign, it is a window that enables us

to look into the mind and heart of God to see who and what God is. And we look through the window of this miracle into the mind and heart of God and see first the infinite love of God!

Again and again, it is said of Jesus in the New Testament that “He was moved with compassion,” either for the crowds or for some sufferers such as the widowed mother of Nain. We repeatedly see this phrase used to describe Jesus in the Bible. This is the strongest phrase used to describe pity and compassion. It is the type of pity which moves a person to the depths of their being. For example, when Jesus saw the multitudes with all their sick people, we read that “He was moved with compassion” (Matthew 14:14). When He saw the crowds like sheep without a shepherd, we read that “He was moved with compassion” (Matthew 9:36). When He saw the hungry people far from home, we read that “He was moved with compassion” (Mark 8:2, Matthew 15:32). When He saw the leper, we read that “He was moved with compassion” (Mark 1:41). It is important to note that, in the Gospels, this phrase is never used to describe anyone except Jesus. It is the phrase that is most characteristic of Him. It describes His reaction to human suffering and need. Jesus could not see anyone in trouble or pain, in hunger or sorrow without being “moved with compassion.” This miracle at Nain then is the sign of the great compassion and love which is always in the heart of Jesus, and therefore always in the heart of God for each one of us. And secondly, we see that the compassion and love of God is backed by the greatest power in this universe: the power of the infinitely great God, who touches the casket and says to the young man, “Young man, I say to you, arise,” and then, “he who was dead sat up and began to speak.”

Now there is little use in a Jesus who worked miracles 2000 years ago and who has ceased to work them now. What we need is a Jesus who still has the power to work miracles today. There is little relevance in a story of a Jesus who raised a dead person to life 2000 years ago but who never does that now. However, there is every, every relevance in a Christ who *to this day*, daily, raises us from the death of sin and liberates us to forgiveness, life eternal, and to a new creation.

There is little relevance in a Jesus who stilled a storm on the Sea of Galilee 2000 years ago, but who stills no storm today. But there is every bit of relevance in a Jesus who stills our storms of fear, guilt, and anxiety, which rise in our hearts today and in whose presence today every storm becomes a calm within the heart.

There is little relevance in a Jesus who turned water into wine 2000 years ago but who

never does so today. But there is every relevance in a Jesus in whose presence today there enters into life a new quality of radiance, joy, love, peace, forgiveness, exhilaration, which is like the turning of water into wine.

So the miracles of Jesus in the Bible were not simply single events in time. They were illustrations, they were examples and insights into that which is always going on and what Jesus always is and will ever be. They are windows into the reality of God.

For Jesus did not just once raise a man from the dead. He is forever and for all true believers the “resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Jesus did not just once feed 5000 people. That is a window through which we look to see that He is the “bread of life,” of which if any person eats, he shall forever never hunger again (John 6:35). And Jesus did not just once open the eyes of a blind man. He is forever “the light of the world” (John 8:12). As Jesus says, “He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life” (John 8:12). And Jesus did not just once empower sinners to become saints and the weak to become strong. He does that today every time we come to Him in prayer and with faith to claim His power. There is an inscription on a door which reads, “we believe that the power within us is greater than the task before us.” That is true because the power within us is the power of Jesus who raised the young man from the grave in the Gospel passage above, and there is no greater power than that in this universe. As He raised the dead man, so through repentance, Jesus raises us daily when we fall. And He will raise us on the last day from our graves when He comes again to “judge the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42), and to establish His eternal kingdom.

So what Jesus did in that tiny village of Nain centuries ago has relevance for us today. It is a *sign* of God’s great compassion. Jesus was “moved with compassion” for the widow and her son as He is still moved with compassion today for us. And backed by the greatest power in this universe, the compassion of Jesus touched the casket of the dead man and brought him back to life. It is no wonder that the people who were there that witnessed this miracle said, “God has visited His people” (Luke 7:16). How else could they explain it? He visited His people then and He continues to visit us today and abide in us through the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Glory be to God forever. Amen!

Do Not Labor for the Food that Perishes

A Christian traveler wrote about a recent trip he had taken to the pyramids of Egypt. He spoke about his experience as follows: “We gathered around the tour leader in the pyramid. ‘Look around you,’ the tour leader said. ‘At one time, this room glittered with inconceivable treasures. The kings entire life was spent piling up riches to fill his burial chamber.’ Silence fell over the group. I tried to run away the myths of thousands of years and envision the treasures that once sparkled in the darkness around me. But all I could see was emptiness, bare walls, musty air, and hollow space. All the treasures had long been stolen or decayed. Everything gone. Standing there in the heart of the pyramid, I was struck with how futile life’s treasure hunts were. Not just the pharoah’s, but mine as well. I too was an accumulator of material things, spending so much time and energy piling up things: a kitchen full of dumb gadgets, closets stuffed with clothes, a den filled with unnecessary computer equipment and fancy electronic devices, a garage crammed with play things, and an attic filled with yesterday’s prize objects. My own little pyramid of treasures. Not as splendid as the king’s horde, but just as fragile and transient. How much better I thought to spend my time and energy on treasures that would last forever. The eternal treasures that come from giving, caring, forgiving, and ministering. When I climbed out of that pyramid, I had seen more than just one of the seven wonders of the world. I had a silent but convincing lesson on treasures. The kind that make a person rich, and the kind that leave a person poor!”

Socrates had a habit of poking around among the market stalls in the bazaars of Athens asking this question: “Can you tell me where those things can be bought that are really necessary to life?” Hundreds of years later, Jesus comes along to precisely answer this question when He says, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (John 6:27). Let us talk about these words of Jesus. Because we do not really know what is truly valuable and important in life, we often find ourselves laboring rather pathetically for the trivial things in life, that is, for the food that perishes instead of for the food that endures to eternal life. One person expressed this so well in a poem which goes like this: “Things, things, things. Things that take our precious time. Things that hold us from the life sublime. Things that only gather dust. Things that rot, things that rust. Things that mold, things that creak. Things that harbor foul disease. Things that mock and defy, till at last we grimly die of things, things, things.”

Someone once said, "Man is in love, and he loves what vanishes!" The Bible puts it this way. "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). Nine of the world's most successful financiers recently died as follows: three committed suicide, one was pardoned from prison so that he could die at home, one died abroad insolvent, one became insane, one was released from prison, one died a fugitive from justice, and one died bankrupt living the final years of his life on borrowed money. All of these men had been multi-millionaires. All of them indeed labored for the food that perishes and they perished right along with it!

Not only does the food we labor for perish, but we perish along with it if it's not the right kind of food. There was an article recently about diets in America. Millions of people in America have money in the bank and food in the refrigerator but are starving on empty calories. Leading nutritionists claim that we spend 110 billion dollars annually on food. We are tickling our taste buds and short-changing our metabolism. That is, we are overfed but undernourished, both physically and spiritually! Physically speaking, according to leading nutritionists, our body needs a certain amount of vitamin A, C, D, and iron per pound of bodyweight regardless of how much food we take in. Now interestingly enough, a recent White House sponsored study noticed and said, "If we classify foods from the most useful to the least useful, we place meats, vegetables, fruits, milk, and eggs in the first category. Bread, pastries, and cereals in the second category. Snacks in the third category. And candy, soft drinks, and beer in the last category." Yet the report says, "The bulk of food advertising is for things in categories three and four, the least useful things." We truly labor for the food that perishes, the food of no value, both physically and spiritually. Now we can eat certain kinds of food and still feel hungry. We will not only feel hungry, but we will receive no food value from the food. People in America today are the most well fed people in the world and yet the most starved people in the world. People try to satisfy a massive hunger of the soul, with material possessions, sex, drugs, and meaningless hobbies, but they remain hungrier and emptier than ever. In addition, millions of people in America spend enormous amounts of their money on expensive diet plans, exercise equipment, health clubs, and fitness centers so that they can look good and feel good. There is all kinds of advertising on television for this diet plan or that one, this fitness center or that one, this exercise machine or that one. It's a multi-billion dollar industry that keeps growing. The world's message to us is "Look good and feel good physically, and this is the most important thing in life." There is all this focus in the world on nourishing and pleasing the body, and nothing at

all is ever mentioned on nourishing and pleasing the soul. And this is precisely why Isaiah the prophet said, “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:2). If we live for the food that perishes, the food will perish and we will perish right along with it. But if we live for the food that does *not* perish as Jesus tells us in John 6:27, and if we live for the inheritance that does not fade away, then life will have just begun for us.

Now what is this food that does not perish? The answer is that it is the food that Christ gives us. The food that Christ says, “the Son of Man will give to you” (John 6:27). That is, the food is Christ Himself! Let us read carefully what Christ says about Himself in Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John (entire chapter). He says, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). And in John 6:48-50, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die” (John 6:48-50). So Christ tells us in these verses that He Himself is the food that does not perish, but endures onto eternal life. And He offers Himself to us in every Divine Liturgy through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Let us read carefully what Jesus says in John 6:53-54 as He speaks to all of us: “Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood *has* eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:53-54). Note here that Jesus *does not* say in this verse that “will some day will have eternal life” but rather He says that such a person already “has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” So Christ is the bread of life who comes to join us to God the Father and to spiritually nourish us onto life everlasting.

What more is this food that does not perish but endures onto eternal life? Is it not to use the blessings and the free gifts that God has given us on this earth to help other people, especially those who are suffering and in need. Is it not to spend as much time adorning the soul as we spend adorning the body. And is it not to check up once in a while to make sure that we have not lost those things that money cannot buy. And is it not to say with Jesus, “I have food to eat of which you do not know. My food is to do the will of the Father who sent Me and to finish His work” (John 4:32-34). Is it not to come to Jesus every day and let Him feed us with the “bread of life, of which any person eats he shall never hunger.” And is it not to invest our life in alleviating pain and suffering by lending an understanding ear to the tired, to the discouraged, and to the aged. Is it not to leave all, to sell all, in order to gain that pearl

of great price, Jesus. And is it not to cultivate a self, a soul that we can take to God without shame when we leave this life. And is it not to invest our life in lifting the fallen, in visiting the sick and imprisoned, in feeding the hungry, and clothing the poor (Matthew 25:32-46). Now all of us do labor in life. But the important question is about what do we labor? Do we labor for the food that perishes? Or do we labor for the food that endures onto eternal life?

We conclude here with this great quotation from Thomas à Kempis from his classic book "The Imitation of Christ". à Kempis says,

"For a small income, a long journey is undertaken (that is, one is willing to take a long journey just to gain a small amount of money).

For everlasting life, many will scarce once lift a foot from the ground.

The most pitiful reward is sought after and fought for.

For a single bit of money, sometimes there is shameful contention.

For a vain matter and slight promise, people fear not to toil day and night.

But alas, for an unchangeable good, for an inestimable award, for the highest honor, and glory without end, they grudge even the least fatigue!"

We close with the following prayer: "Lord, You are the bread of life, who came down from heaven that we may eat of You and not die. Abide in us we pray to satisfy our deepest hunger. As paupers, we have found this bread. Help us to tell others where to find it. Instead of the earthly, grant us the heavenly. Instead of the temporal, the eternal. Instead of the perishable, the imperishable. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God. Amen."

The Blood of Christ Purifies Our Conscience

A teacher was once admonishing a highschool boy for coming in late to class. The teacher said to him, "Don't you ever listen to the voice of conscience?" And after a moments hesitation, the boy replied, "I don't think so, what channel is it on?" That reply says a lot about the moral values in our society today. We read in St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews that, "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:14). We want to concentrate on this verse and other related verses in talking about our conscience.

What is conscience? Conscience is partly that very, very troublesome voice within us that keeps bringing up all of the sins of the past to rob us of sleep and peace. A grandfather said to his grandson one day, "I am worried about my future." And the grandson said, "Why are you worried about your future grandpa?" And the grandfather replied, "Because of my past."

There was a peanuts cartoon once that had Lucy and Charlie Brown talking about cruise ships. Lucy is always very positive about life whereas Charlie Brown is often very passive. And Lucy holding fast to her firm conclusions says, "You know Charlie Brown, there are two kinds of people who go on cruise ships. There are some people who face their deck chairs toward the stern (back) so that they can see where they have been, and there are others who face their deck chairs toward the bow (front) so that they can see where they are going. Now Charlie Brown, in the great cruise ship of your life, how do you face your deck chair?" And Charlie Brown thinks for a moment, then he says, "I can't get mine unfolded!" Some people have trouble with the past, some people have trouble with the future, and others have trouble with the present as Charlie Brown did in this story. Here, we wish to focus our discussion on the past. That is, how can we deal with the past?

Now the only thing that can wipe away the sins of the past, as St. Paul tells us in Hebrews 9:14 is "the blood of Christ." St. Paul says in this verse, "How much more shall the blood of Christ purify (cleanse) your conscience." Now why, why, why does conscience keep bringing up the sins of the past? The reason is that when a person sins, conscience reacts like a broken bone in the body. As a broken bone hurts because it is not where it ought to be, so conscience hurts and pains us when it is not where it ought to be: in a right relationship with God. The

deed we did, the word we said, the harm we wrought, or the good we might of done. All these are brought back by conscience to trouble us. But why? For what reason? Is it because God is sadistic? Is it because He wishes to inflict misery upon us? Does He want to twist life into something that hurts or cheapens? Of course not! That's not the kind of God we believe in. God allows conscience to trouble us for one reason and one reason only: to awaken us, to bring us to repentance, and to guide us to a better way. A hurt conscience is God speaking to us telling us that we have denied life, that we have disobeyed Him. So what pain is to the body, a warning that something is wrong and urging us to seek medical help, that is what a hurt conscience is to the soul.

A well known Christian psychiatrist distinguishes between what he calls the negative conscience and the positive conscience. He says, the negative conscience is the voice which says to us, "you have sinned." It accuses us. The positive conscience, he says, is the voice which says, "confess it to God. Receive God's forgiveness. God will not forsake you. Come to Him." So one is negative and the other is positive. One crushes and the other is a call to deliverance and to life. So the overall purpose of conscience is indeed *positive*. It is God calling us to a new life. "Turn to Me and live" says the Lord (Ezekiel 18:32).

St. Paul also writes, "I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). What does this mean? How does one have such a conscience that is "without offense toward God and men"? We know what conscience can do. It can guide, it can warn, it can instruct, it can haunt, and it can bless. But there is one thing that conscience *cannot* do. It cannot undo the wrong we have done. It cannot heal the wounds it inflicts. It cannot eradicate guilt and it cannot forgive sin. Only Christ can do that. Only the blood of Jesus and His forgiveness can "purify our conscience", as the Apostle Paul says. And only Christ can forgive sins, heal, and erase the past. Christ brings to conscience "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7), and to make us experience now, in conscience, the joys of heaven.

St. Paul again writes about his own life, "But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead" (Philippians 3:13). St. Paul is telling us here to use the past wisely. To learn from our mistakes, but to never, never let the past hold us back. He is telling us to claim God's forgiveness and move forward. So St. Paul tells us here to use the past as springboard and not as a sofa. One of the major flaws with psychology and psychiatry today is that they often spend too much time dwelling on a person's past, and

not enough time on the present and the future. Note that Jesus warns us about spending too much time dwelling on the past when He says, “No one, having put his hand on the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). If, for example, while driving our car, we keep looking in the rearview mirror, we will probably get into an accident and never make it to our destination.

The prophet Micah once said to God, “You will cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19). This verse means that God has hurled all of our sins away from Him, burying them in the deepest, deepest waters. And into the surrounding land, His mighty arm of victory has hammered a sign which reads “No Fishing Allowed.” That which has been swallowed up in the vast sea of God’s forgiveness will never, never surface again. Now the devil may attempt to dig up the past and try to hold those old sins against us. But he cannot succeed. God ignores the devil’s accusations about the past. And when the devil points to our sins of the past, God points to His Son on the cross and only sees His Son’s blood. He has forgiven us of the sins of the past and has no intentions of uncovering that which has been covered by the blood of His Son. When we repent, Christ puts our sins in the deepest, deepest, waters! And this is why St. Paul says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). So when we confess our sins and repent, the past is buried deep in the love of God, and He says, “No Fishing Allowed.” God who washes all of the sands on all of the shores and beaches of this world everyday, can through His forgiveness wash clean all of the sins of the past.

How many times do we carry that extra baggage of grief and guilt from the past? Guilt over past mistakes committed years ago in which the sins have long been played out, been gone, done, finished, and buried. But unlike St. Paul who set his face to the future, we constantly glance over our shoulder to see if the past is gaining on us. There are guilts, griefs, and sorrows that we must bring to Christ and leave with Christ. Why did Jesus die on the cross? To deliver us from the sins of the past, to purify our conscience, and to lead us to the land of new beginnings.

We conclude here with these beautiful verses from the book of Isaiah. “The Lord says, ‘Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old, Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth, Shall you not know it?’” (Isaiah 43:18-19). But in order to “know it”, we must take our eyes off of the closed door of the past that we have been focusing on and turn our eyes around to look for that other door the Lord is opening for us. “How much more shall the blood of Christ purify our conscience” and deliver us from the sins of the past.

The following is a great poem about how to deal with the past. “Put the past behind you. Let it slip away. If it tries to find you, close the door. If heaven has forgiven you, why should you then be driven to remember and remember all that has gone before. Put the past behind you, let it now recede. If it still pursues you, turn away. For there is nothing you have done for which the Lord did not atone. You’re welcomed and you’re pardoned and you’re now at peace with God. Like a bird released and now taking flight, like a captive moving free, you can spread your wings, you can face the sky, you can soar to liberty. Put the past behind you, let its memory dim. Let its haunting shadows fade and die. You’re free to choose another course, you’re really free to choose. Because Christ took your sins and bore them all away. So put the past behind you and walk out in today.”

Have No Anxiety About Anything

Today we would like to discuss a very important topic: anxiety. All of us have experienced various forms of anxiety in our lives, and we would like to discuss how to deal with our anxieties. We base our discussion on the three beautiful verses of St. Paul in Philippians 4:6-8. St. Paul says,

“Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, and whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:6-8).

We should memorize the above verses because in time of need they will be of tremendous use to us.

So St. Paul says here, “Have no anxiety about anything.” When we hear these words, we feel like saying to St. Paul, “Come on now St. Paul, be realistic. Who can live like that? How can someone afflicted with a malignancy or a serious illness not be anxious? How can someone who is trying to make it through school not be anxious? How can someone with a demanding job not be anxious? How can someone trying to deal with peer pressure not be anxious? How can we not be anxious when we live in the ‘age of anxiety’.”

Yet, St. Paul says, “Have no anxiety about anything.” So we again talk to St. Paul and say, “St. Paul, really, what kind of advice is that?” Maybe St. Paul was writing to people of some other world, some other planet, or some other life, but certainly not this one. But the fact is, he was not! When St. Paul wrote these words, he himself was having a pretty rough time of it. You see, St. Paul wrote these words while he was sitting in a prison cell in Rome. So when St. Paul wrote these words, he wasn’t sitting in an easy chair in front of a comfortable fireplace. St. Paul was no armchair philosopher. He was a realist, who was truly acquainted with life!

Yet St. Paul says, “Have no anxiety about anything.” But the main thing here is that St. Paul does *not* stop with these words. He goes on to give us the secret of how to overcome anxiety, as he says, “Have no anxiety about anything, *but* in everything by prayer and supplication, with

thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6-7). So St. Paul says here that we should let our requests, our needs, our fears, be made known to God. Bring them to God says St. Paul, always, “in everything”. St. Paul tells us here that we can talk to God about absolutely anything that is troubling us. We can do this in the absolute knowledge and trust that “He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

In the Old Testament, there is a beautiful example from the life of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:14. Hezekiah received a very disturbing letter from his enemy. It was the kind of letter that would cause a person much anxiety. We read, “And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord” (2 Kings 19:14). So whatever our invading anxiety is, we can always do as Hezekiah did, spread it before the Lord in prayer.

In John 14:1, Jesus says, “Let not your hearts be troubled.” Then Jesus goes on to give us the secret of a trouble-free heart. He says, “Believe in God, believe also in Me.” So we should trust God completely and spread it all out before Him in prayer.

There is a beautiful story about the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was in prison during the second world war in Hitler’s Germany. He was separated from his family until the time of his execution. He was certainly no stranger to anxiety. But through Christ, he had learned to overcome his anxiety, and he wrote in his diary these beautiful words: “From the moment we wake until we fall asleep, we must commend our loved ones wholly and unreservedly to God, and leave them in His hands, transforming our anxiety for them into prayers on their behalf.”

“In nothing be anxious,” says St. Paul, “but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” And this is St. Paul’s prescription for anxiety: take it to the Lord in prayer. And one spiritual writer says about this verse, “Tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer.”

We must be careful in interpreting St. Paul’s verses here. When St. Paul says, “Have no anxiety about anything,” he does *not* mean that we ought to be careless and indifferent about life. Of course, there are many things that we ought to be concerned about and be anxious about. But what St. Paul is saying here is that, after we have done all we can for them, we are to cast these burdens, every detail of them, upon the Lord, for “He cares for you,” says the Apostle Peter.

The English word for anxiety is derived from the Latin word which means literally to choke. Of course, a thing is choked when the outlet is blocked. And this is exactly what causes over anxiety. There is no outlet for our worries and our fears. They back up on us and fill our days and nights with fears. But we Christians have a God given outlet for these fears. We can let our anxieties flow into the ocean of God's compassion.

St. Paul says, "*In everything* let your requests be made known to God." What does this mean? We would like to place emphasis on this word "everything." This word implies that nothing is too small for God to handle. Nothing is too insignificant for His interest, and we must never think we insult God by making our trifling requests made known to Him. Anything at all that may cause anxiety and worry is a reason for prayer and this is precisely why the Bible has purposely kept the area of request wide open. "In everything let your requests be made known to God," says St. Paul. So our outlet for our anxieties then is to let our requests be made known to God *daily*. Jesus says, "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). And if we have no rest today, it is because we do not bring our anxieties to Jesus. We try to carry them alone, or we take them elsewhere, and they literally choke us.

The world tells us that we should forget our anxieties and enjoy ourselves, not realizing that this is spiritually and psychologically about the worst thing we can do with our anxieties. Because when we forget our anxieties, we simply repress them, and they become much more devastating when they get down into the subconscious mind. So the Bible tells us not to repress them, but to bring them out into the open and to cast them upon God in prayer.

Now it is interesting when we look at the life of Jesus, we see that He Himself was certainly no stranger to anxiety. He was terribly anxious, for example, in the Garden of Gethsemane right before His crucifixion. Just before His crucifixion recall that Jesus was so anxious that His "sweat became like great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). And we hear Jesus spreading His anxieties before the Lord in prayer in Gethsemane, as He says to God the Father, "Now My soul is troubled" (Matthew 26:38). Then He said, "Father save Me from this hour. Remove this cup from Me" (Matthew 26:39). But then after prayer came relinquishment (surrender), as He was able to say, "Nevertheless, not My will but Yours be done heavenly Father" (Matthew 26:39). So we see how Jesus dealt with His anxiety. First there is prayer, then there is relinquishment, and then comes peace, as Jesus says, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). "Father into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

So we see the steps that Jesus teaches us in dealing with anxiety, as He did in the Garden of Gethsemane:

1. **Prayer** - Matthew 26:38-39
2. **Relinquishment (surrender)** - Matthew 26:39
3. **Peace** - Luke 23:34, Luke 23:46

A spiritual writer once wrote, “Anxiety is inevitable in an age of crisis like ours. Don’t make it worse by deceiving yourself, and acting as if you were immune to all inner trepidation. God does not ask you not to feel anxious, but to trust in Him no matter how you feel.”

“In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known to God.” Now why does St. Paul bother to add the words *with thanksgiving*. Let us explain this with the following example. A lady once visited her priest for confession and she had many, many troubles to pour out to him. And the priest told her that he would gladly listen to her troubles provided that she would first tell him all that she had to be thankful for in life. She accepted his condition and for a solid half hour she gave the priest all of her reasons for being thankful. After she concluded, her father of confession said, “Ok, now you can tell me all your troubles.” And to her surprise, the lady found herself saying, “I really don’t think I have any.” So we should tell God every detail of our needs in earnest and *thankful* prayer. That is, we should check our blessings as well as our shortcomings. We must thank God for all of our blessings, and list them one by one and name them and go over them in earnest prayer. And when we have finished, surely our list of blessings will be substantially longer than our list of shortcomings.

The final cure of anxiety mentioned by St. Paul is given in Philippians 4:8, where he says, “Finally brethren, whatever things are true, and whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things.” St. Paul tells us here to “meditate on these things.” That is, to *fix* our minds on these things. In other words, in the midst of the storm of anxiety, St. Paul tells us here to fix our minds on Christ, His power, His love for us, and His great promises to us. We should immerse our minds with Christ, and we will discover the truth of the prophet Isaiah when he wrote these beautiful words, “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isaiah 26:3).

There is one last type of anxiety that we would like to discuss. It may seem like a strange one at first, but it's not once we understand it. It is called *endological anxiety*. The prefix "endo" is commonly used in science and medicine, which means inner or within. For example, such words include endocrine gland, endogenous, endoscope, and so on. The word endological comes from the Greek word which means being. Thus, endological anxiety is an anxiety that comes from our being, that is, being made in the image and likeness of God. You see, God has placed a longing for Himself in each and every one of us. This longing is a homesickness and a yearning of the soul for God. If we do not seek to satisfy this longing for God by coming to Christ, accepting Him, and developing a personal relationship with Him, we shall never be able to remove this endological anxiety from within us. It will be there constantly hounding us and haunting us until we hear God's call to go to Him. St. Augustine expressed this beautifully when he wrote, "Our souls were made for Thee O Lord, and they are restless, *anxious*, until they find their rest, their peace, in Thee."

We mention here an example of endological anxiety. Bertrand Russell was a famous British philosopher. He was knighted and received the title of lord Russell in England. Russell was also an atheist. He was born into a Christian home and he was taught to believe in God, but he rejected God and became an atheist. And his daughter said about him after he died these words: "Somewhere in the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that once had been filled by God. And he never found anything else to put in it." It is precisely this inner emptiness that haunts us and produces this endological anxiety within. *Only* when Jesus is invited to occupy this space within, will this endological anxiety be replaced with the "peace of God which surpasses all understanding".

In conclusion, St. Paul says some words that may seem strange and paradoxical to us at first: "Have no anxiety about anything." But these words must not be taken out of context. They were never intended to stand alone. They are anchored by two things:

1. In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.
2. Fix your minds on Christ - His power, His love, His promises, and the result of this will not be anxiety but the peace of God which truly surpasses all understanding, and will keep our minds and hearts in Christ Jesus.

The Meaning of Christmas

When we see the various icons of the Nativity, we often notice that the baby Jesus is depicted as lying in a manger in a very dark cave. In fact He is surrounded by a deep black color all around Him. And immediately above, the bright light of a star in heaven shines upon Him. Now, whenever the color black is used in icons, it expresses the power of darkness, the power of sin and death, which is already shattered by the risen Christ, and only waits to be filled with His light and life! So in the midst of the pitch black darkness of the cave lies He who is the “light of the world.”

It is significant to note that the message of the angels to the shepherds regarding the birth of Christ was in fact delivered at *night*. It was night not only because the sun had set, but because the world was in a state of spiritual and moral gloom. It is often when things are darkest that God manifests Himself in our life.

Most of the important events in the Bible indeed happened at night. For example, it was night in Egypt when the children of Israel were released from the bondage of Pharaoh (Exodus 12:31). It was night when Samuel heard the voice of God calling him to be a prophet to God’s people (1 Samuel 3:10). It was night when God gave David some of his sweetest Psalms (Psalm 134). It was night when St. Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God in that Philippian jail (Acts 16:25). It was night when the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him about the birth of Christ (Matthew 1:21). And it was night when Christ was born in Bethlehem, when the angel of the Lord made that glorious proclamation that a Savior had been given to us (Luke 2:11).

The birth of Christ happened on one of the longest and darkest nights of the year. It is well known that the months of December and January have the longest nights of the year. Christ’s birth in the deepest darkness says something very important to us. It tells us that in the *deepest darkness*, we can find the power and the glory of God. Note the bright star shining over the black cave in the icon of the Nativity. Jesus came into the darkness of this world, into our darkness, to be for the world and for us, the “light of the world,” (John 8:12).

At many times in our life, we ourselves face night. It may be night in our discouragement. It may be night in our moral weakness. It may be night in our loved ones or own illness. It may

be night in our distress or bereavement. It may be night as we face loneliness or guilt. But the message of Christmas is that above all these black clouds, the sun is shining. Jesus who is the light of the world is waiting to come into our life to deliver us from the dominion of darkness and bring us to His kingdom of light. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

All of our fears then are dispelled by the One who was born in the darkness of Bethlehem's night. It was He who was to enter into the tomb of death and come forth again proclaiming, "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore" (Revelation 1:18). The darkness of the tomb has been thus transformed into a brilliant light. Someone once wrote, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight. How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given. So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven."

Christmas is indeed a day of gifts. But the great tragedy of Christmas is the fact that countless millions of people will be opening all kinds of gifts this Christmas, and yet they will have missed the one gift that Christmas is all about. The one gift that is most needful. The one gift without which life is empty! That gift is Christ. There is a well known story of a baptism that was to take place at one of these great castles on the Rhine river. The noble man's son was to be baptized, and the distinguished visitors began arriving from all over the world. All was ready. All of a sudden they discovered that they could not find the baby to be baptized. The very object of the day's celebration had been forgotten, lost, and neglected somehow. They began to look and look, and finally, they found the baby on the bed covered over with the coats of the guests. The guests had inadvertently covered the sleeping baby with their coats. Now isn't that what we have done with the Christ child today? We have covered Him completely with the cheap tinsel of this season. In our mad rush to buy, buy, and buy gifts, we miss the greatest gift of all. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift," writes St. Paul (2 Corinthians 9:15). If we have not accepted God's gift of Christ, if we have not invited Him to come and rein in our life, then the gifts of this world that we receive this Christmas, no matter how many, will never satisfy us. They will all end up in the junk yard, and so will we, without Christ!

I want to share two beautiful stories that I once read. A priest once told a story about the big bright lights that he would put on the dome of his church to illuminate the church every year on Christmas eve. The priest one day said to the deacon, "why should we turn the lights on only on Christmas eve? Why not have them lit every night throughout the year?" So they did. So there it stood every night, the illuminated dome shining against the darkness like the

finger of God pointing to heaven. The priest was then told about a woman who was almost breaking under the burden of caring for her sick husband, and while visiting with this woman in her home, the priest said to her, “you should put him in a hospital.” And the wife went to the window, pulled aside the curtain and gazed at the brightly lit church dome in the distance. Then she said to the priest, “as long as I can see the Kingdom of God, I can go on.”

On another night there was a knock on the priests door at his home. He opened it and a girl of about eighteen years old entered and she seemed very nervous. She said, “Is that your church over there with the lighted dome?” “Yes it is” the priest replied. Then she said, “I was sitting in a car in a lane nearby with a married man. I guess I wanted a little excitement. Then all of a sudden, the lights went on, and when I saw that shining dome, something inside of me went cold. All I wanted to do was to get out of that car. Am I dumb ?” “No you’re not dumb,” the priest replied. “You are bright and shining, like that dome. The light is in you!”

We read in the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John, “That was the true light which gives light to every man who comes into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 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, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:9-12). And Jesus today waits to come into the darkness of our life to bring us the light of God’s forgiveness, His love, His peace, and His eternal life. So on this great feast of Christmas, have we received the gift of all gifts? Out of love for us, Jesus the Son of God, came down the “backstairs” of Bethlehem at night, lest He blind us by the excess light of His divinity. We must receive it. We must let Him who is the light of the world transform our darkness into light, our despair into hope, our death into life, and our sunset into sunrise. For St. Clement of Alexandria said, “He came to change our sunsets into sunrises.”

We close with the following well known poem. “O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell. O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.”

Merry Christmas to all!

The Light Shines in the Darkness

Ted Turner stopped believing in God when he was 20 years old. Ted Turner, as we all know, is the founder and owner of CNN, owner of the Atlanta Braves professional baseball team, and is one of the richest men in the world. He has also won several awards including Time Magazine's Man of the Year.

During his youth, Ted Turner considered himself a Christian, and at age 17, he even thought about becoming a missionary. But by the time he was 20, Ted Turner found it impossible to believe in God any longer. What happened? When Turner was 20, his 17 year old sister Mary Jane, died after having suffered for 5 years from a horrible disease. As Turner watched Mary Jane suffer and finally die despite countless prayers to God for healing, he decided that there was really no God. "How could such a thing happen if an all powerful and loving God is in control of the universe," said Turner. If God could not answer prayers or prevent suffering figured Ted, then there was no God.

Like Ted Turner, many people have watched excruciating suffering among their loved ones. Far from losing their faith however, the faith they already had was strengthened in their suffering, because it was not meaningless suffering, but suffering that was filled with the presence of God. Where is God when we suffer? The answer to that question is that God is exactly where He was when His own Son suffered excruciating pain on the cross. He is supplying His suffering children with much needed strength each day, even as He is preparing a resurrection for them, whereby, He will replace these weak bodies, ravished by pain, with new spiritual bodies not susceptible to pain any more.

Let us contrast Turner's story with a testimony of a young man in his early 20's whose mother died of cancer at age 51. The young man said, "When I looked at her body in the casket lying there, I was filled with the overwhelming feeling that it wasn't her. Yes, it was her body, and yes she was wearing her clothes, but that was not my mother. She was not there. Like Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome in the Gospel of St. Mark, it was as if I heard these same words those three women heard that morning nearly 2000 years ago. 'You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here' (Mark 16:6). Now these words are spoken to all of us. They are words that fill us with hope because we know that God does not abandon us, even in death. We belong to Him both for now and all eternity.

We can be filled with hope because we know that death is not the final page of our story. God continues to write our story with the words of the angel, 'He is risen! He is not here.' We can be filled with hope because we know that death will be transformed into new life. No we won't avoid the heartaches and the suffering and the pain, and we cannot avoid death, yet we have hope because we know that God transforms death into new life." The young man concludes by saying, "When I hear the Easter story now, the story of the women who have come to anoint death, and instead find resurrection, I think of my own experience at the empty tomb of my mother. And I am not alone. I stand with many others who have heard the same words in the midst of their grief: 'He is risen! He is not here'."

The darkness is still with us. But it is now an inhabited darkness, inhabited by Him who is the joyful light, the "light of the world" (John 8:12). "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it," says the Apostle John (John 1:5). The glorious and resplendent light, emanating from the empty tomb dispels the darkness and replaces it with a resplendent light.

The first Christians in the book of Acts didn't explain the resurrection of Jesus because only God can explain it. But they proclaimed it with an uncontrollable ecstasy of joy. And this is precisely what the Coptic Church does in the Divine Liturgy of the Resurrection on Easter Eve. During the liturgy, the church lights are turned off and the church becomes completely dark. Then the priest and the deacon "act out" the resurrection of Jesus, and the church lights come back on after a big bang signifying the resurrection of Christ. Thus, the church literally acts out the resurrection of Jesus during the liturgy, and the deacons chant the beautiful hymns of the resurrection in the procession which follows.

The resurrection of Jesus means:

There is no fear so great that there can be no calm.

And no death so final that there can be no life.

And no grief so deep that there can be no consolation.

And no injustice so insidious that there cannot be justice and truth.

And no sin so serious that there cannot be forgiveness.

And no war so fierce that there cannot be peace.

And no hatred so deep that there cannot be love.

Someone once said, "I went to the funeral home to choose a casket for my oldest sister. We

were taken to a showroom in which there were many open caskets at various price levels. With the lids open it seemed as though they represented the very jaws of death. Then a few days later, we stood by an open grave and it seemed as though again, the jaws of death were open to swallow our loved one.” Indeed, death swallows up everyone! The young and the old, the strong and the weak, the holy and the unholy. It is always hungry. It is never satisfied, never gorged. It swallows up everyone. Death even swallowed up Jesus. But that is where death met its nemesis! Though death swallowed up Christ, it was unable to digest the Lord of Life. And the result is that life is now liberated. The result is that death itself, as St. Paul says, was “swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). And this is the greatest victory this universe will ever see. It’s the victory we proclaim every time we read the words of the Nicene Creed: “I await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come.” “For as by a man came death,” writes the Apostle Paul, “by a man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Grief stricken widow, weep no more for your husband if he died in the Lord. And heart-broken mother, weep no more for your child snatched so soon from your embrace. “For in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, we shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52). We shall see again the eye that has just now been closed. And we shall grasp again the hand that just now fell motionless at the side. And we shall touch again the cheek that just now is clay cold and white. And we shall hear again the sweet voice that is now silent in the tomb. The dead shall live again. And those who fear death, why fear to die? Jesus died before us, and He has already passed those iron gates. And since He has passed before us, He will be there to meet us. “For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him” (Luke 20:38). Why should we weep? For as Jesus rose from the dead, so shall we, and He tells us to “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). We are not lost when we are placed in the tomb. We are but seethed, sown to ripen against the eternal harvest. Our spirit mounts to God. Our body slumbers for a while only to be quickened into eternal life at the resurrection. It cannot be quickened except it die. But when it dies, it shall receive new life. It shall not be destroyed. For Christ is risen from the dead, and to those in the tombs He has bestowed life!

We give here an example of one of the many deathbed testimonies that speak so powerfully of life after death, that is, eternal life. A well known oncologist and professor of pediatrics at Yale University said that for nearly 25 years she has stood at the deathbeds of children and

listened to the calm hopeful visions of their dying moments, which she says echo the stories told by other children who have had near death experiences. Early in her medical career, she (the doctor) sat with a family beside their 7 year old daughter who was in the last stages of leukemia. The little girl had the final energy to sit up in bed and say to her parents, in the presence of the doctor, “The angels. They’re so beautiful. Mommy, can you see them? Can you hear their singing? I’ve never heard such beautiful singing.” Then the child died. After witnessing this, the doctor said, “The word that most closely described what I felt is the word *gift*. It wasn’t just that the child was given the gift of peace in the final moment of her life, but this was a gift to her parents and to me personally.”

Life after death, eternal life, is indeed a gift that God gives to all who believe in His name and are baptized. But the existence of life after death is *not* based on the gift of deathbed visions of angels or brilliant light, or whatever. Our faith in eternal life is based rather on the *solid rock* of the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus! Such beautiful deathbed testimonies, and there are many of them, are given to us by God as a bonus of His grace to help bolster our faith in life after death. What we need to remember is that for those who live in faith and surrender themselves to the will and love of God, the resurrection becomes a daily reality: souls are quickened and sins are forgiven, and the mind is illumined and the heart is purified every day as the Holy Spirit forms the mind of Christ in each one of us.

A woman once visited a military cemetery at the end of the second world war, and this is what she said. “There are graves in the lonely sands of Africa where a brother who died bravely was buried. A dear beloved friend. A boy who won at tennis and swam across the lake with strong steady strokes a few short months ago. They were buried where they fell and the tide of battle roared on leaving a mound across a flag. Above such graves there is a voice saying, ‘He is risen! He is not here’ (Mark 16:6). ‘Because I live, you will live also’ (John 14:19). In a far away land, they buried a nurse who was good and very caring, a doctor who had ministered to those in pain, and a patriot who was one of his country’s finest sons. Over their graves, there was a clear voice in the wind saying, ‘They are risen! They are not here. Because I live, they will live also.’” Over the grave of our loved ones, there is a constant voice whispering in the wind as a result of the resurrection of Jesus. This is the voice of the risen Christ saying, “They are risen! They are not here. Because I live, they will live also.”

We close here with words placed rhetorically in the mouth of Jesus by one of the saints in a 15th century Paschal homily:

“Come to Me all you families of humankind sullied by sin and receive the forgiveness of your sins. For I am your forgiveness. I am the Pascha of salvation. I am the Lamb sacrificed to you. I am your redemption. I am your life. I am your resurrection. I am your light. I am your salvation. I am your King. I lead you to the heights of heaven. I show you the Father eternal. I will raise you by My right hand.”

Christ Gathers His Sheep

During the period of Lent, many Coptic Orthodox monasteries and churches all over the world focus on the writings of St. John Climacus, who wrote a great spiritual book called *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Climacus is also known as St. John of the Ladder (Yohanna El-Daragi). The ladder is associated with his name because of his book, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. This famous book is based on the dream that Jacob had in the Old Testament where he dreamt of a ladder coming down from heaven to the spot where he was sleeping in the wilderness (Genesis 28:12). Now this beautiful spiritual book consists of thirty steps that one must climb to reach spiritual perfection, that is, union with Christ.

We would like to use the symbol of the ladder today for our discussion. We would also like to use two terms that relate to the ladder. One of them we already know and we hear about constantly. It is the expression *upward mobility*. Upward mobility is all about the world around us, especially the business world and the professional world. Everyone is striving for this upward mobility, trying to climb the ladder of success to the very top. In the process, these climbers often lose their spouse, their children, their marriage, and even their sanity in that desperate effort to climb, climb, and keep climbing to the top of the ladder: upward mobility. Some few do indeed reach the top, but only to discover that they placed the ladder against the wrong building! What they find at the top is not the happiness and contentment that they were looking for, but they find rather a rat race of boredom, depression, unhappiness, desperation, unbearable tension and stress, and often suicidal melancholy. The higher one gets on the ladder of the world's upward mobility, the harder it is to be together, to sing together, to pray together, and just to celebrate life together in a spirit of thanksgiving. This is the price that one pays for that ladder.

Now Jesus practiced another kind of mobility, namely a *downward mobility*, instead of the upward mobility. I read recently about a person who renounced a career that would have taken him high up on the ladder of success, and he renounced it for a job that brought him down the ladder to the level of the poor, the weak, and those in distress. The lower we descend on this ladder, the more our eyes are opened to the brokenness of humanity all around us.

The love of God in Christ was made visible to us in a *descending* way. Jesus practiced downward mobility. And this, of course, is the great mystery of the Incarnation. God has

descended down the ladder to us human beings to take on a human nature like us, and take on flesh and blood like us. And once among us, He descended to the total dereliction of one condemned to death on the cross. Now most of us do pay attention to the poor and the suffering once in while, but descending to a total state of poverty and becoming poor with the poor, that most of us are never prepared to do. Yet, that is exactly what God in Christ did for us! And St. Paul expressed this so beautifully when he said, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Speaking of the downward mobility of Jesus, a spiritual writer once wrote, “It is not we ourselves who were moved towards God, nor did we ascend to Him, but it was He who came down and descended to us. It was not we who sought, but we were the object of His seeking. The sheep did not seek the shepherd, nor did the lost coin search for its master (Luke 15:1-10). He it was who came to earth and retrieved His own image. And He came to the place where the sheep were straying, and He lifted it up and stopped it from straying. He did not remove us from here, but He made us heavenly while yet remaining on earth and imparted to us the heavenly life without leading us up to heaven, but by bending heaven down to us.” As David the Psalmist says in the Old Testament, “He bowed the heavens also and came down” (Psalms 18:9).

So the downward mobility of Jesus ultimately led Him to the cross and one *cannot* descend any lower than this as Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). Here we see how far God descended to show us His love. So this is God’s way, the way of downward mobility. It is God’s way not only for Jesus, but also for us. Jesus describes those who follow His descending way, this downward mobility, when He says in the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12),

“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.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

So this is the descending way of Jesus, His downward mobility, that ultimately becomes the ascending way, the true upward mobility. For the downward mobility that led Jesus to the cross and the tomb ultimately became the way to the highest upward mobility this world has ever known or will ever know. And we see this beautiful upward mobility in His resurrection from the dead, placed in a tomb, but through the resurrection, lifted to the heavens. We see it in His ascension forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:9-10). And we see this upward mobility fulfilled in the total glorification of Jesus when He sits at the right hand of God the Father (Acts 2:33). Can there ever be any upward mobility higher than this? And this is the upward mobility in which each one of us Coptic Orthodox Christians is called to share, and by His grace will share ultimately in the kingdom of heaven. The descending way of love, the way to the poor, to the broken, to the oppressed, becomes the ascending way of love, the way to joy, the way to peace, the way to new life. And the cross is transformed from a sign of defeat into a sign of victory, from a sign of despair into a sign of hope, and from a sign of death into a sign of life. God Himself has made the descending way of humble service the way to glory. Only when we are prepared to experience this in our own life of prayer and service will we get an inkling of the mystery of God's love.

So in Christ, the way up is the way down! In order to go up, we must first go down. In Baptism, for example, we first go down into the water signifying our dying with Jesus to sin and death, and then we are raised up from the baptismal font to experience the resurrection with Christ to new life. So the baptismal font, as the Church Fathers say, becomes "a womb and a tomb". It becomes a death and a rising because the way up is the way down. In following Jesus, for example, we lose ourself in service to others in order to find our true fulfilled self. The way up is the way down. We put down the sinful self daily through repentance so that the image and likeness of God in us may be resurrected and shine forth in its pristine beauty. And we put down daily the prideful and egotistical self in us in order for the humble self to rise. We put down, by God's grace, the passions within us in order that we climb unburdened the ladder that St. John Climacus talks about. And in the end, we all go *down*, down into the grave, only to await there our resurrection to our Lord Jesus Christ to life everlasting. So the way up is indeed

the way down. We see this in the Eucharist (Holy Communion), which is the sacrament of love given to us as a means of finding that descending way of Jesus right down into our hearts.

Whenever we eat the bread of heaven, we not only become most profoundly united with Jesus, but we also learn gradually to walk His descending way with Him. Whenever we eat the body of Jesus and drink His blood in Holy Communion, we participate in His downward mobility and become a community, God's very body, in which the destructive upward mobility of this world's cut-throat competitiveness and rivalry is transfigured by the love of God into a loving community that St. Paul describes as "One in love, one in heart, one in mind. Nothing is done out of jealousy or vanity, instead out of humility of mind, everyone gives preference to others. Everyone pursuing not selfish interests, but those of others" (Philippians 2:2-4).

God in Christ to this day climbs down the ladder to where we are and wherever we are. He stands just outside the door of our heart, and He knocks seeking to enter (Revelation 3:20). And when we open, He will take us by the hand and take us all the way up the ladder, and then He will present us to His Father in heaven. Then He will say about us to the Father, "This is My beloved son (or daughter) in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). And the Father will say, "Come, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). You too, descended the ladder with my Son. 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" (Matthew 25:35-36).

We conclude here with Philippians 2:5-11, which is really a great hymn of the early church, in which the descending way of Jesus on the ladder is exalted by St. Paul. Philippians 2:5-11 is often referred to as the Incarnation Song of the Apostle Paul in the Coptic Orthodox Church:

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5-11).

Rejection and Acceptance

I would like to talk about the topic of rejection and acceptance. I have broken up this talk into two parts. The first part deals with God's acceptance of us as sinners, and how we can accept God's grace and forgiveness of us. Accepting God's grace and forgiveness will lead us to three other acceptances which I will discuss. They are

- 1) Acceptance of yourself
- 2) Acceptance of others
- 3) Acceptance of God's will

These three acceptances will comprise part two of this talk. (To preserve continuity in this talk, let us leave the comments, questions, and discussion until the end.)

Let us now talk about God's acceptance of us as sinners. There are several stories in the Bible which illustrate this topic. I would like to focus on the story of Zacchaeus, because I feel this story addresses this topic well. Before we characterize the life of Zacchaeus, I would like to first read the story.

The story of Zacchaeus : Gospel of St. Luke, 19: 1 - 10.

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was of small stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and

save the lost.”

People can survive many, many blows in life, but one of the hardest blows of all, I think, is rejection. We can all think back to the time or perhaps many times in life when we were rejected. We can recall the horrible pain that is associated with rejection.

Now Zacchaeus was a person who experienced that horrible pain of rejection. Zacchaeus was a tax collector for the Romans. Among his fellow Jews he was considered to be the worst of the worst. Zacchaeus was an outcast. He was looked upon as a traitor and a hireling of the Roman army of occupation. He had purchased the right to collect taxes for the Romans from his own people, and he profited from the misfortune of his own people. The result of this was that he experienced total rejection from his own people. He was excluded from the Synagogue, and from all acceptable social contacts with his fellows Jews.

Now Jesus comes to Jericho one day, and of all people whom should he notice. If you have ever seen a sycamore tree, the leaves are quite large. In addition, Zacchaeus was a short man, yet Jesus noticed Zacchaeus up in the sycamore tree. He not only noticed him, he immediately called out to him and invited himself to Zacchaeus’ house for dinner.

Now when the God fearing people of Jericho saw this, they were shocked. We can imagine that they were just as shocked as the scribes and the pharisees were when they saw Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. As they asked the disciples, ”Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners ? ”, and when Jesus heard this, he beautifully replied ”Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:17).

So why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners, they ask. Because to eat with tax collectors and sinners is to accept them. Now, there’s no doubt that Zacchaeus himself was shocked that Jesus wanted to come to his house, and we can be assured that Mrs. Zacchaeus was even more shocked when Jesus and Zacchaeus appeared for dinner.

This story exemplifies the great truth found in the Gospel of St. John. ”For God sent His

Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him”, (John 3:17).

Thus, Jesus did not come into this world to be a critic, an evaluator, or a corrector. He came to be our blessed Savior, and we see this illustrated so beautifully in the way Jesus treats Zacchaeus. Nobody but nobody accepted Zacchaeus but Jesus. Notice that when he met Zacchaeus, Jesus did not call him a crook, which Zacchaeus was. But Zacchaeus called himself a crook after Jesus had accepted him. Jesus’ acceptance of Zacchaeus was the beginning of his salvation.

Now Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was a crook, and in knowing him, he still loved him. Zacchaeus sensed the acceptance, and it made a new person of him. Of course the onlookers could not understand it, and they said so. They felt that Zacchaeus was too bad, too evil, too corrupt to be loved by God, and this was because they were out of touch with their own lostness and sinfulness.

A spiritual father once wrote, “Now if rejection is the hardest blow of all, then the acceptance that God offers us in Christ has to come as the greatest good news of all. Most of us feel the desperate need to be accepted by people, and we spend a great deal of time and energy trying to win that acceptance. Yet true acceptance, real acceptance, the source of all healthy acceptance, comes when we accept the fact that God knows us thoroughly and loves us thoroughly, and knowing that we are pardoned, accepted, and loved by God is the dynamic that makes acceptance of ourselves and others possible.”

Accepting the fact that we are accepted and loved by God is the prerequisite to accepting ourselves and accepting others. Thus, acceptance of ourselves and others flows directly from our acceptance by God.

Carl Rogers, a well known psychotherapist, believed that creating a feeling of absolute unconditional acceptance was the most healing medicine that he could give to his patients, and he wrote several books on this. A famous theologian said once “We must learn to accept the unacceptable”, and this was his definition of God’s grace.

God loves us the way we are as he loved Zacchaeus the way he was. But he loves us too

much to leave us the way we are, and this is why we see that once Zacchaeus experiences the love and the acceptance of Jesus, his whole life is changed. As he immediately speaks up and says to Jesus, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold."

Someone once wrote, "Everything in life that is accepted undergoes a change." Remember how Jesus treated the adulteress. "Neither do I condemn you", he said to the rejected and about to be stoned to death adulteress, "go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

Acceptance leads to a changed life. It certainly did in Zacchaeus' case. We learn from this story that if we feel rejected, we can be assured that there is one place where we can come to experience the sweetness of acceptance. The same God who accepted Zacchaeus, and the adulteress, and the thief on the cross, and the Samaritan woman, and so many many others, will accept us and bestow upon us his love, compassion, acceptance, and forgiveness when we come to him.

Remember one powerful example from the Bible. Remember how Peter wept bitterly after he had denied Jesus three times. We can imagine how Peter must have felt after Jesus' death. He must have utterly despised himself, and felt totally and completely rejected. That is why Jesus singled Peter out immediately after his resurrection, so that Peter would be assured that Jesus had not rejected him because of his denials. When Jesus spoke, he said "Go tell the disciples", and he immediately inserted Peter's name "And Peter too, that I want to see them in Galilee" (Mark 16:7).

And in Chapter 21 of the Gospel of St. John (21:15-19), we see further evidence of Jesus' acceptance and forgiveness of Peter. Recall in this Gospel, that Peter and some of the other disciples had gone fishing near the Sea of Tiberias, and Jesus appeared to them there, and they went and had breakfast with him. There, Jesus spoke individually to Peter and reassured him that he was forgiven and accepted for his denials, and told him to continue preaching his teachings.

Yet this most fundamental fact of the Gospel, God's acceptance of us as sinners, is so hard to accept. Of course the devil wants to feel that it is not only hard to accept, but also

impossible to believe that God can be so accepting. The devil works through our minds and tries to convince us that God's acceptance of us is too good to be true, and that it's too late for us to repent. But the fact of the matter is, what the devil tries to get us to believe is the furthest thing from the truth. As one theologian wrote, "The real truth is that God does in fact accept us. He does forgive sin. He doesn't condone it, he doesn't excuse it, he doesn't overlook it, but he does forgive it if we truly repent." This is what the story of Zacchaeus is all about: Life eternal begins now, when we graciously and humbly accept the love and the forgiveness of Jesus.

I once heard a very powerful story about the Desert Fathers that beautifully illustrates what we have been talking about. Let me share it with you. A brother monk once came to Abba Peomen and said to him, "Father, if I fall into a shameful sin, my conscience devours me". And Abba Peomen replied and said to this brother, "At the moment a person goes astray and sins, if that person says, I've sinned, immediately, that sin is erased". Immediately. We see the immediate forgiveness and immediate acceptance that God offers us in Christ.

This story of Zacchaeus, as is any other story in the Bible should not be viewed as a single event in the history of the world. Rather, we should view this story as an example of how Jesus worked then and still works today in exactly the same way. Thus, we should not view the Bible as a history book.

So that same forgiveness, that same love, and that same acceptance that Jesus offered to Zacchaeus, he offers to each and everyone of us today. And he addresses us by name, each one of us, and he says exactly what he said to Zacchaeus. "Make haste", Joe, Jane, John, and Mary, "Make haste, for I must stay at your house today". And indeed he does come to stay at our house every time we receive him in the Holy Eucharist.

Accepting God's grace and forgiveness will lead us to three other acceptances which I would like to discuss briefly. They are

- 1) Acceptance of yourself
- 2) Acceptance of others

3) Acceptance of God's will

Lets first talk about acceptance of yourself. It's not easy to accept ones self. Most people have a real problem with accepting themselves. Failure to accept ones self is perhaps a major cause of serious emotional problems and suicide. We see the suicide rate, especially among teenagers is growing at a disturbing rate.

One person once said, "The most important day of my life was the day I stopped trying to set the world on fire, and accepted myself. The good and the bad, the strengths and the weaknesses, for what I was. I've been a happier man, a more understanding father, and a more useful citizen ever since."

A well known doctor once wrote, "Accept the fact that you are weak. Don't pretend you are strong. And perhaps if you dare to be what you are, your weakness will become your strength." In other words, if we acknowledge and accept the fact that we are weak, our weakness, acknowledged and accepted will become our strength.

Now didn't St. Paul say exactly the same thing. "For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians, 12:10), and he went on to say, "In my weakness I'm forced to come to my strength, the source of my strength, Jesus". Someone once wrote "For it is always our weakness, when we accept it, that makes us lean so heavily on the source of strength, the Lord Jesus."

I'd like to read these words about acceptance written by a certain person.

"I am neither good nor bad, I am both. And because God loves me, I will love myself with a healthy unselfish love.

I am neither guilty nor innocent, I am both. And because God forgives me, I will forgive myself and forget past sins.

I am neither loving nor hateful, I am both. And because God loves me, I will try to overcome hate with love, even to people I dislike.

I am neither pure or impure, I am both. And because God accepts me through grace, I will accept myself and let him make something beautiful of me."

So we can accept ourselves as acceptable, because God in Christ has already accepted us in his love and mercy. And it is to us for example that Jesus gives us that beautiful promise, "Fear not little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". (Luke 12:32).

Therefore, God's acceptance of us can help us to accept ourselves, secondly it can help us to accept others. Let us now talk about accepting others.

Let me give a quote from a spiritual father about accepting others, in which he relates rejection and the Church. "If all of us who were formerly rejected have now been accepted by God in Christ, then we all now live in a community of formerly rejected persons who hope and now have experienced God's acceptance. Isn't that what the church is all about. The church is a community of people who know what rejection is, and to reach out to others in the world to offer them the same acceptance they have received in Christ. The church that God intended is a community, where each receives the other as all have been received by God. God loves us, and gave himself for us. And as he loves us, so ought we love one another and accept one another."

A want to share a beautiful story that I once heard that illustrates beautifully this point of accepting others.

A middle aged woman had experienced a drinking problem for years, and no one had paid much attention to her, and in fact people were careful to avoid her. And then one day a wise friend named Angie invited her to join their small prayer group that met once a week. "Will you come", Angie asked her. And the woman hesitated and then replied, "But I can't come to a God meeting smelling like bourbon, what would the other ladies think?". Angie smiled and replied, "Oh, we all smell of something. One of us has a problem with gossip, another criticizes her husband, and another has a problem with unforgiveness. God knows how we all smell, but he still loves us, won't you come." The stunned woman understood immediately. She began to laugh while even crying a little. Then she said, "Yes, oh yes, I'll come. Thank you, Thank you."

She was accepted as she was. But once accepted, she did not remain the way she was. Because in that group and in Christ, she found the power to overcome, and to become a new person in Christ Jesus.

Another beautiful example about rejection and acceptance in the Bible is the story of the Samaritan woman, in Chapter four in the Gospel of St. John. In this story, the Samaritan woman, who was an adulteress and rejected by everyone, was immediately accepted by Jesus when he saw her at Jacob's well. The disciples themselves were shocked when they saw Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman, not only because he was speaking with the woman, but because she was also a Samaritan, and Jews did not associate with Samaritans. After Jesus' acceptance of her, her whole life changed as she went on to give her testimony about Jesus to other Samaritans.

In this story, we not only learn that we should accept sinners, but we also learn about how one ought to deal with prejudice. Prejudice is a very serious problem in today's society. We see prejudice everywhere. We see it in Chicago, we see it in Los Angeles, we see it in South Africa, we see it in Egypt, and many other countries around the world. Rejection of others is often a result of prejudice. Here, we see that even though she was a Samaritan woman and Jesus was a Jew, he accepted her immediately knowing she was a Samaritan. Thus, we should accept others in the same way as Jesus accepted the Samaritan woman, and not reject them as a result of prejudice.

Accepting God's love and grace will help us accept others, help us accept ourselves, and lastly, help us accept God's will. Let us now talk about accepting God's will.

Again, I'd like to quote a spiritual father on accepting God's will. "We don't understand everything about God. His ways are not our ways. His ways are far, far, above our ways. His thoughts are far above our thoughts. But we are certain of one thing about God, and we see it on the cross, that he loves everyone of us infinitely dearly and everlastingly. Since this is true, then we can trust him even when we do not understand his ways with us. From such faith comes acceptance. We should accept the will of God when adversity comes, and we should learn whatever lessons are in it, and believe that it works together for our good because he's in control. And that which cannot be changed may indeed be used for our good. If accepted, it can be transformed from a burden into a blessing."

There is a beautiful sentence that reads "In acceptance, there is peace". Or that beautiful proverb, "What cannot be avoided, can be welcomed". And it can be welcomed because it does

not come to us without Gods prior approval. And if God has approved it, it is because he has a mighty, mighty good reason for it.

Someone once wrote some very powerful words about accepting God's will. Let me share them. "When a man suffers, he ought not to say, that's bad, that's bad, nothing that God imposes on us is bad, but it is all right to say "that's bitter, that's bitter, for among medicines, there are some that are made from bitter herbs."

If the hardest blow of all in life is rejection, then we all need desperately the acceptance offered to us by Christ Jesus. Eternal life begins when we accept that acceptance, as we saw in the story of Zacchaeus. And from God's acceptance of us flow these other three acceptances - acceptance of ourselves, acceptance of others, and acceptance of God's will.

The feeling of being unwanted and rejected is perhaps the major cause of emotional and mental disturbances, as we mentioned earlier. We must believe that in Christ we are accepted, as sinful Zacchaeus was accepted, and that we are not unwanted but dearly loved by God. And as one spiritual Father wrote "Believing that in Christ we are accepted and deeply loved by God is the best preventive against being oppressed by the demon spirit of rejection."

In the Epistle reading last Sunday, we heard a beautiful quote from St. Paul describing the acceptance we find in Christ. It is Ephesians 2:19. I'd like to close with this beautiful quote.

"So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."

The Tongue

A famous preacher delivered a fiery sermon once on what he called “That tiny piece of flesh, the most dangerous appertainance of a man’s body.” Gentleman when they heard this blanched and ladies blushed as he elaborated on all of the horrendous consequences of its misuse. And his piercing eyes were like shooting sparks as he expounded on and on. And towards the end of the sermon he leaned over the pulpit and asked, “Shall I show you that tiny piece of flesh?” There was paralyzed silence. Horrified silence. Smelling salts were extracted from ladies handbags. Then with a sly smile on his face the preacher said, “Ladies and gentleman, behold the source of our sins.” And he stuck out his tongue!

The Gospel reading of the third Sunday of Lent is about the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). One of the main themes in the readings of the third Sunday of Lent concerns the *sins of the tongue*. In this Gospel reading, one of the sins of the elder brother was the way he criticized and maligned his younger brother to his father. Recall in this parable that the prodigal son returns home after having lived an immoral life away from his father, the father accepts him, but his older brother does not accept him. In fact the older brother goes out of his way to say to his father about his younger brother, “But when this son of yours, when he came back, he who devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf” (Luke 15:30). Notice here how the elder brother refers to his younger brother: he calls him “your son” and *not* “my brother.” In other words, he does not even want to acknowledge to his father that the prodigal son is his own brother!

Jesus tells us in Matthew 12:36-37 that we must answer for every idle word we have spoken. He says, “I tell you on the day of judgment, men will render account for every careless word they utter. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).

St. James the Apostle has a classic discourse on taming the tongue in his Epistle. It is in James 3:1-12. This is the Catholic Epistle reading for the third Sunday of Lent in the Coptic Orthodox Church. We see here how the readings of this third Sunday of Lent are well connected (as are all the readings of the Coptic Church) and deal with the sins of the tongue. St. James says in James 3:1-12,

“If we put bits into the mouths of horses, that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Look at the ships also. Though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder whenever the will of the pilot directs. So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among its members staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind. But no human being can tame the tongue. A restless evil full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? No more can salt water bear fresh.”

Someone once compiled a list of the sins of the tongue. They are

1. a divisive tongue
2. a filthy tongue
3. a negative tongue
4. a boasting tongue
5. a gossiping tongue
6. a judgemental tongue
7. a lying tongue
8. a murmuring tongue
9. a nagging tongue
10. a sarcastic tongue
11. an insincere tongue

Of course, this list can go on and on. Is it any wonder that the tongue has been called “That tiny piece of flesh, the most dangerous appertainance of a man’s body.”

St. Basil said once, “The most and multifaceted sin is the one enacted by the tongue.” Ben Franklin said once, “Remember not only to say the right thing at the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.” Now we know why we say that verse in Psalm 141:3 in the Compline prayer of the Agpeya, “Set a watch O Lord about my mouth and a door of enclosure about my lips” (Psalm 141:3).

This is what St. John Chrysostom says about the tongue: “God has surrounded the tongue with a double wall, with the barrier of teeth first and the fence of the lips second. In order that it may not easily and needlessly utter words it should not speak, keep it curved within your mouth. Suppose it does not stand for this treatment and wants to keep talking and talking. Then punish it with the teeth, just as if you were giving its body over to the public executioner to be bitten. For it is better that it be bitten now when it sins, than that hereafter, when it is parched and seeking a drop of water, and it be deprived of that consolation.”

How true that verse is in Proverbs, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21).

There are two ways of expressing hostility toward a person. One way is to physically hit that person. The second way is to say something evil about that person. Most of us are too civilized to go around hitting people. Yet most of the time, hitting a person is really not any worse than speaking a vicious word about them that can never be recalled. We hear a lot today about the physical abuse of children, yet we never hear anything about the verbal abuse of children. We forget that there is another form of child abuse that can even be more devastating than physical abuse. Children do not necessarily recover any faster from verbal abuse than they do from physical abuse. It is this constant emotional abuse of words: harsh, threatening, insulting words, that we know have a devastating effect on a child’s emotional and spiritual well being. In families, for example, where children are victims of verbal abuse, children who should be taught to talk to others to resolve their problems, are instead shown by the parents and elders examples, that screaming, threatening, and insulting are the ways to resolve personal problems. It is precisely this type of verbal abuse in families that produces people like Saddam Hussein and others of his ilk.

Words are our most prized possessions. And they really set us apart from the whole of creation because plants, rocks, and animals cannot speak. Words show us to be made in the image and likeness of God. Through words, we can communicate with God and with each other.

And we sing His praises and teach His ways. And this is precisely the reason why the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost appeared in the form of tongues! (Acts 2:3). For it is the office of the tongue to proclaim the Good News and glorify the Almighty. There is a beautiful verse in Psalm 51 (Psalm 50 in the Agpeya) that we read in the beginning of every hour of the Agpeya, “Open Thou my lips O Lord, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise” (Psalm 51:15).

Words can have a major impact on our lives. Words are indeed powerful. When we say to someone, for example, “I love you,” or “I hate you,” or “I forgive you,” the effect of these words can never, never be completely undone. The effect will last forever. How do we feel personally, for example, when someone says to us, “I love you,” or “I forgive you,” or “I appreciate you.” Words are indeed powerful. Without words, no teacher can stretch the mind of his students. Without words, no attorney could defend the truth in a courtroom. Without words, no priest could comfort troubled souls.

If we doubt the power of words, imagine for a moment how we would feel if we were on the receiving end of words such as these:

1. The surgery was very successful. Everything is fine.
2. I have some bad news for you. Your tumor is malignant. You have six months to live.
3. I'm sorry. He just passed away.

Words are powerful because they change things, including the person who speaks them. Someone once said, “Until you say for example, ‘I love you’ to the people you love, you haven’t really loved, because it is of the essence of love to express itself and to make itself heard. Love simply will not grow if it is not expressed this way.”

The tongue in our mouth is really bilingual. Each person can speak two languages: the language of the put-down and the language of praise. When we speak the put-down language, words can wound, words can hurt, words can make enemies, and words can start quarrels. But when we speak the language of praise, words can charm, words can bless, words can make amends, words can comfort, and words can fill us with hope. How beautiful that verse is in Proverbs, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

So we should choose words that build up the good, and leave unspoken the words that tear down and injure. Let us speak words that promote harmony, and leave unspoken words that

divide and stir up. And let us speak words of faith and love, and leave unspoken words that promote fear and anxiety. Let us pray each day that our words be clothed with spiritual power, and whatever words we speak, they must be able to pass these three narrow gates: i) is it true?, ii) is it necessary?, and iii) is it kind?

In the old days, one of the first things that the doctor did when when you went into the office for an exam was to look at you and say, “Let me see your tongue.” That’s perhaps the best way to check out a Christian, is to do this “tongue test,” to see what he or she is talking about. This tongue test, as you recall, is precisely what happened to the Apostle Peter. Recall what the maid said to the Apostle Peter after he had denied Jesus three times. She said, “Your accent betrays you” (Mark 14:70). And our accent always betrays us. For the tongue is the pen of the heart and the messenger of the brain. Jesus said, “It is always out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). Someone once said, “For good or ill, your conversation is your advertisement. Every time you open your mouth, you let people look into your mind and into your heart.”

Here are some practical ways of taming the tongue:

1. One person said that whenever he hears anyone speak evil of someone else, he finds something good to say about the person who has been criticized. He says that this effort has been an enormous assistance to him in his spiritual life. He says, “Nothing aids spiritual development more than ceasing to say unkind things.”
2. Another way of taming the tongue is to enlist the aid of a close Christian friend or relative. Every time he or she hears you utter some ungracious remark, you must go back and recite a verse in the Bible about taming the tongue.
3. Another way of taming the tongue is to simply talk less! Our chances of blowing it are directly proportional to the amount of time we spend with our mouths open. So we should try closing it for a while! Compulsive talkers, for example, find it difficult to keep friends. So we should make our words like that well known shampoo: concentrated and richer.
4. The fourth and last part of taming the tongue has to do with Lent. During this period of Lent, we should fast the true fast. The true fast is not only abstaining from food, but also taming the tongue to abstain from saying unkind or filthy words. So if we are going

to practice any kind of true and genuine fast this Lent, we must concentrate on taming our tongue.

There is a great prayer that goes, “Lord, make all of our words gracious and tender today, for tomorrow we may have to eat them!” And how many times have we eaten our words? There is a beautiful poem about a careless word and a gracious word: “A careless word may kindle strife, a cruel word may kill a life. A bitter word may hate instill, a brutal word may smite and kill. A gracious word may smooth the way, a joyous word may light the day. A timely word may lessen stress, a loving word may heal and bless.”

Recall the friends who came to see Job when he was ill. They gave him a magnificent compliment. They said, “Job, your words have kept men on their feet” (Job 4:4). And good words are indeed powerful enough to keep men on their feet.

We close here with a beautiful story from the Gospels. Recall the story of the centurion who’s servant was sick in Matthew 8:5-13. When the centurion approached Jesus, Jesus turned to him and said, “I’ll come to your home and heal your servant” (Matthew 8:7). And the centurion responded, “Only say the word Lord, and the servant will be healed” (Matthew 8:8). That is, *only say the word*, and healing will take place. This story tells us that someone is always there needing for us just to say the word! The word of hope, the word of caring, the word of forgiving, the word of encouragement. We should just say it! And we will be surprised at the healing that will take place.

Modern Pharisees

Today we would like to discuss the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector. This parable is found in Luke 18:9-14. This is an important parable that teaches us the meaning of true righteousness and humility, and how to have a real loving relationship with Christ. The parable is given as follows:

“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:” “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, ‘God be merciful to me the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14).

What is a pharisee? The pharisees of the New Testament were people who were strict obeyers of the laws of God. They were very knowledgeable about the scriptures and knew all of the rites and laws of God. However, they lacked the most important thing: love. Their hearts were hardened towards God and they were hypocrites. Externally, they seemed perfect, but internally they were most imperfect. They had reduced religion to a set of rules and regulations, without any love in their hearts. They made religion mechanical and they did not value a real personal relationship with God. The pharisees prayed, fasted, read and memorized scriptures, and obeyed the commandments of God, and they made sure that these practices became visible to everyone around them. They separated themselves from others, especially the poor and the sinners. They felt that such people were not fit for the kingdom of God. They were very judgemental of others.

We want to discuss the notion of a Modern Pharisee. We begin with the following story from the cartoon characters in Charlie Brown:

“Linus had his security blanket in place with his thumb resting securely in his mouth, but he was very troubled. And turning to Lucy who was sitting next to him, he said, ‘Why are you always so anxious to criticize me?’ And her response was very typical. She said, ‘I just think

I have a knack for seeing other people's faults.' An exasperated Linus threw up his hands and asked, 'What about your own faults?' And without hesitation Lucy explained, 'I have a knack for overlooking them'."

This is exactly what the pharisees did. They had a knack for seeing other peoples faults and overlooking their own.

In the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector, we read that the pharisee went to the temple to pray. But instead of praying, he criticized and bragged, as he said, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:11). This pharisee had a knack for seeing other people's faults and overlooking his own, seeing only his so-called virtues and bragging about them. The tax collector by contrast who went to the same temple to pray, "would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, 'God be merciful to me the sinner!'" Jesus tells us in this parable that the pharisee that said, "I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector," that pharisee went to hell, whereas the tax collector who prayed "God be merciful to me the sinner!," was justified and went to heaven. This is like saying in today's language that the Archbishop went to hell and the murderer went to heaven. Pretty tough language. No wonder the pharisees were out to get Jesus.

A monk once wrote, "Everyone who gets to heaven will be surprised by three things. First he will be surprised to see many he did not think would be there. Secondly, he will be surprised that some are not there whom he expected to see there. And finally, he will be surprised that he himself is there." Now that's humility!

Part of what Jesus is telling us in this parable is that you can be in church all your life; you can be a Sunday School servant, you can be a deacon, you can be involved in all kinds of church services and activities, and still end up like the pharisee in hell. Often times in life, we Christians often wind up looking like the pharisee rather than the tax collector. We often look like the elder son that stayed home rather than the prodigal son who left but came back only to be criticized by his elder brother (Luke 15:11-32). We sometimes look like those who pick up stones to throw at sinners (John 8:1-11) rather than the ones who reach out to touch Jesus's robe (Luke 8:43-45). We look more like the high priests who sat in judgment (Luke 23:1-25) rather than the lepers who call upon the name of Jesus for healing (Mark 1:40). We assume the

prideful mental illusion that we're better than other people. That we're right and everybody else is wrong!

Today we see plenty of modern pharisees in our midst and we need not go far to find them. We may well find one in our own heart! What is a modern pharisee? We give some characteristics.

1. Generally speaking, a modern pharisee is a person who substitutes religious practices and rituals for an *authentic loving* relationship with God. These are the people who do the external things and do them well, and they make sure that they are noticed by others. They kiss icons, they light candles, they fast, they make the sign of the cross, and so forth. But they do them with no love in their hearts. Of course, these are beautiful disciplines and practices, and we should do them, but we should do them with love in our heart since this is the main test for a Christian.
2. The modern pharisee performs these outward religious practices to foster in themselves the delusion that they are better than others. These outward religious practices become a substitute for confronting the reality of what they really are on the inside. As St. Paul says so beautifully of the pharisees, "They have a form of religion, but they deny the power thereof" (Titus 1:16). That is, they have an external form of religion, but they deny the spiritual (internal) aspect of it. And in Matthew 23:23, Jesus says so eloquently of the pharisees, "They have neglected the weightier matters of the law; justice, mercy, and faith" (Matthew 23:23).
3. The modern pharisee is one who is addicted to religion. We use the word addicted here very carefully. When Jesus called the pharisees hypocrites, He could of just as well called them religious addicts. Why? Notice that when the pharisee went to the temple to pray in this parable, he actually got "high" on his belief that he was better than the tax collector. Religion had become the drug of his choice. He was addicted to his own self-righteousness!

We need to ask ourselves some very serious questions to test out the sincerity of our faith to see that we too are not "high" on pride and self-righteousness. Here are some questions that we should always ask ourselves:

1. Do I use external rituals as a smokescreen or a distraction so that I won't have to look

inside to confront the reality of my sinfulness? Recall what Jesus said about the pharisees. He said that they were “whitewashed tombs, clean on the outside and full of dead men’s bones on the inside” (Matthew 23:27).

2. Do I feel that I am more religious, more Christian, and more Coptic Orthodox than others? Do I point the finger at others, criticize them for not fasting enough, not praying enough, or criticize them for not doing other external things well enough?
3. Do I see my way as the only way to interpret what is truly Christian or Orthodox, and other ways as leading to condemnation?
4. Do I insist that my way be accepted without questions or discussion?
5. Do I entertain illusions of grandeur and see myself as the savior of many?
6. Do I insist on oppressive rules and regulations with my family, friends, or in my church service, regardless of how irrational they might be?
7. Do I look down on others in a judgemental way, and thereby indirectly hold myself up as a paragon of virtue?
8. Am I a heresy hunter, always on the look out for new errors so as to expose them?
9. Am I developing a messiah complex in which I see myself as the guardian of truth?
10. Am I playing God by judging others?

The pharisee was precisely this kind of religious addict, who used religion as a smokescreen to prevent him from confronting the reality of the true sinner he was on the inside. He also used religion as a club, as a weapon, to attack and bash others. So the pharisee’s religion can be characterized as unbalanced, demonic, and insane! There is such thing as a healthy religion and an insane religion. The religion of Jesus is healthy, and the religion of Satan is insane.

So after reading this parable, we see that there is indeed something very unreligious about this “religious” pharisee who comes to the temple to pray. We cannot help but wonder what cruel act he will perpetrate on others next in the name of his high moral code. For you see, the pharisee is really a moral person whose morality has gone sour! And our morality goes sour when it makes us self-righteous. And our morality goes sour when it makes us judgemental.

And our morality goes sour when it separates us from other people. And our morality goes sour when it kills love in our hearts, fosters enmity, divisiveness, and a holier than thou attitude.

The great danger in reading this parable of the pharisee and the tax collector is that we may look elsewhere sometimes to find the pharisee. We do not realize that something of the pharisee may be abiding in each and every one of us. There is a story of a Sunday School servant who taught her class this parable once, and as she expounded on it at length, she closed her lesson by saying to the Sunday School kids, "Now children, let's thank God that we're not like that nasty pharisee!" When we begin to feel that the pharisee is in other people and not in us, then we in fact are the pharisees.

Now Jesus gives us the corrective to the pharisee in the vignette of the tax collector, who hides in a lonely corner of the temple. He does not even lift up his eyes to heaven. He does not compare himself to anyone else. He judges *only himself*. He does *not* say "God I thank You that I am not like other men, like that pharisee over there." Rather he beats his breast and prays humbly, "Lord be merciful to me the sinner." And he says this as if there was no other sinner as sinful as he was. And this is why Jesus says, "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other."

The prayer of the tax collector is a very well known prayer, and it is called the Jesus prayer. It goes like this: "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner." Many books have been written about the Jesus prayer. We should recite this prayer everyday, as did the tax collector in this parable and the Russian peasant in the book titled "The Way of a Pilgrim." Reciting this prayer daily will truly build our spiritual life.

The Sin of Doing Nothing

Usually when we talk about sin, we tend to focus on the “big” sins, such as lying, stealing, adultery, fornication, swearing, blasphemy, and so forth. Thus, we tend to focus on actual committed sins, that is, the *sins of commission*. We rarely focus on omitted sins in our life, that is, the *sins of omission*, or more simply, the *sin of doing nothing*.

To motivate the sin of doing nothing, we give the following true story. A certain farmer wrote in his will that he wanted to leave his farm to the Devil. The courts deliberating on such a ridiculous set of circumstances decided that the best way to carry out the wishes of the unbeliever was to let the farm grow up in weeds and briars, allow the houses and barns to remain unpainted and to rot down, and permit the soil to erode and wash away. And the court said, “The best way to have Satan have it is to do nothing.”

The only thing necessary for evil to triumph in our lives is for good people to do nothing about it. Someone once said, “Even if you’re on the right track, you get run over if you sit there and do nothing. So get off the track and do something.” There was a sign in the dentists office that read, “Don’t pay attention to your teeth. Do nothing, and they’ll go away.”

What we mean here by the sin of doing nothing is to not help people who are in need, not to utilize our talents that God has given us, and not to make the most of what we’ve got. By doing nothing, we are pleasing the Devil, because the best way to let Satan succeed is by doing nothing about the evil that confronts us. As Christians, we must believe that every evil is an opportunity to do good.

Let us see what Jesus has to say about the sin of doing nothing. We will focus on three parables of Jesus: i) the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), ii) the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), and iii) the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we read about a priest and a levite who were walking and probably on their way to the temple to worship. They see a man wounded in the ditch, and they walk by and completely ignore him as if he wasn’t there. Then we see a Samaritan, who supposedly has no dealings with Jews, who helps the wounded man (a Jew) and takes care of him. In this parable, we see that the priest and the levite, who are Jews, are guilty here of a sin common to all of us. They are guilty of the *sin of omission*, that is, the sin of doing nothing.

They saw the wounded man lying in the ditch “half dead” (Luke 10:30) and they walked away. They did nothing!

In addition to the *sins of commission*, which consist of the evil things that we do (steal, lie, swear, fornication, etc...), there are also the *sins of omission*, which consist of the good things that we can do but do not do. Actual committed sins are no doubt more serious, but one suspects that numerically as least the sins of omission carry the day. That is, the sins of omission dominate in our lives rather than the sins of commission. This is because most people are not down right vicious. The evil in our nature is divided with good, and one can be fairly respectable and reasonably good natured and well intentioned. One can intend to be honest, fair, and kind like the priest and the levite. But when the opportunity to do good presents itself, we usually pass it by like the priest and the levite. It was of such people that someone once said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing about it.” The Apostle James writes a very powerful verse in his Epistle, and it is a verse that we should all memorize. He says, “He who knows what is right and fails to do it, for him it is sin” (James 4:17).

We read in the Gospels that Jesus consistently condemned this type of evil. In the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), recall that the master (Christ) had several servants (man). To one He gave five talents, to another two, and another one, each according to his own ability. The one with five talents went and invested his talents and made another five talents. The same happened with the servant who had two talents. But the servant who received one talent, we read, “went and dug into the ground, and hid his masters money” (Matthew 25:18). Then all three servants reported to their master and the two servants who invested their talents were rewarded but for the servant who hid his talent, his master called him “a wicked and lazy servant” (Matthew 25:26), and He took the talent from him and gave it to the servant who has ten talents. And the master said, “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who does not have, what he has will be taken away” (Matthew 25:29). The person with one talent was thus condemned for his actions, and the master “cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness” (Matthew 25:30). Now what mistake did the servant with one talent make? He had a gift that God had given him and he did nothing with it! He missed his chance. He hid his talent in the ground!

Recall the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). In this parable, there was a very rich man. A poor man named Lazarus sat outside the gate of the rich man’s house,

and he was a “beggar, full of sores” (Luke 16:20). Everyday, the rich man would walk right by Lazarus, not even noticing him! Even the dogs noticed and cared for Lazarus since we read that “the dogs came and licked his sores” (Luke 16:21). So Jesus tells us here that the rich man’s treatment of Lazarus was not even at the level of a dog! Finally, in this parable, we read that Lazarus died and went to heaven, and the rich man went to hell. Why did the rich man end up in hell? What did he do wrong? Was he cruel to Lazarus? No he wasn’t. Did he verbally or physically abuse Lazarus? No he didn’t. Did he humiliate or insult Lazarus? No he didn’t. But that’s just the point. He did nothing! And that was the sin that condemned him to hell!

Jesus talks about the final judgment in Matthew 25:1-46. Specifically, in Matthew 25:41-44, Jesus speaks very strongly about condemning certain people on the last day when they appear before His judgment. Here Jesus says some very powerful words. He says, “Depart from me you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Why does Jesus say these terrible words? Jesus Himself tells us why. He says, “I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me” (Matthew 25:43). Here we see how Jesus condemns those who commit the *sin of omission*: the good that we could of done but we did not. It is for this reason among many others that we repeatedly say in the Divine Liturgy “Lord have mercy”.

What a staggering thing it is in Jesus’s great discourse here on the last judgment in Matthew 25:1-46 that there is no mention of the so-called great sins: adultery, fornication, murder, stealing, blasphemy, etc... There is no mention whatsoever of these. But rather Jesus speaks of those who *neglected* something and thus did nothing about it. Again, we recite these strong words. “I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me”. Is this not perhaps the most subtle kind of murder (the sin of omission) in which we overlook people who are in need and are dying, not just for food, but for a word of encouragement, friendship, comfort, or a helping hand. Mother Theresa once said, “The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for, and deserted by everybody. The greatest evil today is the lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference toward one’s neighbor who lives at the roadside assaulted by exploitation, corruption, poverty, and disease.”

We give the following story. There was a boy who believed in prayer but he was poor, hungry, and ill clothed. His friends said to him one day, “What is the use of prayer, seeing that you go hungry most of the time?” His answer was, “God has told somebody to give me bread,

and that somebody always forgets.” Perhaps for most of us, we don’t forget so completely, but we do indeed “forget”. On this notion of forgetting, someone once said, “I asked God for a loaf of bread, and He gave me two, one for my neighbor and one for myself, and I kept both. Perhaps it also true to say that God gave me three, two for my neighbor, and one for myself, and I kept two. We may not pray for bread without being willing to fulfill our responsibility in the common life.”

We close here with this great one-liner by Benjamin Franklin. He says, “The man who *does things* makes many mistakes. But he never makes the biggest mistake of all: doing nothing.”

Angels

Today I would like to discuss what we believe about angels. I would like to discuss five major aspects of the angels. They are

- 1) The existence of angels
- 2) The function of angels in God's plan for us
- 3) The guardian angels
- 4) The mention of angels in the Divine Liturgy
- 5) How angels differ from man

I would first like to read a story from the early Fathers about angels.

One day, Saint Isadore, the hermit, went up to the roof of his hut. And with him was abbot Moses whom the devil of impurity had been tempting for some time. "Look toward the west", said Isadore, and the abbot looked and saw a noisy host of devils preparing for battle. Then the hermit said, "Look east", and the abbot Moses looked and saw a multitude of holy angels, the heavenly hosts, more resplendent than the sun. "Those whom you saw in the west", said the hermit "are the demons who attack the saints. Those whom you have seen in the east are the angels whom God sends to protect and strengthen the saints. You see that we are not at the mercy of the demons. The numbers and the strength are on our side". The angels were far more in multitude than the demons. After hearing this, abbot Moses returned to his hut greatly comforted.

This story reminds us of what Elisha said to his servant in the Old Testament. In 2 Kings:6-15, recall that Elisha was surrounded by the enemy and it looked like the end was near for him, and he said, "Do not be afraid, for there are more on our side than on their side". He said this because the Lord opened his eyes and enabled him to see the thousands of angels that he had sent to protect him.

Angels to us Orthodox Christians are not fanciful decorations we put up on a Christmas tree. They are real heavenly beings created by God.

A Soviet astronaut said once, " All the astronauts in the Soviet Union are communists and atheists. None of us has seen out in space any angels or archangels, and I'd rather think that our American colleagues have had the same experience". Interviewed about this statement, an American astronaut, who is also a Christian, said " I don't see a difference between down here and up there. If you look down here on friendly terms with the angels and with God, then you will live the same way up there. But if you don't feel their presence on earth, you will not feel their presence on the moon or on mars.

How do we know that there are angels when we cannot see them ? For the same reason that there are waves out there that carry words and pictures through the air. If we turn on the T.V., presto, the words and the pictures that are in the air all around us will become real and we'll be able to see them. Science can explain this to us, and even if we don't understand it, we still believe it.

Let me share with you another story. This story was written by Dr. S. Barlow, a professor at Smith College.

"We frequently took walks in the country. On one of these beautiful walks one day, Marian and I heard the murmur of muted voices in the distance. And I said to Marian, we have company in the woods this morning. Marian nodded and turned to look and we saw nothing, but the voices were coming nearer, closer and closer at a faster pace than we were walking, and we knew that strangers would soon overtake us. Then we perceived that the signs were not only behind us, but above us, so we looked up. How can I describe what we felt ? Is it possible to tell of the surge of exaltation that ran through us ? Is it possible to record this phenomenon in objective accuracy and yet be credible, believable ? For about ten feet above us and slightly to our left was a floating group of glorious beautiful creatures that glowed with spiritual beauty - Angels. We stopped and stared as they passed over us. There were six of them in flowing white garments engaged in earnest conversation. If they were aware of our existence, they gave no indication of it. One angel was talking intently to a younger spirit whose back was toward

us and who looked up into the face of an angel who was talking. Neither Marian or I could understand their words, but their voices were clearly heard. They seemed natural, as gentle and peaceful as the morning itself. And as they passed their conversation grew fainter and fainter till it faded out entirely, and we stood transfixed on the spot, still holding hands, still with a vision on our eyes. Perhaps I can claim no more for it except that it has had a deep effect on our lives. This experience of almost thirty years ago greatly altered our thinking. Once, both Marian and I were somewhat skeptical about the absolute details of the birth of Christ. The story as recorded by St. Luke tells of an angel appearing to the shepherds abiding in the field. And after the shepherds had been told of the birth, suddenly we read their was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying "Glory to God in the highest". As a child, I accepted the multitude scene by the shepherds as literal heavenly personages. Then I went through a period when I felt that they were merely symbols injected into a fantasy or a legend. Today, after that experience on the road, Marian and I are no longer skeptical. We believe that in back of that story recorded by St. Luke lies a genuine objective experience told in wonder by those who had seen this experience. All of us I think hear angels for a little while every year at Christmas. And we let the heavenly host come close to us once a year. But we reject the very possibility that what the shepherds saw two thousand years ago was part of the reality that presses close every day of our lives.

Just because we cannot see angels does not mean that they do not exist. Others have seen them. God's word in the Bible and the sacred tradition of the Church through the centuries vouch for their existence. We should believe in angels because Jesus tells us to believe in angels. When Judas led the soldiers in the garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus, recall what Jesus said. "Do you not think I cannot now pray to my Father and he will provide me with more than twelve legions of angels ? " (Matthew 26:53)

The angels are God's, and they will appear with him in his second coming. As we read in Matthew 16:27, "When the Son of man comes in his glory with all his angels". They are his angels because he created them. At the very beginning before man ever existed God created angels out of nothing. As we read on Colossians 1:16, "In him, Christ all things were created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, (the invisible are the angels), whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by Him and for Him". Now since the angels were created before us, they were present with God at

the very creation of the world (see Job 38:7).

Let us now discuss the role of the angels in God's plan for us. The role of the angels is beautifully described by St. Paul in Hebrews 1:14, as "Ministering spirits, sent forth to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation".

Throughout the Bible, we read countless stories about angels coming to the aid of people. Examples in the Old Testament are

- 1) Elijah
- 2) Isaiah
- 3) Ezekiel
- 4) Daniel
- 5) Joseph
- 6) Moses

Some examples from the New Testament are

- 1) Joseph
- 2) Peter
- 3) The Virgin Mary
- 4) Jesus
- 5) The Shepherds

Let us now look at the Bible briefly to see how angels ministered.

1) Recall, that we recently celebrated epiphany - the baptism of our Lord by John the baptist. It was the archangel Gabriel who announced to Zecharias the birth of John the baptist. (Luke 1:13)

2) It was an angel who told the Virgin Mary in Nazareth that she will be the mother of our Savior, the Lord Jesus. (Luke 1:31-32)

3) Recall the angels that sang in the skys over Bethlehem to announce the birth of Jesus. (Luke 2: 13-14)

4) It was an angel that told the shepherds about the birth of Jesus, and it was at that point that the shepherds visited Jesus in Bethlehem. (Luke 2:11-15)

5) After Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for forty days, we read, "the angels came and ministered to him". (Matthew 4:11).

6) Angels were present with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, as we read, "An angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him." (Luke 22:4).

7) Recall that it was an angels who stood by the empty tomb to tell Mary Magdalene, "He's risen, He's not here". (Luke 24:6)

8) Angels appeared just before Jesus ascended to Heaven on the Mount of Olives to announce that this same Jesus who was now ascending visibly into Heaven, will come back again with the same glory of his ascension one day to judge the living and the dead. (Acts 1:10-11)

There are nearly 300 Bible texts in which the word angel or angels is used.

There is a very beautiful verse about angels in John 1:51. Jesus says in this verse, "Truly, truly I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man".

Now how can angels ascend and descend on the Son of man ? Let's look at the Bible briefly.

Recall that in the Old Testament, Daniel prays and an angel appears to him and closes the Lions mouth (Daniel 6:22). So Daniels prayer ascends and the angel descends to comfort him and strengthen him.

In the Gospels, we just mentioned two instances where angels appeared to Jesus: Once at the end of the forty days in the wilderness, and the second was in the garden of Gethsemane. On both of these occasions, it was while Jesus was praying that angels visited him. So Jesus' prayers ascend and the angels descend to strengthen him.

When Peter was in prison, we read in Acts 12:5 that "Earnest prayer for him was made to God by the Church". So the church's prayer ascends, and the angel descends upon Peter to free him from prison.

Thus, we see that through prayer, the angels of God do indeed continue to ascend and descend upon each of us. The story of Peter is particularly interesting in that angels came to the aid of Peter as a result of other people's prayers. This teaches us that we should always pray for others, and not only for ourselves. For when we pray for others, the angels of God will descend upon them and comfort them.

I want to read a story about one of the hostages in the Iran hostage crisis of 1980. Katherine Coob was an American citizen who was held hostage by the Iranians for 444 days. This is what she said.

"I was alone. But not really. My guardian angel was there, and of course the Lord was with me. I had a source of power and strength that went far beyond me". Again, as Katherine Coob's prayer ascended, an angel descended to strengthen her and bring to her a sense of God's presence and power. This story leads us to the topic of guardian angels.

In the baptism of the Orthodox Church, there's a prayer that asks God to assign a special guardian angel to stay with the newly baptized child and to protect him/her throughout their life. The prayer reads, "Attached to this life dear Lord, a radiant angel who will protect him/her from every plot of the adversary." In the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, we pray for the protection offered by our guardian angel. The prayer is, "For an angel of peace, faithful guide, guardian of our souls and bodies, let us ask the Lord."

Since there are devils out there attacking us and tempting us, our heavenly Father has

provided us with guardian angels, far more than there are devils. St. John Chrysostom compares the guardian angels to the troops garrisoned in cities on the frontiers of the empire to defend it from the enemy.

Where do we read of guardian angels in the Bible ? Jesus himself mentions guardian angels in the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:10. He says, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones (speaking of children), for I tell you that in heaven their angels behold the face of my Father who is in heaven".

Two verses from the psalms also speak of the guardian angels. They are

"For God will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways". (Psalm 91:11)

"The angel of the Lord camps around those who fear him and delivers them". (Psalm 34:7)

Do we ever speak to our guardian angel ? They are always there. Many Christians do. Let me give an example of a person who did. Corey Tanboom was imprisoned in a concentration camp in Hitler's Germany. She prayed to the Lord while in the camp, and this is what she said. "Lord, is it only devils that are real ? Where are your angels" ? And at that time, she was standing in a line where all the women ahead of her were being frisked by the guards, and she had hidden a little Bible on her body which she didn't want the guard to discover. As she approached the guard, the guard suddenly waived her on. The same guard who had frisked all of the women ahead of her, waved her by, and Corey Tanboom never forgot that, and she thanked her guardian angel.

The angels are the spirits that God has created to serve Him and care for us as children. They are God's messengers and helpers. And there are millions of them in heaven, and they watch over us so that in time of danger, we can say my guardian angel was there. When we get a sudden inspiration for example, who's to say that it was not our guardian angel who whispered it in our ear. When we say kind things or do a good deed, who's to say that it was not our guardian angel who encouraged us to do it.

Let me give the following example from the Gospels. Recall the scene at the pool at

Bethesda at Jerusalem (John 5:2-4). "Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at certain season into the pool, and troubled the water; then whoever stepped in first, after stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had".

Now how many times in our lives has the angel of healing visited us. The waters of our lives may have been troubled, yet from that troubling came healing and new strength. We might think of the universe as a great spirit filled amphitheater, where the angels of God are eagerly watching the runners in the race of life (of course we are the runners), and they are applauding our efforts, cheering us on to ultimate victory.

Now I would like to discuss where angels are mentioned in the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil. First, we see they are mentioned in the prayer of reconciliation. As we read "You have filled the earth with Your heavenly peace, with which your angels glorify You saying: Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, and good will toward men."

In the intercessory prayer to the Virgin Mary, we sing the following hymn. "Rejoice O Mary, the attendant and mother, for the angels worship the child on your lap. The Cherubim worship deservingly, and the Seraphim fervently. No favor do we plead. Save your prayers and intercession unto our Lord Jesus Christ, O you lady of us all. The lady mother of God. We praise you with the Cherubim, and the Seraphim exclaiming and saying: Holy, Holy, Holy, O Lord, the almighty. Heaven and earth are full of Your glory and honor."

Right after this hymn, the priest says, "Before whom stand all the angels, the archangels, principalities, dignitaries, thrones, the lordships, and powers". This is taken directly from Colossians 1:16. It is here that St. Paul indicates to us that there is a hierarchy amongst the angels. Finally, mention of angels is also made in the fraction prayer. In this prayer, we read, "Before You stand thousands by thousands and ten thousand by ten thousands of holy angels and archangels, the cherubim, the seraphim, and all the countless crowds of the heavenly powers."

In this amphitheater surrounding the throne of God are not only the angels, but the saints of all ages, Adam is there, Eve, Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Daniel, Peter, Paul, Barnabas, our departed loved ones, and Jesus is there. And one day we will be there. So before his throne are all of His angels and saints praising and glorifying Him. All of our departed loved ones, for example, are present with in the alter here on earth when we celebrate the Divine Liturgy. This is why we remember and pray for the dead in the Liturgy, because they are here with us, they are not dead but living with us before the throne of God. Together with them and all of the angels we offer glory and praise to God.

There is a beautiful verse from St. Paul relating to this. It is in Hebrews 12:22-24. "You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven."

Let us now discuss how angels differ from man. Again, let us refer to the definition of angels given by Paul in Hebrews 1:14. They are "ministering spirits, sent forth to serve for the sake of those are to obtain salvation".

The angels original physical form is a spiritual one. They have spiritual, heavenly bodies. They can, however take other forms, such as human forms. There are any examples of this as cited by our church. One example in the Bible is in the story of Abraham (Genesis 18:1-2). Recall the three men that visited Abraham and told him that Sarah would bear a son. These men were angels in a human form. Another example is in the following story.

"Dr. S. W. Mitchell, a celebrated Philadelphia neurologist, had gone to bed after an exceptionally tiring day. Suddenly he was awakened by someone knocking in his door. Opening it, he found a little girl, poorly dressed and deeply upset. She told him her mother was very sick and asked him if he would please come with her. It was a bitterly cold, snowy night, but though he was bone tired, Dr. Mitchell dressed and followed the girl. As *Readers Digest* reports the story, he found the mother desperately ill with pneumonia. After arranging for medical care, he complimented the sick woman on the intelligence and persistence of her little daughter. The woman looked at him strangely and then said, "My daughter died a month ago" She added,

"Her shoes and coat are in the clothes closet over there". Dr. Mitchell, amazed and perplexed, went to the closet and opened the door. There hung the very coat worn by the little girl who had brought him to tend to her mother. It was warm and dry and could not possibly have been out in the wintry night." Could the doctor have been called in the hour of desperate need by an angel who appeared as this woman's young daughter ? Was this the work of God's angels on behalf of the sick woman ?

Secondly, angels differ from man in that they are sinless. In this sense, the angels are above us while we are alive here on this earth. Since they are sinless, they cannot be saved or redeemed. They cannot experience salvation and eternal life through God's grace, whereas we can. As St. Paul says in Hebrews 2:9, "But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

Angels however, are not heirs to God's throne, and we are. Thus, when we die and are resurrected on the last day, we will be higher than the angels, as St. Peter says (2 Peter 1:4) "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust". Thus, we will be above the angels in heaven.

We will be higher than the angels after our resurrection because our bodies will be exactly like the body of Jesus after his resurrection - a glorious heavenly body. St. Paul describes this beautifully in 1 Corinthians 15:42-48, as he writes,

"So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. The first man Adam, was from earth, a man of dust. The second man Christ, is from heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."

Moreover, St. John also elaborates on this in 1 John 3:2, as he writes "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when

he is revealed, we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is”.

Angels do not procreate or marry. Thus it appears that the number of angels remains constant. We see evidence of this in Matthew 22:30, as Jesus says, ”In the resurrection, they (men) neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven”. The obedient angels will not die, and the fallen angels are subject to God’s judgment at judgment day.

Angels excel humankind in their knowledge. They have much more knowledge than us, and may even know things about us that we do not know. We see evidence of this in 2 Samuel 14:20. Here, King Solomon was being urged to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem, and Joab asked a woman of Tekoa to talk to the the king. She said, ”My Lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth”. The angels, however, do not know everything like God. They do have limited knowledge. Jesus tells of this when speaking of his second coming in Mark 13:32, as he says, ”But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven”.

The angels of God are very powerful and have great might. They are much more powerful than man. Recall that it was an angel who closed the mouth of the lion to help Daniel. It was an angel who loosed the chains from Peter in prison. In 2 Thessalonians 1:7, Paul refers to them as ”mighty angels of God”. And in 2 Peter 2:11, we read, ”Angels who are greater in might and power (than men) do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord”. Also in Psalm 103:20, David refers to the power of angels as, ”Angels that excel in strength”.

One final illustration on the power of angels refers to the battle of Armageddon. It is an angel who will bind Satan with a chain and cast him into the bottomless pit. As we read in Revelation 20:1-3, ” And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more”. The angels, however, are not ”all powerful”. They do have limited power, and are not as powerful as God.

Finally, we mention that the angels of God are not always in heaven. Of course, they exist all over the world carrying out God's orders. However, when they are in heaven they praise and worship God. There are certain angels that are in heaven constantly. These are the cherubim and the seraphim. Their sole function is to praise and glorify God continuously. In reading the Bible, we see that there is a hierarchy (ranks) amongst the angels. The archangels are the highest rank. Our church believes in seven archangels, whose names can be found in the book of Tobit. These are Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, Rafael, Ragael, Sariel, and Ramiel. The other ranks include angels, cherubim, seraphim, powers, thrones, and principalities. The number of different types of angels is unclear, but St. Paul confirms the ranks of angels in Colossians 1 :16, as he says, "For in Him, all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him."

INTRODUCTION TO EVERY HOUR

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.

Kyrie eleison, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord bless us. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of all ages. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Lord, make us worthy to pray thankfully:

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, through Jesus Christ our Lord, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

THE PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Let us give thanks to the beneficent and merciful God, the Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ; for he has covered us, helped us, guarded us, accepted us onto Him, spared us, supported us and has brought us to this hour. Let us also ask Him, the Lord our God the Pantocrator, to guard us in all peace this holy day and all the days of our life.

O Master, Lord, God the Pantocrator, the Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, we thank You for everything, concerning everything, and in everything; for You have covered us, helped us, guarded us, accepted us unto You, spared us, supported us, and have brought us to this hour.

Therefore, we ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of mankind, to grant us to complete this holy day and all the days of our life, in all peace with Your fear. 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. But those things which are good and profitable do

provide for us, for it is You who have given us the authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, by the grace, compassion and love of mankind of Your Only-Begotten Son, Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ; through whom the glory, the honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due unto You, with Him and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver who is of one essence with You, now and at all times and unto the ages of all ages. Amen.

PSALM 50

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight- - that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the secret heart You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart- - these, O God, You will not despise. Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then you shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar. ALLELUIA.

PRIME

This prayer commemorates the hour in which our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It is prayed in the morning after rising from sleep to thank God for the beginning of a new day and to glorify Him in His resurrection.

The worshiper prays the Introduction of Every Hour which includes:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

THANKSGIVING PRAYER

PSALM 50

Come let us kneel down, let us ask Christ our God.

Come let us kneel down, let us entreat Christ our King.

Come let us kneel down, let us beseech Christ our Savior.

O Lord, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, our God, through the intercession of Saint Mary and all Your saints, preserve us, and grant us to a good start and have mercy on us according to Your will forever.

The night is gone, we give thanks to You O Lord and we ask that You save us and keep us this day without sin.

THE PAULINE EPISTLE

From St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians,

4:1-5

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love, 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.

THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH

One is God the Father of everyone.

One is His Son, Jesus Christ the Word, who took flesh and died; and rose from the dead on the third day and raised us with Him.

One is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who proceeds from the Father, who purifies the whole creation and teaches us to worship the Holy Trinity, one triune God, one in essence. We praise Him and bless Him forever. Amen.

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The morning prayer of the blessed day we offer to Christ our King and our God, beseeching Him to forgive us our sins.

From the Psalms of our Father David the prophet and the king, may his blessings be upon us all.

PSALM 1

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. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous. But the way of the ungodly shall perish. ALLELUIA.

PSALM 26

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, me enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an army should encamp against

me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident. One thing I have desired of the Lord, that I will 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. Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When you said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You, "Your face, Lord I will seek." Do not hide Your face from me; do not turn your servant away in anger; You have been my help. Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation, When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me to a smooth path, because of my enemies. Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence. I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord! ALLELUIA

PSALM 142

Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplications! In Your faithfulness answer me, and in Your righteousness. Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous. 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. I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands. I spread out my hands to You; my soul longs for You like a thirsty land. Answer me speedily, O Lord; my spirit fails! Do not hide Your face from me, lest I be like those who go down into the pit. Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You. Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies; in You I take shelter. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Your spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness. Revive me, O Lord, for your name's sake! For Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out

of trouble. In Your mercy cut off my enemies, and destroy all those who afflict my soul; for I am Your servant. ALLELUIA

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN 1:1-17

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. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world. He was in the world and the world did not know Him. 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, 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. 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 bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Glory be to God forever Amen.

1. O "The True Light" who shines upon every man who comes into the world. You came into the world with your love for mankind and all the creation rejoiced in your coming. You saved our father, Adam, from the seduction of the serpent, and delivered our mother, Eve, from the pangs of death and gave us the spirit of adoption. We ask that You make us worthy to praise You and bless You saying,

DOXA PATRI KAI EIYOU KAI AGIO EPNEVMATI.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

2. O Christ Our Lord the true light even as the daylight shines upon us, let the luminous

senses and the bright thoughts shine within us, and do not let the gloom of pain hover over us that, with understanding, we may praise you with David saying, “My eyes have awoken before the morning watch, that I may meditate on Your words” (Psalm 118:148) Hear our voices in Your great mercies, and save us, O Lord our God, through Your loving kindness.

KE-NIN KAI A-EE KAI ISTOS E-ONASTON E-ONON. AMEN.

Now and forever unto all ages. Amen.

3. O Theotokos, the second heaven You are the honored Mother of the Light. ĵFrom sunrise to sunset the faithful offer you praises; for you are the bright and unchanging flower and the mother who is ever virgin. The Holy Spirit overshadowed you and the Son condescended to take flesh from you.

Wherefore, we implore you to ask the Lord to give salvation to the world which He created, and to deliver it from all tribulations. Let us praise Him a new praise now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

THE GLORIA

Let us praise with the angels saying, “Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will toward men”. We praise You; we bless You; we serve You; we worship You; we confess to You; we utter with Your glory. We give thanks to You for Your great glory.

O Lord who reigns over the heavens, God the Father, the Pantocrator, and the One and Only-Begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. O Lord God, the lamb of God, Son of the Father, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

O You, who sits at the right hand of His Father, have mercy upon us. You alone are Holy. You alone are the Most High, my Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Glory be to God the Father, Amen.

I bless You everyday and praise Your Holy name forever and unto the ages of ages, Amen.

ĵFrom the night my soul longs for You, my God, for Your commandments are the light on

earth.

I meditate in Your ways, for You have become a helper to me. “My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord. In the morning, I will direct my prayers unto you, and will look up.” (Psalm. 5:3)

THE TRISAGION

Holy, God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, Who was born of the Virgin, have mercy upon us.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, Who was crucified for us, have mercy upon us.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, Who rose from the dead and ascended into the heavens, have mercy upon us.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and at all times, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us. O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us. O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us. Lord forgive us our sins. Lord forgive us our iniquities. Lord forgive us our trespasses. Lord visit the sick of Your people and heal them for the sake of Your Holy name. Our fathers and brothers who have fallen asleep, Lord repose their souls.

O Lord who alone is without sin, have mercy upon us. O Lord who alone is without sin, help us and accept our supplications.

For Yours is the Kingdom, the glory and the triple holiness. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord bless us. Amen.

Make us worth O Lord to pray thankfully:

Our Father Who art in Heaven . . .

INTERCESSION OF THE MOST HIGH MOTHER, THE THEOTOKOS

HAIL TO ST. MARY

Hail to you. We ask you, O the Saint full of glory, the ever Virgin, Theotokos, the Mother of Christ, to raise our prayers to your beloved Son that He may forgive us our sins.

Hail to the Holy Virgin who bore for us the true Light, Christ our Lord. Ask the Lord on our behalf to have mercy upon us and forgive us our sins.

O Mary the Virgin Theotokos, the holy and trusted intercessor of the human race, intercede on our behalf before Christ whom you bore, that He may grant us the forgiveness of our sins.

Hail to you the Virgin, the true Queen. Hail to the pride of our race, who for us gave birth to Emmanuel. We ask you, the trusted intercessor, to remember us before our Lord Jesus Christ that He may forgive us our sins.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CREED

We magnify you, the mother of the true light, and glorify the Theotokos, the Holy Virgin, for you bore for us the Savior of the world who came and saved our souls. Glory to you our Master, Christ our King; the pride of the apostles, the crown of the martyrs, the joy of the righteous, the confirmation of the churches, the forgiveness of sins. We preach the Holy Trinity, One in essence. We worship Him and glorify Him. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord bless us. Amen.

THE CREED

We believe in One God, God the Father, the Pantocrator, who created heaven and earth, and all things seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, 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. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried. On the third day He rose from the dead, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into the heavens, and sat at the right hand of His Father. He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead, whose Kingdom shall have no end. Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver-of-Life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son He is worshiped and glorified, and has spoken through the prophets. We believe in One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the coming age. Amen.

KYRIE ELEISON (Lord have mercy) - **41 times**

HOLY HOLY HOLY

Holy Holy Holy. Lord of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of Your glory and honor. Have mercy upon us, O God the Father, the Pantocrator. O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us. O God, the Lord of hosts be with us. For in our hardships and tribulations we have no helper but You. O God, absolve, forgive and remit our transgressions which

we committed intentionally and unintentionally, knowingly and unknowingly, secretly and openly. Lord forgive us for the sake of Your Holy name which is bestowed upon us.

Yes, according to Your mercies, O Lord, and not according to our sins.

Make us worthy to pray thankfully:

Our Father Who art in Heaven . . .

FIRST ABSOLUTION

O God the Lord of hosts who existed before all the ages, who created the sun for daylight, and night for all men to rest; we thank You, O King of ages, for You have let us pass the night in peace, and brought us to daybreak. We ask You, O our King, the King of all ages, to let Your face shine upon us, and the light of Your divine knowledge brighten us. Make us, O Master, sons of light and sons of day, to pass this day in righteousness, chastity and good conduct, and to complete all the days of our lives without stumbling; through the grace, the compassion and love of mankind of Your Only-Begotten Son Jesus Christ, and the gift of Your Holy Spirit, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

SECOND ABSOLUTION

O God who brings forth the light, who lets His sun shine upon the righteous and the wicked, who made the light which illuminates the universe, enlighten our minds, our hearts and our understanding O Master of all, and grant us to please You this day. Protect us from all evil, all sin, and all the power of the adversary; through Christ Jesus our Lord, who is blessed with You and with the Holy Spirit, the giver of life and one essence, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

THE CONCLUSION OF EVERY HOUR

Have mercy upon us O God and have mercy upon us, who at all times and in every hour in heaven and on earth, is worshiped and glorified, Christ our good Lord, the long suffering, exceedingly merciful and extremely compassionate, who loves the righteous and is merciful to the sinners of whom I am chief; who does not wish the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live, who calls all to salvation with the promise of the blessings to come. Lord receive our prayers in this hour and in every hour. Ease our life and guide us to carry out Your commandments. Sanctify our souls. Cleanse our bodies. Conduct our minds. Purify our intentions, Heal our sickness. Forgive us our sins. Deliver us from every destructive grief, and distress of heart. Surround us by Your holy angels, that being guided and guarded by their camp, we may attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of Your infinite and invisible glory. For You are blessed, now and forever. Amen.

VESPERS

This prayer commemorates removing the body of Jesus Christ from the Cross, wrapping it in linen, and anointing it with sweet spices.

The sunset prayer of the blessed day we offer unto Christ our King and our Lord, beseeching Him to forgive our sins.

From the Psalms of our Father David the Prophet and the King. May his blessings be upon us all. Amen.

PSALM 116

Oh, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!
ALLELUIA

PSALM 117

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let Israel now say, "His mercy endures forever." Let the house of Aaron now say, "His mercy endures forever." Let those who fear the Lord now say, "His mercy endures forever". I called on the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is for me among those who help me; therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. All nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. They surrounded me like bees; they were quenched like a fire of thorns; for in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. You pushed me violently, that I might fall, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death. Open to me

the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter. I will praise You, for You have answered me, and have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, and He has given us light; bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. ALLELUIA

PSALM 121

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. For thrones are set there for judgement, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces."

For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say. "Peace be within you."
Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek your good. ALLELUIA

PSALM 128

"Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth," let Israel now say – "Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long." The Lord is righteous; he has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked. Let all those who hate Zion be put to shame and turned back. Let them be as the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up, With which the reaper does not fill his hand, nor he who binds sheaves, his arms. Neither let those who pass by them say, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord!" ALLELUIA

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE 4:38-41

Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them. When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.

Glory be to God forever Amen.

1. If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where shall I, the ungodly and the sinner appear ? For I did not endure the burdens nor the heat of the day because of the weakness of my humanity. But; O merciful God, count me with the fellows of the eleventh hour. For behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Therefore I do not dare to lift up my eyes to heaven but rely on the abundance of Your mercies and love for mankind, crying out and saying "God forgive me, a sinner, and have mercy on me".

DOXA PATRI KAI EIYOU KAI AGIO EPNEVMATI.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

2. Hasten, O my Savior, to open Your arms and receive me in Your Fatherly bosom, for I wasted my life in pleasures and lust and the day has passed by and vanished. So now I rely on the richness of Your never-ending compassion. So disregard not a submissive heart, lacking for Your mercy as I cry to You saying, "Father I have sinned against Heaven and before You, and I am not worthy to be called Your son, so make me as one of Your hired servants".

KE-NIN KAI A-EE KAI ISTOS E-ONASTON E-ONON. AMEN.

Now and forever and unto all ages. Amen.

3. Because of every iniquity I did with prudence and diligence, and of every sin I committed with eagerness and enthusiasm, I am worthy of all judgment and torment. Therefore, I beseech you, our lady the Virgin, to induce me to repent. I implore you to intercede on my behalf and call upon you to help me, that I may not be put to shame. And when my soul departs from my flesh, do come and visit me.

Defeat the plots of the enemy, and shut the doors of Hades, that my soul may not be consumed, O the bride who is spotless who has the true bridegroom.

KE-NIN KAI A-EE KAI ISTOS E-ONASTON E-ONON. AMEN.

Now and forever and unto all ages. Amen.

KYRIE ELEISON (Lord have mercy) - **41 times**

HOLY HOLY HOLY

Holy Holy Holy. Lord of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of Your glory and honor. Have mercy upon us, O God the Father, the Pantocrator. O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us. O God, the Lord of hosts be with us. For in our hardships and tribulations we have no helper but You. O God, absolve, forgive and remit our transgressions which we committed intentionally and unintentionally, knowingly and unknowingly, secretly and openly. Lord forgive us for the sake of Your Holy name which is bestowed upon us.

Yes, according to Your mercies, O Lord, and not according to our sins.

Make us worthy to pray thankfully:

Our Father Who art in Heaven . . .

ABSOLUTION

We thank You, our compassionate King, for You have granted us to pass this day in peace, and brought us to this evening with thanksgiving and made us worthy to behold the vesper lights. Lord, accept this praise of ours, now in progress and save us from the tricks of the adversary and eliminate all the traps which he sets for us and grant us peace and purity in the upcoming night free from anxiety, unrest and nightmares, and wake up for prayers and praises to glorify Your Holy name in everything, at all times and in all places with the Father who is without a beginning and incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit the giver of life and consubstantial, now and forever and from all ages to ages. Amen.

THE CONCLUSION OF EVERY HOUR

Have mercy upon us O God and have mercy upon us, who at all times and in every hour in heaven and on earth, is worshiped and glorified, Christ our good Lord, the long suffering, exceedingly merciful and extremely compassionate, who loves the righteous and is merciful to the sinners of whom I am chief; who does not wish the death of a sinner but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live, who calls all to salvation with the promise of the blessings to come. Lord receive our prayers in this hour and in every hour. Ease our life and guide us to carry out Your commandments. Sanctify our souls. Cleanse our bodies. Conduct our minds. Purify our intentions, Heal our sickness. Forgive us our sins. Deliver us from every destructive grief, and distress of heart. Surround us by Your holy angels, that being guided and guarded by their camp, we may attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of Your infinite and invisible glory. For You are blessed, now and forever. Amen.

COMPLINE

This prayer commemorates the laying down of the body of Jesus Christ our Lord in the grave. This hour represents the end of man's life in any given day, for sleep is but a short death.

The blessed prayer of retiring we offer to Christ our King and our God, beseeching Him to forgive us our sins.

PSALM 129

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul awaits, and in His word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning - - yes, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. ALLELUIA

PSALM 132

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing-life for evermore. ALLELUIA

PSALM 133

Behold, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who by night stand in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord. The Lord who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion! ALLELUIA

PSALM 147

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. He makes peace in your borders, and fills you with the finest wheat. He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes; He casts out His hail like morsels; who can stand before His cold ? He sends out His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow. He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgements to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; and as for His judgements, they have not known them. Praise the Lord! ALLELUIA

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE 2:25-32

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, 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 to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."

Glory be to God forever Amen.

1. Behold, I am about to stand before the just judge terrified and trembling because of my many sins. For a life spent in pleasures deserves condemnation. But repent, O my soul so long as you dwell on this earth. For inside the grave dust does not praise. And

among the dead, no one remembers. And in Hades, no one gives thanks; therefore arise from your laziness and slumber. And beseech the Savior repenting and saying “Lord have mercy upon me and save me”.

DOXA PATRI KAI EIYOU KAI AGIO EPNEVMATI.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

2. If life were forever and dwelling on earth were for good, you would have an excuse, O my soul. But if your bad deeds and ugly evils were revealed before the just Judge, what would you give for an answer while you lie stricken on the bed of sins, negligent to subdue the flesh ? O Christ our Lord, I dread Your awesome throne, I humble before Your Council of Judgement and I fear the light of Your divine radiance. I the wicked and defiled who lie on my bed neglecting my life. But I take example of the Publican beating my chest and saying, “O God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

KE-NIN KAI A-EE KAI ISTOS E-ONASTON E-ONON. AMEN.

Now and forever and unto all ages. Amen.

3. O pure Virgin, overshadow your servant with your instant help, and keep the waves of evil thoughts away from my mind and raise up my ailing soul for prayer and vigil for it has gone into a deep sleep. For you are the compassionate and able helper and the mother of the fountain of life, my King and my Lord, Jesus Christ my hope.

+ + + + + + + + + +

Lord, Graciously protect us from sin tonight. Blessed are You the God of our fathers. And indeed abundantly blessed, and Your Holy name is full of glory forever, Amen.

Let Your mercies be on us, O Lord, even as we have set our hope in You. For the eyes of all await You; for You are He who provides Your people with food in due season. Hear us, O God our Savior, the hope of all the nations of the earth, and You, O Lord, shall keep us and deliver us from this generation and forever, Amen.

Blessed are You, O Lord, reveal Your justice to me. Blessed are You, O Lord, teach

me Your commandments. Blessed are You, O Lord, let Your righteousness shine upon me. Lord, Your mercies are forever. Do not reject the creation of Your hands. For You have become my shelter from generation to generation.

I asked of the Lord and said, have mercy upon me, and save my soul. For I have sinned against You. Lord, I take refuge in You, so save my soul and teach me to carry out Your will. For You are my God, and You have the fountain of life, and in Your light, O Lord, we behold the light.

May your mercies come upon those who know You. And Your righteousness upon those who are upright in the heart. You are due all the blessing. You are due all the praise. You are due all the glory. O the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit was from the beginning and is to come. Amen.

It is good to confess to You O Lord and sing to Your most high name acknowledging Your mercies by day and proclaiming Your justice by night.

THE TRISAGION

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, Who was born of the Virgin, have mercy upon us.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, Who was crucified for us, have mercy upon us.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, Who rose from the dead and ascended into the heavens, have mercy upon us.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and at all times, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us. O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us. O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us. Lord forgive us our sins. Lord forgive us our iniquities. Lord forgive us our trespasses. Lord visit the sick of Your people and heal them for the sake of Your Holy name. Our fathers and brothers who have fallen asleep, Lord repose their souls.

O Lord who alone is without sin, have mercy upon us. O Lord who alone is without sin, help us and accept our supplications.

For Yours is the Kingdom, the glory and the triple holiness. Lord have mercy. Lord bless us. Amen.

INTERCESSION OF THE MOST HIGH MOTHER, THE THEOTOKOS

HAIL TO ST. MARY

Hail to you. We ask you, O the Saint full of glory, the ever Virgin, Theotokos, the Mother of Christ, to raise our prayers to your beloved Son that He may forgive us our sins.

Hail to the Holy Virgin who bore for us the true Light, Christ our Lord. Ask the Lord on our behalf to have mercy upon us and forgive us our sins.

O Mary the Virgin Theotokos, the holy and trusted intercessor of the human race, intercede on our behalf before Christ whom you bore, that He may grant us the forgiveness of our sins.

Hail to you the Virgin, the true Queen. Hail to the pride of our race, who for us gave birth to Emmanuel. We ask you, the trusted intercessor, to remember us before our Lord Jesus Christ that He may forgive us our sins.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CREED

We magnify you, the mother of the true light, and glorify the Theotokos, the Holy Virgin, for you bore for us the Savior of the world who came and saved our souls. Glory to you our Master, Christ our King; the pride of the apostles, the crown of the martyrs, the joy of the righteous, the confirmation of the churches, the forgiveness of sins. We preach the Holy Trinity, One in essence. We worship Him and glorify Him. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord bless us. Amen.

THE CREED

We believe in One God, God the Father, the Pantocrator, who created heaven and earth, and all things seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, 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. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried. On the third day He rose from the dead, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into the heavens, and sat at the right hand of His Father. He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead, whose Kingdom shall have no end. Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver-of-Life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son He is worshiped and glorified, and has spoken through the prophets. We believe in One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the coming age. Amen.

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Yes, according to Your mercies, O Lord, and not according to our sins.

Make us worthy O Lord to pray thankfully:

Our Father Who art in Heaven . . .

ABSOLUTION

Lord all what we sinned against You in this day whether in deed or in word or in thought or through our senses, do forgive and pardon us O Good One and Lover of mankind for the sake of Your Holy name. Lord, grant us a peaceful night and undisturbed sleep. And send us the angel of peace to protect us from every evil, every strike and every temptation of the enemy through the grace, compassion and love of mankind of Your Only-Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ who is due, with You and with the Holy

Spirit, the Life-Giver and consubstantial, all glory, honor and majesty. Now and forever and from all ages to all ages. Amen.

THE CONCLUSION OF EVERY HOUR

Have mercy upon us O God and have mercy upon us, who at all times and in every hour in heaven and on earth, is worshiped and glorified, Christ our good Lord, the long suffering, exceedingly merciful and extremely compassionate, who loves the righteous and is merciful to the sinners of whom I am chief; who does not wish the death of a sinner but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live, who calls all to salvation with the promise of the blessings to come. Lord receive our prayers in this hour and in every hour. Ease our life and guide us to carry out Your commandments. Sanctify our souls. Cleanse our bodies. Conduct our minds. Purify our intentions, Heal our sickness. Forgive us our sins. Deliver us from every destructive grief, and distress of heart. Surround us by Your holy angels, that being guided and guarded by their camp, we may attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of Your infinite and invisible glory. For You are blessed, now and forever. Amen.

Come on All You Saints

Come on all you saints come on
To the heavenly Jerusalem
Where there is eternal life
And we live in peace with our Savior.

Nayrouz is the beginning of the year
When we remember our martyrs
Who defended faith without fear
Now they live in peace with our Savior.

If Satan comes to divide us
The voice of the Lord will gather us
And His peace will be with us
And we live in peace with our Savior.

Our fathers followed Jesus Christ
Fought the evil day and night
They received crowns of light
Where they live in peace with our Savior.

My Coptic Church so Great

My Coptic Church so great
You spread the Christian faith
In the Ethiopian country
In Nubia and Sudan
In the Western nations
In the African continent
And in European cities
You witnessed for the faith. (2)

Refrain:

O Coptic Church of God
Persecuted but survived
We redeem you with our blood
We redeem you with our lives. (2)

In the council of Nicea
Heresies, you stood against
Your deacon Athanasius
He is the hero of faith
St. Clement and St. Oregon
St. Cyril and St. Dioscorus
St. Paula and St. Anthony
Your men that were so brave. (2)

A church and a monastery
An altar and a sanctuary
Your sacraments are seven
They lead us up to heaven
By powers so divine
By prayers and by strife
You invaded the desert
To praise God day and night. (2)

Jesus Christ visited you
With His mother St. Mary
St. Mark's blood so pure
Watered you with the faith
O Mother of the Martyrs
St. George and St. Demiana
And the blessed St. Peter
The seal of the martyrs. (2)

My Orthodox Church

My Orthodox Church
Holy and united
In the early years
St. Mark came to Egypt
He wandered in the land
In the name of the Savior

The church of the Lord.
Built on the rock.
After Jesus Christ
And showed us the light.
Proclaiming the faith.
Who takes away the sins

The Copts then believed
Joy overwhelming
Idolatry has fallen
The cross was raised up high
Satan rose in anger
He stirred up the soldiers

In Jesus our Lord
Throughout the land.
As the Gospel spread
God's kingdom was near
To fight the Son of God
The governors and kings.

They raised up their arms
Deny Jesus Christ
Our great fathers
Did not yield to pain
No turning back at all
We fear no danger

Against the faithful
Or else you will be killed.
Mothers and children
Suffering or shame.
Triumph all the way
Our Lord Emmanuel.

How much were they tortured
How many were burnt
By faith and hope
And remained faithful
By their blood and tears
The church of martyrs

How much were they jailed
How many were killed
They conquered pain
To the King of heaven
We received our faith
Our mother, we praise.

Let us wake up all
Love one another
O church of the fathers
Unity and holiness
My Coptic Church
Egypt forever

With the risen Christ
Lift up our hearts.
You are our pride
With those we abide
Her faith is right
Stronger for Christ.

Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross

Jesus keep me near the cross
There's a precious fountain
Free to all a healing stream
Flows from Calvary's mountain.

Refrain :

In the cross, in the cross
Be my glory ever
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.

Near the cross O Lamb of God
Bring its scenes before me.
Help me walk from day to day
With its shadows over me.

Near the cross I watch and wait
Hoping trusting ever
Till I reach the golden strand
Just beyond the river.

He Paid All My Debts

To the Lord I owe my life
My soul He redeemed
He paid all my debts
When He died for me.

Refrain :

He paid all my debts
The Pure Lamb of God
On the cross He died and said (2)
“Now it is all done.”

The heavenly throne He left
To redeem mankind
On the cross, His blood was shed
The spear pierced His side.

Righteous works of the Law
Could not save mankind
Only through Your cross O Lord
Salvation is mine.

You the Blameless took my blame
You the Sinless bore my sin
Your Blood was the price
That opened the Paradise.

Oh Beloved

Oh Beloved, Oh Beloved
Nailed unto the cross for me
O what sin have You committed?
You who calls all to be.
Oh Beloved, wish that I could
Spend the rest of life with You
Worshiping Your holy passion
Crucifying the flesh for You.

Daughter of Zion behold me
Stricken and smitten for you
Friend and kin, Me have forsaken
There is none to comfort Me.
All alone I'll tread the winepress
All alone I'll drink the cup
Shedding My Blood for you to ransom
And My Flesh for you to sup.

I was bound, and I was smitten
And they did spit on my face.
I was stripped, and I was scourged
I was condemned in your place
Your sins became my crown of thorns
Oh that you would understand
Every time you sin anew
It's one more nail in my hand.

Like a Lamb brought to the slaughter
Like a dumb Sheep to be sheered
King, Creator, Lord and Master
By His creatures, mocked and jeered
Despised, rejected, with grief acquainted
And of men was not esteemed
Bruised and wounded, sore afflicted
Yet, with His stripes we were healed.

Lord create in us a fountain
That with tears will ever flow
And a heart contrite and broken
And the Spirit within renew.
Oh that we could shed the tears
Over Your feet pierced and bruised
Oh that we always remember
For our sins You were abused.

The Burning Bush

The burning bush seen by Moses
The prophet in the wilderness
The fire inside it was aflame
But never consumed or injured it.

The same with the Theotokos Mary
Carried the fire of Divinity
Nine months in her holy body
Without blemishing her virginity.

I open my mouth and proclaim
And utter hidden mysteries
With the praise of Virgin Mary
Blessed is the pride of the human race.

Gabriel the messenger came to you
With the incarnation of the Word (Logos)
The Lord will dwell in your holy womb
Blessed is the pride of the human race.

The Holy Spirit will come upon you
The Most High will overshadow you
And you shall bear the Son of God
Blessed is the pride of the human race.

The burning bush seen by Moses...

David your father said of you
and prophesied about the birth
That God will be held in your bosom
Blessed is the pride of the human race.

All that was said has been fulfilled
The proclamations and prophesies
About the birth of Emmanuel
Blessed is the pride of the human race.

Through you blessed and fair Mary
We were freed from slavery
God has filled you with eternal grace
Blessed is the pride of the human race.

The burning bush seen by Moses...

Each girl in Israel hoped to become
The mother of the Savior of the world
From her offspring the Messiah will come
Blessed is the pride of the human race.

But how can Mary have a son
Her life she's given to the Holy One
By faith she said Your will be done
Blessed is the pride of the human race.

The blessed daughter of Joachim
Achieved what was each woman's dream
To be the mother of the One to redeem
Blessed is the pride of the human race.

The burning bush seen by Moses...

Amen Alleluia

Holy God and Holy
Mighty in His glory

The Alpha and Omega
Amen Alleluia.

Michael and Gabriel
Rafael and Sourial

The angels in heaven
Amen Alleluia.

The stars high above
Always showing His love

The milky way and all
Amen Alleluia.

The moon and the sun
Glorify the Holy One

Shining by night and day.
Amen Alleluia.

The oceans and the lakes
Rejoicing sounds they make

The rivers and the streams
Amen Alleluia.

The mountains and the hills
Created by His will

The canyons and valleys
Amen Alleluia.

The deserts and the sand
Proclaim throughout the land

In tranquility and peace
Amen Alleluia.

The clouds and the rain
The storms and hurricanes

The mist and the snow
Amen Alleluia.

The trees and the grass
The fresh air through them pass

The fruits and seeds
Amen Alleluia.

The birds in the sky
Spreading their wings on high

With gentle sounds of praise.
Amen Alleluia.

The fishes of the sea
Praising His majesty

Of every size and shape
Amen Alleluia.

The animals of the earth
Were happy at His birth

In Bethlehem with Him
Amen Alleluia.

The four living creatures
Each one with different features

Around the throne of God
Amen Alleluia.

The first is like a lion
Bowing to the King of Zion

With power and might in him
Amen Alleluia.

The second is like a calf
Pleading on our behalf

A sign of sacrifice
Amen Alleluia.

The third has a face of a man
According to the heavenly plan

Created in God's image
Amen Alleluia.

The second is like a calf
Pleading on our behalf

A sign of sacrifice
Amen Alleluia.

The third has a face of a man
According to the heavenly plan

Created in God's image
Amen Alleluia.

The fourth is like an eagle
Majestic and regal

Soaring in the heavens
Amen Alleluia.

Each one possesses six wings
All day and night they sing

And eyes all around and within
Amen Alleluia.

The twenty-four elders
To him they surrender

Casting their crowns aside
Amen Alleluia.

Moses saw the burning bush
To see God he was yearning

But not consumed with heat
Amen Alleluia.

Daniel in his dream saw God sitting on a throne
Surrounded by radiant glow Amen Alleluia.

Ezekial saw a door In the east was tightly closed
The Lord passed through its coreAmen Alleluia.
A Virgin will have a child Isaiah said of old
To save sinful mankind Amen Alleluia.

The Queen dressed in gold With beauty to behold
The Son of God to hold Amen Alleluia.

O Holy Trinity

My heart and my tongue
Praise the Trinity.
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Everyone praises you
And worships You
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Because You are our God
And our Great Savior
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Our Lord and God
Came and saved us
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Out of true judgments
Teach me Your justice.
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Great is Your mercy
Visit us with Your salvation
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Here I am O Lord
I flee unto You
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Glory and power be to You
O King of glory
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Jesus is our Refuge
In our tribulations
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Blessed be the Son of God
Deliver us from temptations
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

All nations praise You
O Christ the King
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Grant us Your peace
Heal all our sickness
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

You are the Compassionate
You are the Merciful
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Blessed be You
We praise and bless You
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Truly great is God
The Righteous Judge
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Your name is blessed
You are the True Word of God
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Guard us O Christ
With Your goodness
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Heal the sinners
In their tribulations
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

My soul and my thought
Lift them up to heaven
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Our Lord, Son of God
Grant us Your salvation
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

O Merciful God
You are long suffering
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Holy, Holy, Holy,
The Son of the Holy
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

The souls of our fathers
Repose them, our Savior
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

Remember us O Lord
In Your heavenly kingdom
O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.

The Lord Said to Moses

The Lord said to Moses
To give him My orders

I'll send you to Pharaoh
To let my people go.

Moses said no my Lord
Please send him someone else

My tongue is heavy and slow
He'll never agree to do so.

God said I'll send Aaron
And you'll be the prophet

To speak on your behalf
I'll give you a mighty staff.

Ten strikes on Pharaoh will come
That he will surrender

That My power he'll believe
And let the Israelites leave.

Pharaoh's heart was hardened
Until all first-born died

He would not bend or yield
From God there is no shield.

God's people left Egypt
Pharaoh's army followed them

The Red Sea was in the way
And said they'll never get away.

Moses lifted his rod
The water stood in place

And stretched out his hand
The sea became dry land.

They walked through the Red Sea
Protecting them from Pharaoh

God always in their sight
With clouds and fiery light.

Pharaoh and his armies
His chariots and horsemen

Followed Moses and his kin
After them went marching in.

When the Israelites got ashore
They saw God's salvation

The wall of water came down
Pharaoh's army started to drown.

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam
God will save His people

Sang all a hymn of praise
Now and to the end of days.

But soon in the wilderness
In Egypt we ate good food

They said we have no meat
Here we'll die from the heat.

God sent them daily manna
From a rock they got water

To satisfy their needs
God took care indeed.

As they walked in and out
Through baptismal water

Of water of the Red Sea
From original sin we're free.

From the sea of sin
Praise Him forever

Out through Jesus we came
And glorify His name.

The Three Youth and the Fiery Furnace

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon
Conquered Israel his might was shown
And brought young men to Chaldean
Praise and glorify His name.

Azarias, Ananias, and Misael
Also the great prophet Daniel
Were brought from the land of Israel
Praise and glorify His name.

To his palace ordered the king
The young men his servants will bring
To be raised Chaldeans in everything
Praise and glorify His name.

Even their Jewish names had to go
New names on them they did bestow
Sedrak, Misak, and Abednego
Praise and glorify His name.

They served the king with honesty
Their wisdom was best in the city
Their goal was heaven and eternity
Praise and glorify His name.

They wouldn't eat from the idol's meat
Beans and vegetables only did they eat
They were healthy handsome and neat
Praise and glorify His name.

The king then made an image of gold
Everyone will worship they were told
To his orders all nations will hold
Praise and glorify His name.

The three young men were strong and bold
Our faith in the Lord will not be sold
Our religion we will uphold
Praise and glorify His name.

The Chaldeans with them were upset
And said their heads we sure will get
A lesson that no one will forget
Praise and glorify His name.

Unhappy was the king when he got to know
That Sedrak, Misak, and Abednego
To his orders they all said no
Praise and glorify His name.

He said in the fire they will be thrown
That everywhere it will be known
That no one disobeys the throne
Praise and glorify His name.

Seven times hotter the fire was lit
No one could survive for one minute
Those who threw them were burnt by it
Praise and glorify His name.

The king from what he did was sad
Great hopes for the three youths he had
From what was happening he was mad
Praise and glorify His name.

In his heart he wished them all well
But how could they in a fiery hell
Escape from burning who could tell
Praise and glorify His name.

The king was astonished to see four
Instead of the three there were before
And said how come I see one more
Praise and glorify His name.

The three were loose the king could see
The fourth like the Son of God was He
All this he said was strange to me
Praise and glorify His name.

They said our God is greater than all
For He created every body and soul
On his protection we always call
Praise and glorify His name.

The fiery furnace would not dare
Even to touch or burn their hair
God stood by them wherever they were
Praise and glorify His name.

The king was happy that the youths were brave
To his orders they would not cave
Their God sent an angel to save
Praise and glorify His name.

The king for the youths made a decree
No one with them dare disagree
worshiping their God they would be free
Praise and glorify His name.

Hate for the three youths was halted
worshiping their God was not faulted
The Name of the Lord was exalted
Praise and glorify His name.

As they obeyed and followed the Lord
And not worship silver or gold
Even the hot furnace became cold
Praise and glorify His name.

His people God will always keep
The Lord does not slumber or sleep
And what one sows one sure will reap
Praise and glorify His name.

We the youth admire you so
Your courage helps our faith to grow
Sedrak, Misak, and Abednego
Praise and glorify His name.

O Shepherds in the Fields

O shepherds in the fields
Hurry wake up from your sleep
Today unto you is born
The Savior of all the world.
(All the flocks just leave behind
Come and see a Holy Child) (2)
He is in a place
No human could stay.

The shepherds rejoiced
As they heard the angels voice
By songs from their hearts so pleased
They praised the King of peace.
(On their way they did not need
Anybody to guide or lead) (2)
For there was the Lord's light
Shone around them so bright.

After a while they arrived
To the place they had in mind
They saw an Infant so mild
Holy, tender and so kind.
(Gentle Mary was beside
Joseph and angels behind) (2)
What a beautiful sight
Wonderful and bright.

Our Father the Almighty Living God

Our Father the Almighty Living God
Wanted to grant us eternal life.
And raise us from our earthly nature
And in the highest heavens give us home.

Refrain:

Glory be to the Lord of Hosts
Who lives in the eternal light
Who came to us incarnated
And was born from Virgin Mary.

He sent His angel Gabriel
Carrying the Good News to the earth
Rejoice O Mary the daughter of Joachim
For you have been chosen by your Good Lord.

You were blessed and filled with Grace
In His eyes, you were preferred
Than all the righteous on the earth
All generations shall bless your name.

You accepted the Lord's Gospel
And obeyed your God's will
From you, will be born Emmanuel
In the little town of Bethlehem.

I am Glad

I am glad, I am glad
With Your peace and Your love

That You came to our land.
We will go hand in hand.

Refrain :

He came for us
Our God, Our God

With His tender love
Came to save us our God.

Saint Mary was pleased
He told her you will bear

When she heard Gabriel
Our Lord Emmanuel

The angels in the sky
Glory to God in the highest

Praised the Lord for His birth
And peace be on the earth.

A bright star far in the east
It showed them where Jesus was born

Appeared to the three wise men
In the city of Bethlehem

The King of Glory

The King of Glory
His name Emmanuel

What shall we call Him?
The promised Christ.

Refrain :

Rejoice all nations
Of the King of glory
For Jesus Christ. (2)

For the incarnation
Lift up your voices

In all of Galilee
He went among His people

In every city of village
Curing their illness.

He gave His life for us
He took upon Himself

The pledge of salvation
The sins of the world.

He conquered sin and death
And we will share

He truly has risen
The heavenly kingdom with Him.

O Mary, to You All Peace

To Mary came Gabriel
To a city in Galilee
Told her God be with you
O Mary, to you all peace (3)
Told her God be with you
O Mary to you all peace.

Blessed you among women
You shall give birth to a Son
He is Holy, He is Holy
And is called the Son of God (3)
He is Holy, He is Holy
And is called the Son of God.

In the manger Jesus was born
The heavenly angels sing
On the hay, on the hay, He laid His head
Though He is the King of Kings (3)
On the hay, on the hay, He laid His head
Though He is the King of Kings.

To the shepherds in the field
An angel appeared
Said rejoice, said rejoice
All of you, the Savior is here (3)
Said rejoice, said rejoice
All of you, the Savior is here.

To Mary Came Gabriel

To Mary came Gabriel
Told her God be with you

To a village in Galilee
O Mary peace with you. (2)

Hail O favored one on earth
And His name Emmanuel

You will bear Jesus Christ
Means the Lord is with us. (2)

In a manger the Lord was born
On the hay was His bed

The heaven is His throne
Christ the King laid His head. (2)

The angels of the heavenly host
Glory to God in the highest

Praised the Lord for His birth
And peace be on the earth. (2)

Away in a Manger

Away in a manger
The Little Lord Jesus

No crib for His head
Laid down His sweet head.

The stars in the sky
The Little Lord Jesus

Looked down where He lay
Asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing
But Little Lord Jesus

The Poor Baby awakes
No crying He makes.

I love You Lord Jesus
And stay by my cradle

Look down from the sky
Till morning is night.

Be near me Lord Jesus
Close by me forever

I ask You to stay
And love me, I pray.

Bless all the dear children
Prepare us for heaven

In Your tender care
To live with You there.

Hymn for Epiphany

John, the voice crying in the wilderness
Preaching to the Jews God's forgiveness
Baptizing them as they came to confess
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand
He gave the pharisees a strong reprimand
The wrath of God you could not withstand
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

People came to Him and wondered more and more
If He was the messiah they were waiting for
As they had never seen the likes of Him before
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

John in humility thought it was only right
to witness that Jesus was the true light
He was only the forerunner of Jesus Christ
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

He told them as he saw Jesus passing by
His shoes I am not worthy to untie
For He is the Son of the Most High
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

I baptize you with water from the river
He will do so with the Holy Spirit and fire
For Jesus is the true life giver
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

Jesus came to John from the land of Galilee
To be baptized that the Jews may see
That a law abiding Jewish man was He
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

But John said I do not deserve to be
The man to baptize the One who's full of glory
I need Your baptism, not You by me
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

Jesus answered let it be so
That I be baptized so that the world will know
That I came to fulfill and obey the law
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

Jesus all the way in the water went in
Standing by him was John his kin
Before Jesus' ministry was to begin
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

The voice of the Father from heaven up above
proclaimed this is my Son whom I love
The Holy Spirit descended like a dove
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

The Trinity to the world has been revealed
Which for generations has been sealed
The rift between God and man is now healed
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

Through immersion in water Jesus gave
A symbol for His three days in the grave
Baptism and faith in Christ will save
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

Washing with water makes the body clean
From any impurities that might have been
Baptism cleans the soul from original sin
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

Through Christ, God made a covenant with the human race
The sins of Adam through baptism to erase
Through Moses came the Law, and through Jesus grace
Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

Hymn of the Fraction of Lent

Blessed are those who have mercy
Who give to the poor and fast and pray
The Holy Spirit will fill their hearts
The Son will show them mercy on Judgment Day.

Moses fasted for forty days
To be purified in body and spirit
To receive from God the two tablets
With the ten commandments on them written.

When Moses saw the Almighty God
His glory filled Moses with grace.
The people of Israel covered their eyes
They could not look at his radiant face.

Fasting and prayer of the prophet Daniel
Saved his life in the lions' den
The Lord kept shut the lions' mouths
For God protects His holy men.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

Elijah fasted and prayed that the sky
For three and half years would not rain
That the Israelites who went astray
Would feel hunger, agony and pain.

As they repented he asked the Lord
To bring the rain with His mighty hand.
The Lord opened the gates of heaven
Rain and rejoicing filled the land.

Fasting and prayers of Ninevah
As they appealed to God above
When they repented God forgave
Their sins and filled them with His love.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

Fasting and prayers of the disciples
Spread God's Word to every nation
Baptizing and preaching the Holy Gospel
Healing and bringing salvation.

Fasting and prayers of the martyrs
Gave them the power to stand the pain
Knowing that even losing their lives
Is nothing compared to their heavenly gain.

Fasting and prayers of the righteous
And cross bearers kept them living
In the caves and deserts and mountains
Because of their love for Christ the King.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

Hymn of the Sunday of Temptation

Blessed are those who have mercy
Who give to the poor and fast and pray
The Holy Spirit will fill their hearts
The Son will show them mercy on Judgment Day.

Jesus fasted in the wilderness
For forty nights and forty days
Teaching us to follow in His path
And walk in the narrow and righteous ways.

When Jesus showed great hunger
The tempter came to him and said
If you are truly the Son of God
Change this stone to a loaf of bread.

Jesus said to Satan, "It is written
By bread alone man shall not live"
The Word of God will fill his needs
Eternal life the Lord will give.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

The devil took Jesus to the temple
And said as you stand in this holy place
If truly you are the Son of God
Throw yourself from here to the base.

For God will send His mighty angels
To watch over those who are His own
To give protection and support
Your feet will not touch any stone.

Jesus said to him, "It is written
You should not try to tempt the Lord"
For He is your Maker and Creator
And you cannot withstand His sword.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

The devil became weary and confused
Why would the Lord hunger and fast
And wondered if this was the Messiah
Who came to save the world at last.

So he took Him to a high mountain
The glory of the world under Him to see
And said all this I shall give you
If you bow down and worship me.

Then Jesus said, "Be gone you devil
One shall worship God and not Satan"
The devil departed as the angels
Came to serve the blessed Son of Man.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

Hymn of the Prodigal Son

Blessed are those who have mercy
Who give to the poor and fast and pray
The Holy Spirit will fill their hearts
The Son will show them mercy on Judgment Day.

There was a man who had two sons
Working with him in the house they grew
After his death all that he had
Was to be divided between the two.

The younger son said to his father
Give me now my share of what you own
Soon after that he took what he received
And went far away to live on his own.

He spent his money by living in sin
With youth who came to have fun with him
Not long after, he lost all he had
The future seemed so gloomy and grim.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

A famine came throughout the land
His friends left him when the money was gone
He looked for a job to feed himself
For a long time he could not find one.

At last he got a job on a pig farm
And gladly shared of what the swine ate
Sorrow and pain soon filled his heart
Lonely and sad he became, what a fate!

He said to himself that was a mistake
To leave my loving father at home
I was living in comfort and peace
Now I am an outcast, the land I roam.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

The servants in my father's house
Have better food than I have to eat
I hardly can live on the swine's food
In my father's home living was sweet.

I wish I could go now back home
And tell him in the past we didn't get along
I sinned against you and heaven
I know now that I have done you wrong.

Please take me back, I beg of you
I lost everything and have no place to go
Consider me a servant in your home
A son I don't deserve to be, I know.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

When the son left the father was sad
Wondering always what was his son's fate
He was hoping to see him once again
For long hours he would sit by the gate.

The father saw his son from afar
Coming home tired and walking slow
He ran, embraced and hugged his boy
And said, "Come to me, I missed you so."

The son then cried, "I'm not worthy
I do not deserve in your sight to stand
I sinned against you and heaven
Please take me as a hired hand."

The father said, "You're my flesh and blood
You'll always be to me a son."
He ordered for him to get new shoes
A ring for his finger, a robe to put on.

“A fattened calf we shall eat today
Let joy and happiness in this home abound
My son was dead and now is alive
To me he was lost, but now is found.”

Blessed are those who have mercy...

The eldest son with his father was upset
And said to him with eyes full of tears
“You are unfair to your good son
You gave me nothing throughout the years.

Your prodigal son wasted his share
While I worked for you like a slave
For him a feast you have prepared
A goat for my friends you never gave.”

The father said, “All I have is yours
I appreciate you’re always here
Please understand a father’s heart
You are both to my heart so dear.

God always calls those who drift and say
My arms to you are open and wide
Even if you’re lost and call on Me
You’ll always find me by your side.”

Blessed are those who have mercy ...

Hymn of the Samaritan Woman

Blessed are those who have mercy
Who give to the poor and fast and pray
The Holy Spirit will fill their hearts
The Son will show them mercy on Judgment Day.

Jesus departed from Judea
Was on His way to Galilee land
He had to pass through Samaria
The heat of the sun was hard to stand.

He stopped by a town called Sychar
And sat for a while to rest from the heat
In a land that Jacob gave to Joseph
There lies Jacob's well in it, at his feet.

The disciples, to buy food, went to town
A journey ahead, of a whole day to go.
Jesus looked up by the well nearby
A woman from Samaria coming He saw.

Carrying a pail to draw water with
From the well, as she did every day.
Jesus asked her if she would give Him
Water to quench His thirst away.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

She said, "How can I give You water

The Jews and Samaritans don't get along
I am a Samaritan, You are a Jew
You Jews have done the Samaritans wrong."

He said, "If you know about God's gift
The One who is asking you for a drink
is He that gives living water
From giving Him water, you would not shrink."

She looked at Him and said, "How can
You get water when the well is deep
You don't even have a pail to use
So where would you, the water keep ?

Are You greater than Prophet Jacob ?
Who gave this well a thousand years ago
To us to satisfy our needs
His greatness and kindness we all know."

Blessed are those who have mercy...

Jesus said, "From this water you drink
After a while, you'll thirst again
The water I give to you will be
A spring of eternal life for all men."

The woman said, "Give me of this water
That I may not again come here
You utter strange but marvelous things
I wish others, to your words, would hear."

Jesus said, "Go call your husband
To listen to what I have to say."
She said to Him, "No husband I have."
And turned her face from Him away.

Jesus told her, "Right, you have said
Five husbands you had in the past
The man in your house is not your spouse
The truth came from your heart at last."

Blessed are those who have mercy...

She said, "I see You are a Prophet
Although I do not know, Sir, Your name
Tell me which place one should worship
Here as our fathers said or in Jerusalem?"

"Believe me woman, the day will come
In the near future Jesus replied
People will not worship the Father
Here, there, or on the mountain-side.

You worship what you don't know about
But we Jews worship what we know
The Lord of Salvation from us will come
From Him the Living Water will flow.

God is Spirit and those who believe
And worship Him in truth and spirit
With them the Father will be pleased
They shine in heaven and their lamps are lit.

The woman said, "The Messiah will come
To show us all things that are and will be."
Jesus answered, "You should by now know
The One you speak with now, is He."

Blessed are those who have mercy...

At that moment the disciples came back
And were surprised to see Him talk
To the Samaritan woman by the well
As she was starting away to walk.

They said to Jesus, "Master, eat
The food we brought from town to You."
He said, "My nourishment is not meat
But doing the will of Him who sent Me.

Isn't it four months till harvest
I say lift up your eyes and see
The fields are ripe and ready to be reaped
The sower and the reaper, happy both will be."

The woman told the people of the town
"A Man told me all that I have done
He might be the coming Messiah."
So all of them at once, to Him were gone.

After two days of hearing Him teach
And the Word from God they did receive
They told the woman, "For ourselves we saw
He is the world's Savior, we truly believe."

Blessed are those who have mercy...

Hymn of the Palsied Man

Blessed are those who have mercy
Who give to the poor and fast and pray
The Holy Spirit will fill their hearts
The Son will show them mercy on Judgment Day.

There was a pool in Bethesda
Near the great temple in Jerusalem
Where those afflicted stayed near by
The blind, the palsied and the lame.

For every now and then to the pool
Came an angel from heaven
Moving the water and blessing it
Healing power to the water was given.

Whoever gets in first would be healed
As soon after the angel came
So all the sick waited by the pool
To get in first was each man's aim.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

A man with illness, thirty-eight years
Was seen by Jesus lying in there
Jesus asked him if he wanted to be healed
The man said, "I have no friends who care.

Whenever I try to get in the pool
Someone will get in before me
I have no strength to move in fast
No hope for healing that I can see."

Jesus said, "Get up now and walk
You will have strength to carry your bed."
At once, the man was totally healed
And did exactly what Jesus said.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

The Jews then saw the man walking
Carrying the bed on which he used to lay
They told him that it was not lawful
To carry his bed on a Sabbath day.

The man answered that it was the One
Who healed me, ordered me to do so.
"Who is this Man?" they asked him
As Jesus moved away, the man didn't know.

Later that day in the temple
Jesus said to the man as he walked through
“Now that you are well, sin no more
That nothing worse may befall you.”

Blessed are those who have mercy...

The man went back to the Jews and said,
“It was Jesus who made me walk.”
Persecuting Jesus the Jews then sought
Saying the Sabbath commandment He broke.

Jesus then told them, “My Father is still
Working in this world and so I do.”
That made the Jews even more intent
To kill Him as their hate to Jesus grew.

No matter how many years we have
A sickness of the body or of the soul
God will forgive if we repent
And heal and bless us, one and all.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

Hymn of the Man Born Blind

Blessed are those who have mercy
Who give to the poor and fast and pray
The Holy Spirit will fill their hearts
The Son will show them mercy on Judgment Day.

A man was blind since his birth
Was seen by the disciples as they passed by
They asked Jesus, "Was it the man's sin
Or his parents that he had no eyes?"

Jesus answered, "Neither is the case
But that God through him be glorified
A miracle will be witnessed by all
That His holy name be magnified."

Jesus said to the man, "Come forward."
And made of the dust a piece of clay
He touched the man's eyes with it and said,
"Go to Siloam and wash the clay away."

The man did so and came back seeing
His eyes were created in him anew
The crowd was astonished to see the miracle
And wondered is it the same man they knew.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

The Pharisees said to the man, "Is it true

That you have been blind since your birth
And that Jesus opened your eyes
Using the clay of the dust of the earth?"

He told them, "Yes, I am the one
Who was born blind but now can see
A Man called Jesus opened my eyes
I do confess that He did heal me."

They then said Jesus is a sinner
Performing a miracle on a Sabbath day.
The man declared, "How can this be
A Great Prophet He is I have to say!"

They asked his parents, "Is he your son?"
The parents answered, "He is for sure
But how he sees, we do not know
He should explain, he is mature."

Blessed are those who have mercy ...

The Pharisees again asked how was he healed
This made him angry and upset
He said, "Would you be willing to believe
If I told you that he is a Prophet?"

They said to the man, "In sin, you were born
You try to teach us how do you dare?
We follow Moses of whom we know
Jesus we know not comes from where."

They cast him away, rebuking him
In Jesus they didn't want to believe
Their eyes were blinded to see the truth
The grace of God, they never did receive.

The simple eye is the body's light
It sees the truth, its light always shine
Opening our eyes we ask You Lord
Honor and majesty and power are Thine.

Blessed are those who have mercy...

Hymn of Palm Sunday

He who is above the Cherubim
Today appeared in Jerusalem
Riding a colt in great glory
Surrounded by ranks of ni-angelos.

Refrain :

Hosanna khen ni et chose
Fai pe ebouro empe-Israel
Ef- es-marou-out enjefi-ethni-yo
Khen efran em epchois ente nigom.

On the way they spread garments
And from the trees they cut branches
Shouting song of joy and praise
Ousanna ep-cheeree en Daveed.

Today the sayings were fulfilled
From the prophecies and the proverbs
As Zechariah prophesied and said
A prophecy about Isos-be-Ikhrestos.

Hosanna in the Highest

The Lord above the Cherubim
Today enters Jerusalem
Taking the human flesh to redeem
Hosanna in the Highest.

Jesus to Jerusalem planned to go
For Passover according to the Law
A big crowd followed, when Him they saw
Hosanna in the highest.

Our Savior and our God
Lowly and humble a donkey He rode
Coming along Jerusalem road
Hosanna in the highest.

Passing through the Mount of Olive
The crowd shouted our hearts we give
To Your kingdom as long as we live
Hosanna in the highest.

Olive branches raised up high
People joined in as He passed by
With thundering voice of shout and cry
Hosanna in the highest.

They put their garments on the street
And spread their shirts under His feet
The future King they wished to meet
Hosanna in the highest.

The multitude entered the town
Its walls seemed to be tumbling down
With mighty voice seeking Him to crown
Hosanna in the highest.

King of Zion on a colt will lead
Zechariah prophesied indeed
Hosanna to the Son of David
Hosanna in the highest.

They shouted with unceasing voice
This is the King of our choice
By crowning Him we will rejoice
Hosanna in the highest.

Branches of palm trees in their hands
And voices heard throughout the land
His victory the Pharisees could not stand
Hosanna in the highest.

They said how all these things could be
Jesus of Nazareth, we know who is He
Stopping the praise, they wished to see
Hosanna in the highest.

Jesus answered if no man shouts
The stones of the earth will cry out
This is the day prophesied about
Hosanna in the highest.

Jerusalem filled with happiness
A glorious King with righteousness
Coming to reign over and to bless
Hosanna in the highest.

He gave the man born blind his sight
He showed Zacchaeus the path of light
He raised dead Lazarus by His might
Hosanna in the highest.

With five loaves, thousands were fed
He made the crippled man carry his bed
The kingdom of heaven is near, He said
Hosanna in the highest.

He came to the world as Son of man
In His predetermined heavenly plan
To free us from the bondage of Satan
Hosanna in the highest.

We worship You, Jesus our King
Olive and palm branches we bring
With unceasing voices we sing
Hosanna in the highest.

Very Early Sunday Morning

Very early Sunday morning
Jesus is risen declaring

Before the dawn's light appears
Victory no more defeat.

Refrain :

Resurrection is my song
Resurrection made me strong

Resurrection gave me life
Jesus my Lord is alive.

Jesus is risen in glory
And the angel told the story

Heaven and earth sang and praised
He is risen as He said.

Mary Magdalene was looking
While Jesus was telling

In the garden for her Lord
Her to go and spread the Word.

All the disciples were praying
When Mary came to them saying

They were really in great fear
He is risen, He is not here.

While they were in the room
My peace I give to you

Jesus Christ Himself appeared
And my peace with you I leave.

But Thomas did not believe
So Jesus again appeared

What the disciples have seen
Showed him the place of the spear.

Tell the Marys no more mourning
For Jesus our Lord is living

Among the dead do not seek.
Giving power to the weak.

Jesus my victorious Lord
And the thorn of death He broke

Conquered the powers of hades
My salvation He declared.

The heavenly hosts were singing
And the joy is overwhelming

Welcoming our glorious Lord
He opened the doors of hope.

Halleluia, Halleluia
Halleluia, Halleluia

Risen is the Lord of peace
Truly He is risen indeed.

Alleluia Risen is the King of Peace

Alleluia risen is the King of Peace
Alleluia truly He is risen indeed.
Alleluia Jesus is risen today
Alleluia the big stone is rolled away.

Mary Magdalene went so early to the tomb
For the body she brought spices and perfume.
Mary stood outside with her eyes in tears
Looking at the empty tomb she was in fear.

She asked the gardener, "where did they put my Lord?"
She did not know that He is the Risen Lord.
Jesus was telling her, "O Mary rejoice."
She cried, "O Master," as she recognized His voice.

He told her, "Go to my brothers and preach the news
Tell them I will come and see them very soon.
Mary went to the disciples right away
With all joy she preached, "Jesus is risen today."

And Jesus Christ Himself among them appeared
Showed them His hands, His side and gave them peace.
For Thomas' sake He appeared another time
Told him come, touch Me and see My wounded side.

Alleluia to the Savior of the world
Alleluia all you nations praise the Lord.
Alleluia the thorn of death He broke
Alleluia He gave us victory and hope.

Truly Risen

Truly risen is the Lord, King of Heaven.
Alleluia, Alleluia: He is risen.

Very early Sunday morning Mary went
To the tomb with spices and sweet ointment.

And behold an angel rolled the stone away
For the Lord had risen early in the day.

And the two men in the tomb unto her said
“He is risen: seek Him not among the dead.”

As she turned, her eyes beheld another man
But knew not that He is the beloved one.

And in tears she begged Him, saying, Sir, be kind
Tell me where my Lord and Master I can find.

Jesus told her, weep not Mary, but rejoice
And her heart leaped as she heard the Savior's voice.

Touch me not but go to my disciples, tell
Said the Lord when at His feet Mary fell.

Mary sought where the disciples met in fear
And she told them she had seen the Lord most dear.

And the same night His disciples saw Him too
Unto them He said, My peace I give to you.

Alleluia, to the risen Lord and King
Alleluia, O death where is thy sting ?

Alleluia, He is risen in Glory
Alleluia, O grave where is thy victory ?

O Christian Children

O Christian children, rejoice and sing
Now is the triumph of our King
To all the world glad news we bring
Christ is risen from the dead.

The Lord of life is risen today
Bring flowers of song to strew His way
Let all mankind rejoice and say
Christ is risen from the dead.

Praise we in songs of victory
That love, that life which cannot die
And sing with hearts uplifted high
Christ is risen from the dead.

The strife is over, the battle done
Now is the Victor's triumph won
Now be the song of praise begun
Christ is risen from the dead.

The powers of death have done their worst
But Christ their legions hath dispersed
Let shouts of holy joy outburst
Christ is risen from the dead.

He brake the age-bound chains of hell
The bars of iron and brass fell
Let hymns of praise His triumph tell
Christ is risen from the dead.

Lord, by the stripes which wounded Thee
From death's dread sting Thy servants free
That we may live and sing to Thee
Christ is risen from the dead.

Thy Name we bless O risen Lord
And sing today with one accord
The life laid down, the life restored
Christ is risen from the dead.

O Sons and Daughters

O sons and daughters let us sing
The King of Heaven, the glorious King,
Over death hath risen triumphing
Christ is risen from the dead.

On easter morn, at break of day
The faithful women went their way
To seek the tomb where Jesus lay
Christ is risen from the dead.

An angel clad in white they see
Who sat and spake unto the three
Your Lord doth go to Galilee
Christ is risen from the dead.

That night the apostles met in fear
Amidst them came their Lord most dear
And said, My peace be on all here
Christ is risen from the dead.

When Thomas first the tidings heard
He doubted if it were their Lord
Until he came and spake the word
Christ is risen from the dead.

My pierced side, O Thomas see
Behold my hands, my feet said He
Not faithless but believing be
Christ is risen from the dead.

No longer Thomas then denied
He saw the feet, the hands, the side
Thou art my Lord and God he cried
Christ is risen from the dead.

How blest are they who have not seen
And yet whose faith hath constant been
For they eternal life shall win
Christ is risen from the dead.

On this most holy day of days
To God your hearts and voices raise
In laud and jubilee and praise
Christ is risen from the dead.

Hymn of the Resurrection

All of ye heavenly hosts above
sing to our Lord a song of praise
Rejoice with us today and say
Our Lord is risen from the dead.

Today the prophecies are fulfilled
The fathers' visions have come true
And Christ our Lord is risen
He is the firstborn from the dead.

He Rose as if He was asleep
For death has no power over Him
He gave us everlasting paradise
And from slavery we are released.

He broke the strong brass doors of hades
and shattered its mighty iron bars
He changed punishment to salvation
And returned Adam to paradise.

With happiness and gladness and joy
Adam and his sons who were in bond
Their bodies and souls are revived
The faithful once again are free.

The daughter of David rejoices today
The disciples sadness turned to joy
When the women proclaimed His resurrection
And what they heard from the angels.

The Lord our God is risen
To Him glory and majesty be given
We thank Him for His love and grace
For His mercy forever endures.

Peter and Paul

The Faithful servant of the Lord
Shall receive a great reward
In Jesus they have great faith
In His kingdom is their place.

In Bethesda St. Peter was born
A zealous and loving heart he owned
He was chosen by the Lord
To shepherd His flock and teach His Word.

On the shores of Galilee Jesus met
Peter and Andrew casting their nets
Told them come and follow me
I will make you fishers of men.

Some people thought Jesus was Jeremiah
Others thought He was John or Elijah
But Peter uttered with his blessed tongue
“You are the Christ the Son of God.”

Jesus blessed Peter and to him He said:
“Peter you are the rock of faith.
Upon this rock I build my church
The gates of hell cannot stand against.”

All the disciples of the Lord
Left everything when they were called

Followed Jesus in the narrow road
And spread the Gospel all abroad.

He appointed them to preach the faith
The keys of heaven to them He gave.
“You shall be witnesses for my name
In Jerusalem, Judea and all the earth.”

Saul born in the city of Tarsus
To the church he was a persecutor
Was converted on the way to Damascus
To a believer and a great preacher.

His eyes were blinded when he saw the Lord
Fell to the earth when His light shone
“Why do you persecute Me, Saul?
It’s hard to kick against the goads.”

Terrified Saul looked up to the Lord
Said, “Lord, what do you want me to do ?”
Jesus said, “To Damascus go,
There you’ll know what you must do.”

Led by the hands, for he could not see
For three days, neither drank nor ate
Upon him the hands of Ananias were laid
His sight and the Holy Spirit he received.

The apostle Paul filled with grace
With Christ's love his heart was aflame
Wrote epistles while in chains
Turning Jews and Gentiles to the Christian Faith.

At the time of evil Nero
Persecution against Christians really grew
"Execute Peter and Paul
Crucify one and the other by the sword."

When the time of crucifixion had come
Peter said in front of everyone
“Crucify me with my head down,
For like My Master, I deserve not to be.”

At the feast of the Apostles we celebrate
Peter and Paul killed for Jesus sake
The crown of martyrdom they deserve
Their teachings the church observe.

We praise you Peter and Paul
In all nations your lights have shone
We ask your blessings upon us all
Remember us before the throne.

The Spirit of Truth, The Comforter

Let us praise the name of the Lord
For He with glory is glorified.

Refrain :

He ascended to the heavens
And sent to us the Paraclete.
Spirit of truth the Comforter, Amen, Alleluia.

He made the two into one
That is the earth and the heaven.

Come all you nations
To worship Jesus Christ.

This is God our Savior
And the Lord of every one.

Trinity in one and one in Trinity
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
Spirit of truth the Comforter, Amen, Alleluia.

Hail To Mary

Hail to Mary, mother of God
Magnify her, glorify her

Whenever you see the shining sun
Chosen was she to bear the Son.

Before God even the the heavens
Higher than heaven is Virgin Mary

Are not pure in His holy sight
Who became mother of the true light.

She is above all the angels
Over the saints and apostles

In the heaven her light does shine
Is the mother of the true vine.

With wings of silver said the psalmist
God chose her, queen of us all

Mary is seen as a golden dove
To her we give our deepest love.

Hail to Mary, mother of God
Magnify her, glorify her

Whenever you see the shining sun
Chosen was she to bear the Son.

As we fall and call to help us
On the rocky road of living

We will find her by our side
She will hold our hands to guide.

As we gaze to the heavens
In trials and tribulations

And raise our eyes to the sky
On her always we can rely.

Virgin Mary as we stand here
Of the Lord we ask through you

Seeking thy presence this hour
To fill us with holy power.

Hail to Mary, mother of God
Magnify her, glorify her

Whenever you see the shining sun
Chosen was she to bear the Son.

Chanting of her endless virtues
With adoration and love to Mary

Give her always unceasing praise
Our voices to her we raise.

Hail to Mary, queen of heaven
All the nations and forever

On the right side of the King
Of her praises we always sing.

You're the mother of new creation
I shall always praise your majesty

Your protection please, on me impart
And keep you forever in my heart.

Hail to Mary, mother of God
Magnify her, glorify her

Whenever you see the shining sun
Chosen was she to bear the Son.

Shere Ne Maria

The mother of the King
Gabriel came to say

Your praises we sing
As you stood to pray.

Do not be afraid
A son you will conceive

By His hand you are made
That was hard to believe.

Your son will reign over
Forever is His kingdom

Jacob's house forever
He'll give you wisdom.

Nothing for God is hard
The Son of the most high

He'll watch you and guard
Coming to the world to die.

Dying for our sins
For conceiving a son

The world with Him will win
You said Thy will be done.

The angel went away
As you came in the room

To Elizabeth you went to stay
John leaped in her womb.

Elizabeth said behold
Honor for me to see

Your greatness unfold
God's mother comes to me.

You are God's choice
You sang a hymn of praise

With you we all rejoice
With you our voice we raise.

The mighty will be down
Mercy to those who fear

The meek will wear a crown
Who God's commandments hear.

The rich empty will go
Through strength of His arm

The hungry's eyes will glow
No one will do us harm.

Praised by all nations
Above the Cherubim

Through the generations
Higher than the Seraphim.

The burning bush of old
The ladder of Jacob

More precious than gold
Purity is your robe.

The dome of the church
You are the Eastern door

Your support we search
The Son of God you bore.

You are great Aaron's rod
The mother of the King

You are the mother of God
Your praises we sing.

Hail to You, O Mary

(Tangeed tune)

Hail to you, O Mary The very and true queen	The pride of our race The pure symbol of grace
Hail to the throne of God The Mother of our Savior	The second heaven The salvation of all men.
Hail to the pure Virgin The daughter of David	The help of mankind Who leaves no one behind.
Hail to her who appeared And converted many	To millions abroad To become children of God.
Hail to her who received And did bear in her womb	The angel Gabriel The Salvation of Israel.
Hail to the Ever-Virgin Emmanuel before whom	Who carried in her hand All the angels stand.
Hail to her who appeared As a shining figure of light	On the domes of Zeitoun As bright as the sun at noon.

Hail to the undefiled
Who brought us peace on earth

The perpetual Virgin
And goodwill toward men.

Hail to her who heard
Proclaiming unto her

Gabriel's salutation
The Messiah's visitation.

Hail to the new Eve
Forget not your children

Who brought us salvation
In the hour of temptation.

Hail to the Mother of God
The handmaid of the Lord

Blessed by all generations
Worthy of all exaltation.

Hail to the Censer
In the presence of the Lord

Carrying the Divine Ember
Your children remember.

Hail to the pure vessel
And through her was fulfilled

Bearer of the Great Mystery
The promise to the ancestry.

Hail to the glorious one
By all the generations

Who is to be called blessed
By us, and all the rest.

The Sunday Theotokia

Seven times every day I'll praise your Holy Name
With all my heart O God of everyone.

I remembered Your Name And I was comforted.
O King of the ages. And God of all gods.

Jesus Christ our Lord The True God
Who was incarnate For our salvation.

He was incarnate Of the Holy Spirit
And of the Virgin Mary The Holy Bride.

He changed our sorrow And all our afflictions
Into joy for our hearts And rejoicing for all.

Let us worship Him And sing about His Mother
The Virgin Mary The fair dove.

Let us all proclaim With the voice of joy.
Saying, hail to you O Mary The Mother of Emmanuel.

Psalm One Hundred Fifty

Praise the Lord in all His saints: Alleluia, Alleluia. . .

Praise Him in the firmament of His power: Alleluia, Alleluia. . .

Praise Him for His mighty deeds: Alleluia, Alleluia. . .

Praise Him according to His majesty: Alleluia, Alleluia. . .

Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet: Alleluia, Alleluia. . .

Praise Him with the psaltery and the harp: Alleluia, Alleluia. . .

Praise Him with the timbrel and the chorus: Alleluia, Alleluia. . .

Praise Him with the strings and the organ: Alleluia, Alleluia. . .

Praise Him with the fine sounding cymbals: Alleluia, Alleluia. . .

Praise Him with the cymbals of joy: Alleluia, Alleluia. . .

Let everything that has breath praise the name of the Lord our God.

Glory be to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Now and at all times and forever and ever.

Glory be to our God: Alleluia, Alleluia: O Jesus Christ the
Begotten Son of God, hear us and have mercy upon us.

Je-ef-ezmaro-ot enje Efiot nem Epshiri: Nem epnevma

Etho-wab: ti-etrias etjik evol: Ten-o-osht emmos tenti-o-onas.

Night of the Last Supper

Night of the Last Supper
Jesus took bread and broke

Night of the Last Supper
And said "Eat My Body." (2)

Refrain:

Our Master, Our Savior
He is the Bread of Life

Gave us the wine of love
Coming from heaven above.

Night when my Lord suffered
He took wine and gave thanks

Night when my Lord suffered
And said, "This is my Blood."

This is the Groom's Supper
Promising eternal life

Is given to His bride
Up in the paradise.

This is the food of souls
And the blood is given

Is offered to us all
To help me lest I fall.

Jesus, You are my hope
Wash me and clean my soul

Forgive my sins O Lord
Put on me a new robe.

My heart I give to you
Your love to me I knew

Your will I want to do
When You paid all my dues.

Jesus fills all my heart
And through this sacrament

The devil has no part
He gave me a new start.

Jesus, to You I pray
Bless me and help me obey

To lead me in your way
All what the Bible says.

Christ suffered for my sake
My sins Jesus forgave

His mercy is so great
And a new life He gave.

My heart is filled with joy
With God I have union

And my spirit rejoice
When I take Communion.

The Lord is My Shepherd

The Lord is my Shepherd Come to Him all who labor	I shall not want And He will give you rest. (2)
Whenever I am weary Whenever I am anxious	You help me find rest. You calm all my fears. (2)
Whenever I am restless Searching for kindness	You listen and care. You stretch out Your hand. (2)
Whenever I am homeless In a strange country	You open Your door. You make me feel at home. (2)
Whenever I am hungry Whenever I am thirsty	You give me to eat. You give me to drink. (2)
Whenever I am sad Whenever I am happy	You stand by my side. You share with me my joy. (2)

I Put My Life into Your Hand

I put my life into your hand
My Savior and my Lord
Lead me, guide me, hold my hand
And help me serve Your Word.
Please protect me lest I fall
Your Holy Name I always call
Bless me and sanctify my soul
Until I see the Lord.

Refrain :

Your tender voice I hear
Whether I am far or near.
“Come to Me O troubled come
I will help you overcome.
Come to Me heavy laden come
And I shall give you rest.”

When life troubles worry me
When darkness is so near
All the clouds will disappear
When the Lord’s light appears
The Lord is my hope and my strength
All His promises He fulfills
With His love my heart is filled
Until I see the Lord.

Lord, have control over my life
And guide me in your way
I call Your sweet name day and night
So please answer my prayer
That I might return back again
To fill my heart with Your grace
I ask You to strengthen my faith
Until I see the Lord.

When my life's end becomes so near
I feel a great relief.
The Lord will come in a glorious scene
And take me to His Feast.
The Good Lord will wipe every tear
And fill my heart with joy and peace
His love to me, His cross revealed
Until I see the Lord.

Shepherd of My Soul

O You whose presence delights my soul
And whom in my distress, I call.
My comfort by day, and by night my refuge,
My stronghold, whenever I fall.

Shepherd of my soul, I beg You to tell
Where You make Your sheep to rest?
For why should I roam in the valley of tears,
And wander, as one who is lost?

I charge you to tell the daughters of Zion
Have you seen the One I adore?
I seek Him in vain in the night of my soul,
But lo, I can find Him no more.

Shepherd of my soul, I shall follow You
O how sweet Your voice is to me!
So guide me, and lead me, and show me the way;
My only desire is You.

I am my Beloved's and He is mine.
He calls me sister and spouse
O how do I long for the day we shall wed;
In heaven, in His father's house.

O Tell Me John, O Tell Me

O tell me John, O tell me
About His shining face
And how you were so lucky
On His chest your head laid.
Please answer me and tell me
John answered me and said. (2)

He called me the Beloved
In His eyes, I found grace.
He trusts me with His mother
I took her to my place.
His heart is beating beating
With love for human race. (2)

And dear Peter please tell me
About the rock of faith
And how you were appointed
A pillar in His church.
Please answer me and tell me
Peter answered and said. (2)

In spite of all denials
His love for me was great.
And while I was so bitter
My sins He has erased.
His heart is so forgiving
For sinners everywhere. (2)

And dear Thomas how did you
Doubt that he is raised
When you were not believing
He appeared just for your sake.
Please answer me and tell me
Thomas answered and said. (2)

I saw with my own eyes
The places of the nails.
And in His side, the hole
Where blood and water drained.
By all His wounds and sufferings
He opened heaven's gate. (2)

And all you His disciples
Tell me again and again.
How when you were in trouble
For you, He took good care.
All the disciples answered
We could never explain. (2)

The life that is awaiting
Those who believe in His name.
So joyful and so peaceful
There is no worry or pain.
Our life is all for Jesus
And death is really a gain. (2)

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

What a Friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer.
O what peace we often forfeit
O what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a Friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our Refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do Your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
In His arms He'll take and shield you
You will find a solace there.

Where He Leads Me I Will Follow

I can hear my Savior calling (3)
Take your cross and follow Me.

Refrain :

Where He leads me I will follow (3)
I'll go with Him all the way.

If I am sick or I am healthy (3)
I'll go with Him all the way.

Whether in peace or times of war (3)
I'll go with Him all the way.

I'll go with Him through Gethsemane (3)
I'll go with Him all the way.

I'll go with Him through the judgment (3)
I'll go with Him all the way.

He will give me grace and glory (3)
And go with me all the way.

To Whom Shall I Go ?

When I feel worried To whom shall I go?
You comfort me, O my Lord I kneel and pray to you. (2)

When I feel sad To whom shall I go?
You make me glad, O my Lord I kneel and pray to You. (2)

When I feel hungry To whom shall I go?
You feed me, O my Lord I kneel and pray to You. (2)

When I feel sick To whom shall I go?
You cure me, O my Lord I kneel and pray to You. (2)

When I feel lost To whom shall I go?
You guide me, O my Lord I kneel and pray to You. (2)

When I feel oppressed To whom shall I go?
You defend me, O my Lord I kneel and pray to You. (2)

There is None Like Him

Refrain :

Holy Holy is the Lord
Heaven is full of His glory

Holy is the Lord of Hosts
O there is none like Him. (2)

He is taller than the mountains
He is deeper than the depths

He is wider than the oceans.
O there is none like Him. (2)

He is greater than the universe
Yet He dwells within our hearts

The world could not contain Him.
O there is none like Him. (2)

He did not ever need us
And He wants us to be with Him

Yet He made us out of love
O there is none like Him. (2)

Blessed Be Egypt

Blessed be Egypt
The land from where

My favorite land
I called My Son. (2)

Blessed be Egypt
With His Holy Mother

Where our Lord went
and our land was blessed. (2)

Blessed be Egypt
Where His blood was shed

The land of St. Mark
for the sake of God. (2)

Blessed be Egypt
Who watered our faith

The land of martyrs.
With their pure blood. (2)

Blessed be Egypt
At her church in Zeitoun

Where St. Mary appeared
Healing those who were sick. (2)

There is a Fountain Flowing

There is a fountain flowing All my sins forgiven	From the Savior's side. In that precious tide. (2)
Jesus paid the price There is a fountain flowing	When for me, He died. From my Savior's side. (2)
There is a risen savior Ever interceding	At the Father's throne For His very own. (2)
Pouring down the blessings There is a risen Savior	That are His alone. At the Father's throne. (2)
There is a Holy Spirit All the glorious gifts are	Who is sent from heaven. His and have been given. (2)
He'll show us more of Jesus There is a Holy Spirit	Till the veil is risen Who is sent from heaven. (2)
There is a full salvation From faith to faith and glory	Wrought for you and me. To glory eternally. (2)
O Lord just take this life There is a full salvation	And let me live for Thee. Wrought for you and me. (2)

The Lord is My Shepherd

The Lord is my shepherd
I shall be well supplied
Since He is mine and I am His
What can I want beside?

He leads me to the place
Where heavenly pasture grows.
Where living waters gently pass
And full salvation flows.

If ever I go astray
He does my soul reclaim
And guides me in His right way
For His most Holy Name.

While He affords His aid
I cannot yield to fear
Though I should walk through death's dark shade
My Shepherd is with me there.

In sight of all my foes
You do a table spread
My cup with blessings overflows
And joy exalts my head.

The bounties of Your love
Shall crown my following days
Nor from Your house will I remove
Nor cease to speak Thy praise.

Hear My Cry I Pray to Thee

Refrain :

Hear my cry I pray to Thee
And to my voice incline your ear
Hold me and have mercy upon me (2)
For You O Lord I'm in great need. (2)

My soul is troubled in the deep
And my eyes are full of tears
Now I remember You indeed (2)
For Your salvation is near. (2)

All the waves came upon me
I was drowned in the deep sea.
I asked for help where it could be
But in the hands of my Lord Dear. (2)

My heart is trembling in great fear
And my head is wrapped in weeds
Out of the depth I cried to Thee (2)
Save my soul and set me free. (2)

God ordered the whale in the sea
To safely drop Jonah in peace
In the fish belly Jonah kneeled (2)
And thanked the Lord for His great deed. (2)

I Gave My Life for You

I gave My life for you
My precious blood I shed.
That you may ransomed be
And risen from the dead.
I gave, I gave My life for you (2)
What have you given for Me? (2)

My Father's House of light
My glory circled throne
I left for earthly night
For wanderings sad and lone.
I left, I left it all for you (2)
What have you left for Me? (2)

I suffered much for you
More than your tongue can tell
Of bitter agony
To rescue you from hell.
I've borne, I've borne it all for you (2)
What have you borne for Me? (2)

And I have brought to you
Down from my home above
Salvation full and free
My pardon and My love.
I bring, I bring rich gifts to you (2)
What have you brought to Me?

O Take My Hand Dear Savior

O take my hand Dear Savior
Till all my journey's ending

And please lead me.
I dwell with You.

I need You O Lord
O bless me my Lord

I need You.
I come to You.

You mighty God of ages
When angry tempest rages

O be You near
I need not fear.

When evening shadows lengthen
My faint heart, Savior, strengthen

The night is come
And bring me home.

Jesus Stands and Says

Jesus stands and says
Don't go far away

I am the way
Alleluia.

I am your Christ
When you follow me right

I am the Light
Alleluia.

Come to Me my son
Till my kingdom come

Let My will be done
Alleluia.

He knocks on my door
He will fight my war

I shall wait no more
Alleluia.

He cures my soul
Every time I call

Whenever I fall
Alleluia.

At His feet I bow
To worship You now

Jesus tell me how
Alleluia.

Mary and Martha

Jesus entered a house	Of Mary and Martha
Martha to the kitchen rushed	Fix Him something to eat.
Mary down to the ground	Kneeling at Jesus' feet
Opening her heart and ears	In Him she found her needs.
Martha was quite upset	That Mary offered no help.
She started complaining	That Mary was not caring.
Jesus praised Mary	What she did was really neat
But He was not really pleased	With Martha's great big feast.
When Jesus is anywhere	Talking and teaching
We should always be right there	Listening and learning.
Also when we go to church	With Jesus we all meet
We should always be quiet	Everyone in his seat.

Our Lord Jesus Christ

Our Lord Jesus Christ
Our joy and our pride.
For as much as You've loved us
Let us in Your love abide.

As one family we unite
Our Head is Jesus Christ.
In His teachings we delight
Singing praises day and night.

With the joyful we rejoice
To the needy we give a hand
And remember in our prayers
That the Lord may bless our land.

In the darkness, we do not fear
Cause we know You're walking near
Sure Your eyes are watching me
From my sins, You've set me free.

Christian Love

In Christianity the A-B-C's
Spell L-O-V-E
First Corinthians thirteen
Tells us what love really means.
Love is patient, love is kind
Looks not for mistakes to find
Love is humble, love is meek
Love will never self seek
Does not envy, never selfish
Never proud, nor snobbish
Is not jealous, is not rude
Love rejoices in the truth
Bears all things
Believes all things
Hopes all things
Endures all things.
Now remains faith, hope and love
But the greatest of these is love.

Draw Me Nearer Blessed Lord

I am Yours, O Lord, I have heard Your voice
And it told Your love to me.
But I long to rise in the arms of faith
And be closer drawn to You.

Refrain :

Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord
To the cross where You have died
Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord
To Your precious bleeding side.

Consecrate me now to Your service Lord
By the power of Grace Divine
Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope
And my will be lost in Yours.

O the pure delight of a single hour
That before Your throne I spend
When I kneel in prayer and with You my God
I commune as friend with friend.

There are depths of love that I cannot know
Till I cross the narrow sea
There are heights of joy that I may not reach
Till I rest in peace with You.

O Pilgrim on Your Way to God

O pilgrim on your way to God
Don't care about hunger or thirst
The Living Bread is your food
Living water quenches your thirst.

O Pilgrim forget the past
and walk in the narrow path
And if sufferings come across
Remember Jesus on the cross.

The trumpet very soon will sound
With great joy no place to frown
A big feast above the clouds
Who's ready receives a crown

He's been preparing your place
Busy thinking long for your sake
He longs to grant you His grace
O what joy if you are awake.

O church of Christ our Lord
Among hardships you've been born
Never fear danger nor sword
The Almighty calms all storms.

Who Shall Separate Us

From the Love of Christ

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall trouble or hardship or persecution?

Or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written for Your sake we face death all day long.

We Are One in the Spirit

(We are one in the Spirit
We are one in the Lord) (2)
And we pray that our unity
May one day be restored.

Refrain :

And they'll know we are Christians
By our love, by our love
Yes, they'll know we are Christians
By our love.

(We will walk with each other
We will walk hand in hand.) (2)
And together we'll spread the news
That God is in our land.

(We will work with each other
We will work side by side.) (2)
And we'll guard each man's dignity
And save each man's pride.

All praise to the Father
From whom all things come
And all praise to Christ Jesus
His Only Son
And all praise to the Spirit
Who makes us one.

O King of Peace

O king of Peace
Give us your peace

Grant us your peace
And forgive us our sins.

Disperse all the enemies
Keep her in your faith

Of your holy church
Forever and ever.

Emmanuel our God
With His Father's glory

Is among us now
And the Holy Spirit.

May He bless us all
Cure our bodies

Clean our hearts
And also our souls.

We worship You O Jesus Christ
And the Holy Spirit

With Your Good Father
For You came and saved us.

Our Lord Jesus Christ

Our Lord Jesus Christ
Bearer of the sins of the world
Count us with Your sheep
Those who are on Your right.

At Your second coming
That awesome coming
Let us not trembly hear
That I do not know you.

But let us be worthy to hear
Your tender voice
That is full of joy
Proclaiming and saying

“Come to Me O blessed
Of My Father
Inherit the life
That is eternal.”

The martyrs come
Bearing their sufferings
And the saints also come
Bearing their righteousness

The Son of God comes
In His glory and His Father's glory
And gives everyone
According to his deeds

O Christ Word of the Father
The Only God
Grant us your peace
That is eternal

As You have given it
To Your saintly apostles
Say to us as You said to them
“My peace I give to you

My peace which I took
From My Father
I leave it with you
Now and forever.”

O angel of of this day
Flying to the heights with this hymn
Remember us before the Lord
That He may forgive us our sins

May You cure the sick
May You repose those who have slept
Our brothers who are in trouble
Help them O Lord and us.

May God bless us all
And let us bless His Holy Name
At all times His praise
Is continuously in our mouth.

The Baker Woman

The baker woman in her humble lodge
Received a Grain of wheat from God
For nine whole months the Grain she stored
Behold the handmaid of the Lord

Make us the Bread, Mary, Mary
Make us the Bread, we need to be fed.

The baker woman took the road which led
To Bethlehem the house of bread
To knead the Bread she labored through the night
And brought it forth about midnight.

Bake us the Bread, Mary, Mary
Bake us the Bread, we need to be fed.

She baked the Bread for thirty years
By the fire of her love and the salt of her tears
By the warmth of a heart so tender and bright
And the bread was golden brown and white

Bring us the Bread, Mary, Mary
Bring us the Bread, we need to be fed.

After thirty years the Bread was done
It was taken to town by her only son
Soft white bread to be given free

For the hungry people of Galilee.

Give us the Bread, Mary, Mary
Give us the Bread, we need to be fed.

For thirty coins the Bread was sold
And a thousand teeth so cold, so cold
Tore it to pieces on a Friday noon
When the sun turned black and red the moon

Break us the Bread, Mary, Mary
Break us the Bread, we need to be fed.

And when she saw the Bread so white
The Living Bread she had made in a night
Devoured as wolves might devour a sheep
The baker woman began to weep.

Weep for the Bread, Mary, Mary
Weep for the Bread, we need to be fed.

But the baker woman's only Son
Appeared to his friends when three days had gone
On the road which to Emmaus led
And they knew Him in the breaking of the bread

Lift up your head, Mary, Mary
Lift up your head, for now we've been fed.

The Wedding Banquet

Refrain :

I cannot come
I cannot come to the banquet
Don't trouble me now
I have married a wife
I have bought me a cow
I have fields and commitments
That cost a pretty sum
Please sir forgive me
I cannot come.

A certain man held a feast
On his fine estate in town
He laid a festive table
He wore a wedding gown
He sent out invitations
To his neighbors far and wide
But when the meal was ready
Each of them replied.

The master rose up in anger
Called his servants by name
Said, "Go into the town,
Fetch the blind and the lame
Fetch the peasant and the pauper
For this I have willed
My banquet must be crowned
And my table must be filled."

When all the poor had assembled
There was still room to spare
So the master demanded
Go search everywhere
Search the highways and the by ways
And force them to come in
My table must be filled
Before the banquet can begin.

Now God has written a lesson
For the rest of mankind
If we are slow in responding
He may leave us behind
He is preparing a banquet
For that great and glorious day
When the Lord and Master calls us
Be certain not to say.

Sons of God

Refrain :

Sons of God, hear His holy Word
Gather around the table of the Lord
Eat His body, drink His blood
And we'll sing a song of love
Allelu, Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia.

Brothers, sisters, we are one
And our life has just begun
In the spirit we are young
We can live forever.

Shout together to the Lord
Who has promised our reward
Happiness a hundred fold
And we'll live forever.

Jesus gave a new command
That we love our fellow man
Till we reach the promised land
Where we'll live forever.

If we want to live with Him
We must also die with Him
Die to selfishness and sin
And we'll live forever.

Make the world a unity
Make all men one family
Till we meet the Trinity
And we'll live forever.

With the church we celebrate
Jesus coming we await
So we'll make a holiday
So we'll live forever.

Amazing Grace

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

All in All

Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior of my soul
Let my thoughts be your thoughts
That is all in all.

Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior of my soul
Let my senses be your senses
That is all in all.

Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior of my soul
Let my heart be your heart
That is all in all.

Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior of my soul
Let my will be your will
That is all in all.

Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior of my soul
Let my deeds be your deeds
That is all in all.

Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior of my soul
Let my way be your way
That is all in all.

Fishers of Men

I will make you fishers of men
Fishers of men, fishers of men, if you follow me
if you follow me, if you follow me.
I will make you fishers of men, if you follow me.

I Will Love as Jesus Loved

When the Spirit of the Lord moves in my heart
I will love as Jesus loved.
I will love, I will love
I will love as Jesus loved.

When the Spirit of the Lord moves in my heart
I will pray as David prayed.
I will pray, I will pray
I will pray as David prayed.

When the Spirit of the Lord moves in my heart
I will preach as St. Paul preached.
I will preach, I will preach
I will preach as St. Paul preached.

From Every Nation

Refrain :

From every nation from every tribe
from every tongue
From every nation from every tribe
From everywhere
(Thousands of people standing
The heavenly throne surrounding) (2)
Coming from every place (2)

Coming from sorrow and grief
Bound and tortured for years
Dressed so nice and clean
Playing their violin
(Those who were redeemed
By the Blood were freed) (2)
I saw them relieved
When they were coming.

Before tyrants so great
They defended the faith
Endured suffering and pain
Looking for heavenly gain
(Those who were redeemed
By the Blood were freed) (2)
Walked in the Lord's fear
And they were coming.

Persecuted for His name
They were killed for His sake
To the Lord their hearts were raised
Their tongues declared their praise
(Those who were redeemed
By the Blood were freed) (2)
Crowns of light they received
When they were coming.

In the midst of fire walking
Inside prisons singing
By the Spirit comforted
And by Jesus guided
(Those who were redeemed
By the Blood were freed) (2) Their blessings we need
And they were coming.

Their bodies were cut with spears
They were brave, never feared
In their eyes I saw tears
In their hearts joy and cheers
(Those who were redeemed
By the Blood were freed) (2)
Departed in peace
And they were coming.

Dressed in white so neat
Ready for the Lord to meet
Voice of welcome they hear
From saints and angels near
(Those who were redeemed
By the Blood were freed) (2)
Saw the glorious scene
When they were coming.

Our Father Who Art in Heaven

Our Father who art in heaven
Before His glory bows every knee
We plead that our sins be forgiven
We humbly stand praying to Thee.

Hallowed be Thy glorious name
Whom the Cherubim and Seraphim fear
Though our sins put us to shame
We ask, as your children, our plea hear.

Thy kingdom come in the world today
That we may live in Your kingdom now
Your Holy Spirit will lead our way
Your guiding hand will show us how.

Thy will be done for You are the King
As all creation praise Your name
Our will, under Your feet, we bring
Please set our hearts with Your love aflame.

On earth as it is in heaven
For all by Your mighty power are made
That honor and majesty be given
To You, may we be, with Your hand are guided.

Give us this day our daily bread
For You alone, our needs supply
Our souls forever with Your love be fed
For Your love is all we need to live by.

Forgive our trespasses as we forgive
Those who do against us trespass
Purity of heart, O Lord please give
And let our wicked sins to pass.

And lead us not into temptation
For we are weak when we are alone
But through Your glorious salvation
Your mighty hand will guide our own.

Deliver us O God, from the evil of man
And help us walk in the path of light
Thou cast away from us Satan
And keep us guarded in Thy Holy sight.

Through the mediation of Christ Jesus
The Savior of the world in whom we believe
The fruits of salvation will be with us
And what we ask in His name, we receive.

For Thine is the glory and kingdom
Power and light for us will shine
Thou fill us with heavenly wisdom
And grace from Your power divine.

From now and forever, Amen
To Thee our hearts and souls will bring
Offerings from the gifts we are given
To give our God, Savior and King.

Our Father Who Art in Heaven

Our Father who art in heaven
Hallowed by Your glorious name
Your kingdom come, Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us
And lead us not into temptation.

But deliver us from the evil one
Through Jesus Christ our Lord
For Thine is the kingdom, power and glory
For ever and ever, Amen.

Blessed is the Father and the Son
And the Holy Spirit
The perfect Trinity
We worship and glorify Him.

My Redeemer and Savior

Our life is filled with joy
O my Lord Jesus Christ

To remember Your Holy Name
My Redeemer and Savior.

All creations glorify Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Those on earth in heaven
My Redeemer and Savior.

Seven times every day
O my Lord Jesus Christ

To the Lord I stand and pray
My Redeemer and Savior.

From the morning to the eve
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Your Holy name in my heart
My Redeemer and Savior.

All the sins that I have done
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Please forgive O blessed Son
My Redeemer and Savior.

The Son of God in His glory
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Will come again on judgment day
My Redeemer and Savior.

To give each one of us all
O my Lord Jesus Christ

According to what we have done
My Redeemer and Savior.

May we then not hear that sound
O my Lord Jesus Christ

That I know not who you are
My Redeemer and Savior.

But with Your sweet tender voice
O my Lord Jesus Christ

You say My children do come in
My Redeemer and Savior.

To inherit eternal life
O my Lord Jesus Christ

From now and for evermore
My Redeemer and Savior.

The martyrs will be standing there
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Carrying their suffering for Thee
My Redeemer and Savior.

The righteous will also be there
O my Lord Jesus Christ

With their virtues and good deeds
My Redeemer and Savior.

Fill our hearts with the true peace
O my Lord Jesus Christ

That the world cannot take away
My Redeemer and Savior.

As you have given the disciples
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Saying peace be unto you
My Redeemer and Savior.

The sick of us O God please heal
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Our brothers who are in distress
O my Lord Jesus Christ

O angel of this holy day
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Remember us before the Lord
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Trinity in one we all believe
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Those who fell asleep repose
My Redeemer and Savior.

Comfort them and wipe their tears
My Redeemer and Savior.

Who unceasingly glorify God
My Redeemer and Savior.

To forgive us our sins
My Redeemer and Savior.

With the Father and Holy Spirit
My Redeemer and Savior.

My Heart and My Tongue

My heart and my tongue
Glorify the Trinity
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

Every one praiseth Thee
And glorifieth Thee
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

For Thou art our God
And our Savior
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

Great is Thy mercy
Visit us with Thy salvation
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

Glory and power
To Thee O King of glory
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

The Lord is our refuge
In the time of tribulation
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

All nations praise Thee
O Christ our King
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

Deliver us from temptation
O Only Begotten Son
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

Grant us Thy perfect peace
And heal our infirmities
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

Thou art the Compassionate
Thou art the Merciful
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

Guard us O Christ
According to Thy goodness
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

My soul and my thoughts
Lift them up to Thee
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

O Lord, Son of God
Grant us Thy salvation
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

Holy, Holy, Holy
The Son of the Holy
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

Remember us O Lord
In Thine heavenly Kingdom
O Holy Trinity
Have mercy upon us.

Listen, O Christ's Congregation

Listen, O Christ's congregation
With understanding and concentration
And sing with all jubilation
Christ has granted us salvation.

Give thanks unto Him for His grace
And praise Him for His great kindness
Exalt His name in every place
Christ has granted us salvation.

Through His compassion and love divine
He granted unto us, sons of men
This mystery of the bread and wine
Christ has granted us salvation.

The holy angels of heaven
Desire to behold and look upon
This mystery we have been given
Christ has granted us salvation.

The bread of which we partake
Is the body broken for our sake
It forgives every fault and mistake
Christ has granted us salvation.

The wine in the cup that has been blessed
Becomes the blood of Jesus Christ
And remits all sins we have transgressed
Christ has granted us salvation.

Our race was condemned by Adam's fall
But Christ abolished the dividing wall
And granted salvation to every soul
Christ has granted us salvation.

Death came to the world by one man's mistake
But the Lord shed His blood for our sake
This is the blood of which we partake
Christ has granted us salvation.

The manna given in the wilderness
Was a figure of this mystery of goodness
We deserve it only if we confess
Christ has granted us salvation.

This is the true heavenly bread
This is the blood that for us we shed
Through them we are to Him united
Christ has granted us salvation.

Every time we partake with affection
We remember His death and resurrection
And His mysteries will lead us to perfection
Christ has granted us salvation.

Wherever He Shall Lead Me

Wherever He shall lead me (3)

I shall always, always walk with Him.

Even unto crucifixion (3)

I shall always, always walk with Him.

Even unto Gethsemane (3)

I shall always, always walk with Him.

Whether in war or in peace (3)

I shall always, always walk with Him.

Whether in health or in sickness (3)

I shall always, always walk with Him.

If they smite me or despise me (3)
I shall always, always walk with Him.

Even if they jail or stone me (3)
I shall always, always walk with Him.

He will lead me into victory (3)
I shall always, always walk with Him.

And will take me to His Glory (3)
I shall always, always walk with Him.

Draw me Lord, and I shall follow (3)
I shall always, always walk with Thee.

The Saturday Psali

Remembering Thine Holy Name

Bringeth joy to our souls

O my Lord Jesus Christ

O my Good Savior.

Every one blesses Thee

The heavenly and the earthly

O my Lord Jesus Christ

O my Good Savior.

For Thou alone art Worthy

Of the Honor and the Glory

O my Lord Jesus Christ

O my Good Savior.

All the tribes of the earth

Praise Thine Holy Name

O my Lord Jesus Christ

O my Good Savior.

Six pots of water

Thou has changed into wine

O my Lord Jesus Christ

O my Good Savior.

Seven times every day
I will praise Thine Holy Name
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

In ecstasy we praise Thee
All of us Thy people
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

The Glory of Thine Holy Name
Is on the lips of Thy saints
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Morning and evening every day
I will praise Thine Holy Name
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

With every breath that I breath
I will praise Thine Holy Name
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

All the causes of sin
Cast away from our souls
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

All the thoughts of the enemy
Do Thou chase away from us
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Everything that hath breath
Praiseth Thine Holy Name
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Thou art above everyone
Thou art the King of kings
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Thine is the Glory with Thy Father
And the Holy Spirit
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Thy Name is blessed and sweet
On the lips of Thy saints
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

My lips praise Thee
And my tongue glorifieth Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Yes indeed we praise Thee
Yes indeed we glorify Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

We shall not get weary
Forever and ever we'll praise Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

All the praises and the blessing
We ascribe unto Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Thine alone is the Glory
The Honor and Thanksgiving
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Holy art Thou O my Lord
Holy indeed O my God
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Every soul praiseth Thee
Every knee boweth to Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

O Name full of Glory
O Name full of Blessing
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

From now until eternity
We'll not cease praising Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Thine is the Blessing
The Honor and the Glory
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

With the Blessing we bless Thee
We the Glory we glorify Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

As long as we live we'll praise Thee
As long as we're here we'll glorify Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

The perfection of all Blessings
Is in Thine Holy Name
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Receive our prayers
From us the sinners
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

Grant us Thy perfect peace
And forgive us our sins
O my Lord Jesus Christ
O my Good Savior.

And whenever we sing hymns
Let us say tenderly
O my Lord Jesus Christ
Have mercy upon us.

Glory to the Father
The Son and the Holy Spirit
Now, and at all times
And forever and ever.