




El Nayrooz

 On September 11 our Church celebrates the Feast of El Nayrooz, which is the beginning of the Coptic New Year. During the Coptic New Year we remember the great martyrs of our Church. You may wonder why we would remember our martyrs on the first day of the Coptic New Year. Here is the story.

After our Lord Jesus Christ resurrected and before He ascended into Heaven above, He told the Apostles and disciples to,

“Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

(Matthew 28:19,20)



Our Lord
Jesus Christ gave
His disciples a
commission, a job, which is



to preach and tell the whole world about Him so that people will believe and become Christians and enjoy living with God for all eternity in Heaven.

You would think that everyone would love to hear about the Lord Jesus Christ but most people did not want to know our Lord Jesus Christ at all because they were evil. These people would rather worship idols; images made of gold, silver and jewels, than the one true God.

Because the disciples, through the power of the Holy Spirit, were converting so many people to Christianity, the evil ones decided they would kill anyone who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who die for sake of our Lord Jesus are called martyrs.

There arose evil men who became kings and used their power to try and destroy Christianity by killing anyone who was Christian. It so happened that in Egypt there were many Christians. In the year 284 AD a new emperor named Diocletian took power. He ordered the longest and fiercest persecution the Christians ever experienced. For over ten years Diocletian's army was killing the Christians. Over one hundred thousand Coptic Christians lost their earthly lives but found their heavenly lives.

To keep alive the memory of the martyrs who laid down their lives for their faith, the Coptic calendar begins with the year 284 AD as its starting point. The Coptic year has twelve months of thirty days each and a short month of five days (or six days on leap year). This is the same calendar system that the Ancient Egyptians used.



During this hard time of persecution the Church was led by Pope Peter. He was a son of promise. His mother Sophia wanted a child because she had no children.

During the celebration of the martyrdom of the apostles St Peter and St Paul, she entered the church and in front of the holy altar she prayed from the depth of her heart that the Lord would give her a child.



That night she saw in a vision two old men dressed in white telling her that her prayers were answered, and she would be given a son, and he would be called Peter, after the apostle, for he will be the father of a whole nation.

In time she gave birth to a boy and named him Peter. When Peter was seven years old, his parents offered him to the patriarch Abba Theonas. He became a son to the Pope and was ordained by first as a reader, then a deacon, then a priest. He grew up to be knowledgeable, wise and pure.

When Pope Theonas was dying, he counseled the church leaders to choose Peter as the next Pope. Thus Peter, the son of promise, became the father of a nation and the seventeenth successor of St. Mark in the year 285 AD.

Pope Peter guided the Church during some of the hardest years of its history. Not only was the king trying to destroy Christianity by killing the Christians but an evil man named Arian began spreading wrong teachings about the Lord Jesus Christ within the Christian community.

When Diocletian realized that after so many years of persecutions, the Christians of Egypt were not dead but that they increased in number he became very angry. He ordered the religious leaders arrested and tortured thinking that by doing so he would break the spirit of the people. Six bishops were arrested but no matter how bad the tortures were, they would not deny their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally they were martyred. When Pope



Peter heard of their martyrdom, he fell on his knees and offered thanks to God for having kept the bishops steadfast until the end.

Finally Diocletian placed Pope Peter in prison. On the way to be executed they asked him if he had a final request. He asked to be allowed to visit the Church of St. Mark. He was permitted a few minutes there. He went in and prayed and fervently asked that God accept that his life would be the end of the persecution.

The soldiers then led him to be executed. For a while no one dared raise a hand against him for they saw his face like that of an angel. Then one of the officers took out gold and said, 'this I will give to the one who dares behead this sage.' The sight of gold made one soldier strike the saint's head off.

The soldiers went away and the faithful believers came and in tears carried away the remains of their blessed pope and buried him in St. Mark's Church. The martyrdom of Abba Peter started a period of peace. That is why we call him 'the Seal of the Martyrs' until this day.

May the prayers and supplications of St. Abba Peter be with us.



Martyr, St Mercurius (Philopateer or Abu Saifain)

