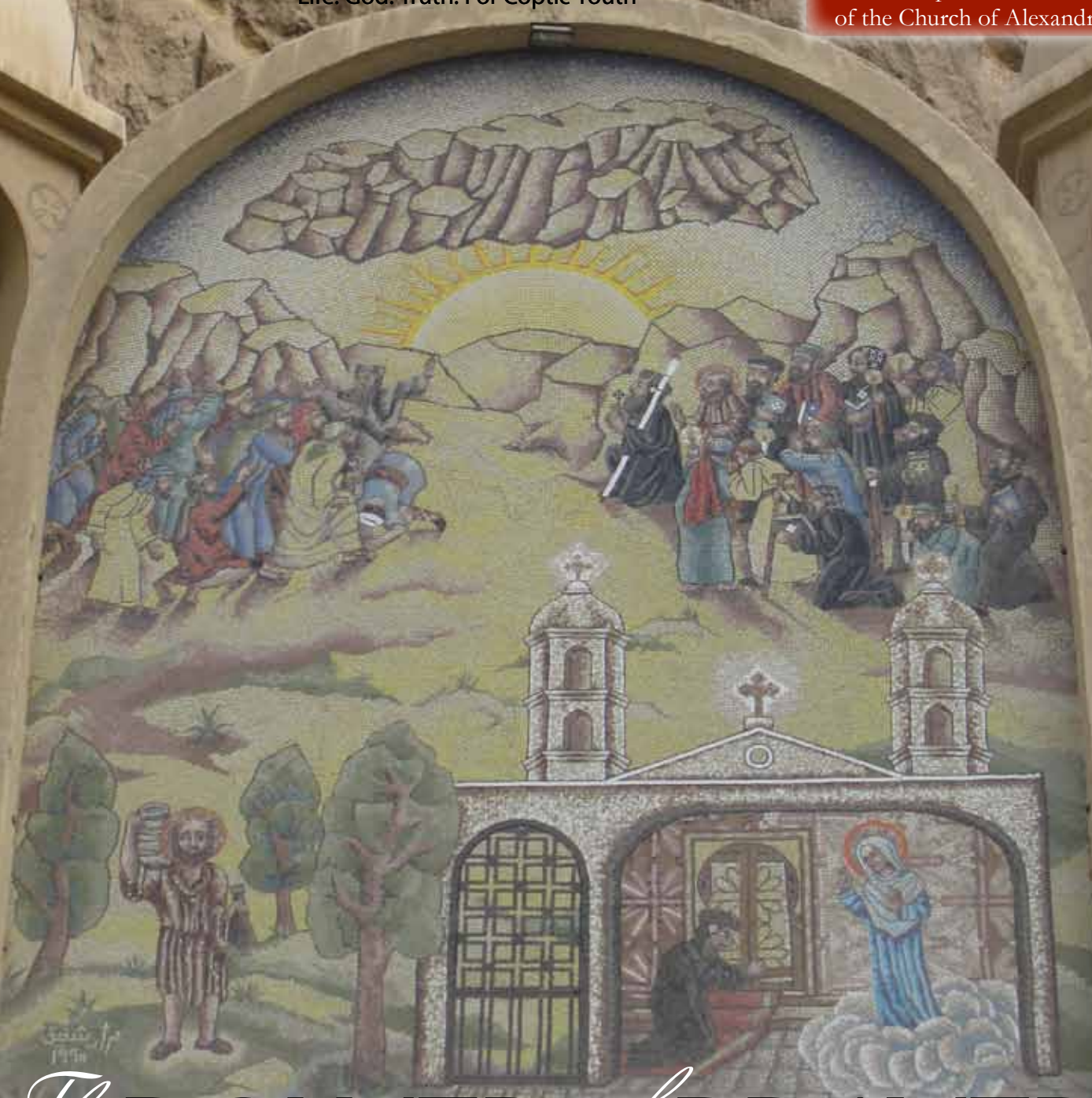


MIGHTY MAGAZINE MARROWS

Life. God. Truth. For Coptic Youth



We welcome
His Holiness
Pope Tawadros II,
118th Pope and Patriarch
of the Church of Alexandria



Fall 2012 Volume 11 No.4

The POWER of PRAYER

* Cover image from an icon located at the Moqattam mountain that was moved by the power of prayer, which this icon depicts

“But don’t you get bored praying the same thing over and over?” I asked my older brother. This was at a point when I felt that the prayers of the Liturgy were a set of rituals repeated every Sunday and every time a service is conducted - same words, same supplications, same moves, same songs and hymns, and same tones. They haven’t changed for many years!

I used to pray for things: passing exams, success in my job, healing from sickness, money when funds were short, finding the right person, and deliverance from problems. I got tired of asking over and over. I got tired of meeting God only to give Him my list of things I want or His list of things to do. I got tired of this Jesus-Mart drive-through. But God’s mercy and grace did not leave me there. He taught me what prayer actually is and how to pray.

To pray is to communicate with God, to connect with Him. To pray is to meet the Almighty and be in the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords. To pray is to stand in front of the throne of God. Praying is the time when God inclines His ears to what you have to say. Praying is pouring your heart in front of God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is you connecting with every person of the Holy Trinity: you talk and He listens. It is also when He talks and you have to listen. What an immense privilege!

Praying for materialistic things is fine. After all, He is our Father and Good Shepherd. But there is more to prayer than that. For instance, thanksgiving is a prayer. In fact, it is actually the beginning of every service we have in our Church. Praising and singing to the Lord are also very powerful prayers, as clearly portrayed in 2 Chronicles 5:11-

14, *“And it came to pass when the priests came out of the Most Holy Place...and the Levites who were the singers...stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets-indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord,*

and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: ‘For He is good, For His mercy endures forever;’ ...that the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.”

Did you ever thank God

for the roof that is above your head? Yes, there are people who do not have a home and who literally live in the streets. Did you ever thank God for the car you have and the money you use to buy gas? Do you thank Him for the parents you have, the husband or wife He gave you? For the children you have, or do not have? If you compare what you have with what is

lacking from others, you will find a list of many things for which to give thanks.

Other spiritual prayers are those for forgiveness like in Psalm 50. We pray for salvation, for deliverance from the enemy and his snares as in Psalm 31:15. We pray for others: the Church, her patriarch, for the sister churches, for the clergy,deacons

and all the servants, for those who bring gifts to the house of the Lord, for our assemblies and congregation, for the ruler of the country, for the travelers and for those in captivity, for the sick, for the poor, for the orphans and widows, and for the waters of the river and for the fruits of the earth. We pray for the whole world. One verse that touched me deeply about praying for others is what Samuel the prophet said to the people: *“Moreover, as for me, far it be from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you”* (1 Sam 12:23). He considered ceasing to pray for others a sin against the Lord! That taught me to pray for everyone, be they believers, non-believers, family, friends, or enemies.

Praying is the time to ask for guidance as did Abraham’s servant when he was assigned the task of finding a bride for

Isaac (Gen 24). You can ask for enlightenment as did Cornelius (Acts 10), for revelation as did David (1 Sam 23), and for the affirmation of God’s calling for you as did Gideon. Gideon asked the Lord to give him a sign of confirmation: a fleece of wool placed on the floor was to be wet and all the surrounding grounds to be dry. It was so. The next day the fleece was to be dry and the grounds to be wet. Again it was so (Judg 6:36-40).

All the above are supplications and requests, but prayer is also a time when God speaks to you, a time when He reveals Himself to you. He responded to Moses when Moses complained about sending him to deliver the Israelites (Ex 6:1-11). He brought Joshua out of his perplexity and cleared things up for him (Josh 7:6-15). He spoke

to Paul in the night by a vision (Acts 18: 9-10). He teaches His flock who He is (Is 43:13, 25 and Rev 1:10-11).

The most precious aspect of prayer is that it is the time when you connect with the Almighty God, our Father who is in Heaven, our redeemer, the lover of mankind, the true friend who sticks closer than a brother and the eternally good and faithful shepherd. If you ever feel that praying is just a repetition of words, know that you are not praying in the spirit. As our beloved H.H. Pope Shenouda III repeatedly said: “Every connection with God is a prayer, but not every prayer is a connection with God.”

By Mariam Maher

This Is Not a Jesus-Mart

TIDBITS FROM AROUND THE DIOCESE



SUSCOPTS proudly presents a new program focused on health, dietary tips, and total wellness:



CREAMY MACARONI BASHAMEL, buttery basboosa baked to perfection, and slow cooked meat that just melts in your mouth. It's the day after a period of fasting, and you're ready to consume all the food that your heart (and stomach) desires. We can't blame you. It's been a while; and we Egyptians seriously know how to cook.

But before you pick up those utensils and start shoveling food into your digestive tract once again, let's pause and think about a few things together.

- Have you ever considered that your physical well-being actually plays a huge role in your spiritual life?

- Maybe our Maker intended for us to have a healthy diet and to take care of our bodies?

God created our bodies as amazing machines meant to feed and aid our spiritual lives. Early Church Fathers have said that the body is actually the aid to the soul; they synergistically

work together.

The saying rings true that "you are what you eat." We know that is true both physically and spiritually, of course. This topic has been very heavy on our hearts lately and we feel that we need to address it as a Church. We need to educate ourselves on how to take care of our bodies (which will in turn take care of our minds and spirits) and we need to do this to set a precedent and example for the generations to come. We've been convicted by this truth, and would like to share what we've learned so far. We are committed to continue discovering along the journey of life. Furthermore, we have been gradually changing our own lifestyles and habits of eating and it has done tremendous things for our total health: mind, body, and spirit.

Through taking care of our bodies, we have learned even more about our Maker and how we were truly created to be with Him. We have learned how brilliant our Maker is by providing us with all the resources necessary for our bodies to function at full capacity – and He did so at the very inception of Creation! Our bodies functioning at

full capacity are meant to do one thing: glorify Him.

Together, we can help each other unlearn the eating habits that harm our bodies and to start fresh – to eat to live, rather than live to eat. That is the way our Lord designed it.

Our mission with the YAWhaYE program is to do just that. We look forward to sharing, learning, and discovering how to treat our bodies with respect, gain more energy for praise and worship through all that we do in our daily lives, and to improve our total wellness to glorify Him and His brilliant creation in man.

Sincerely,
the YAWhaYE team

If you have any suggestions for presentation topics or special subjects you may want to learn more about, please email us at yawhaYe@gmail.com with your suggestions, comments, and/or questions!

GOD'S WORK When you believe in His Words

An excerpt from a letter that came to one of the Diocese Priests after he gave a sermon on tithes



I hope to encourage change to those who wear the old (meaning they still have old ideas about tithing) and do not know the benefits of the new. I will say a word of truth. I was one who wore the old because of my lack of belief in

giving my tithes. I believed that my earnings were just enough to live on. My income was not increasing at all! I heard your words pertaining to tithing, Father. After your sermon, I said to myself; "I will make a deal with myself, I will try to give my tithes faithfully for about 6 months, if God does not intervene and do something with my income I will stop giving my tithes." I thought, "Why not kill two birds with one stone? Either my income will increase or I will stop giving my tithes."

I tried to wear the new (meaning I am trying something new). Sure

enough, my income increased, God blessed my tithes and it became truly three folds. He also opened new doors and places for me to make more business deals. Now I am wearing the new superb garments all because of your kindness and sharing of God's words, I got to know and witness God's work in my life.

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR GIVING ME THE ANSWER THAT CAME FROM YOUR MOUTH, TRULY IT PLEASED OUR HEARTS.



Q Faith & A

By George Bassilios

A person says ...

**I DON'T LIKE CHRISTIANS
AND I DON'T BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY
BECAUSE OF ALL THE ATROCITIES CHRISTIANS
HAVE COMMITTED THROUGHOUT THE AGES.**

Response ...

- St. Augustine said once: "Never judge a philosophy by its abuse." I likewise warn you not to judge a

religious system by its abuse.

"This same objection could very well be said about politics, but politics cannot be eliminated from society; we can only try to find the right political formula."¹ The real problem is not in politics, it is rather concealed in those who use politics for their own evil agenda. Likewise, the problem is not with Christianity, it is in those who have been given to their malignant passions and use Christianity as an umbrella for cover.

"Just because someone says they're a Christian does not mean they are one!"²

"On the other hand, atheists—throughout history—have killed many more in history than religious people have. Consider the following:

- Stalin, an atheist, was responsible for killing between 40 million and 100 million.

- Hitler killed 20 million people for their racial identity or personal beliefs.

- China's Mao Tse-Tung murdered between 40 million and 80

million.

- Vietnam's Pol Pot slaughtered over 2 million people in just 3 years.

These were all atheists in the 20th century alone.³

- "Focusing on the atrocities of the so-called Christians is a smoke screen to avoid the real issue."⁴ The real question ought to be whether Christianity coherently answers my deepest and existential questions in life.

- Lastly, the vast majority of Christians have far more positive achievements than negative influences, e.g. the institution of "countless hospitals, schools, colleges, orphanages, relief agencies, and charity agencies."⁵ No other religion in history compares to Christianity's altruism and positive influence throughout the years.

1. Anthony, Richard. "Objections to Christianity Answered." Ecclesia. n.d. <http://www.ecclesia.org/truth/objections.html> (accessed October 15, 2012).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Beckwith, F, and G Koukl. *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1998.

5. Ibid.



“It is True for You but Not for Me”

Debunking Moral Relativism

By George Bassilios

“No one has the right to tell me what is right and what is wrong”; “I have the right to do whatever I want, as long as I am not hurting anyone”; “This may be true for you but not for me.” These statements, underlying our culture’s mindset, have become the backbone of our moral system. This worldview, “Moral Relativism,” has become the default way of thinking today. It is the unofficial creed of our culture in America. But what is Moral Relativism? Are there any Moral Absolutes? Is morality defined by our culture? Is Moral Relativism logically sustainable? What about the dominating virtue of tolerance? Let us expound upon these questions and address them in order to assist those who seek the truth in an age of confusion.

MORAL RELATIVISM

Relativism begins with the presumption that there is no God, no transcendent agent imposing upon us a standard of right and wrong.

As a result, there is no objective right and wrong. Morality and truth depend upon the person and the circumstances. To say that you think something is right or wrong does not say anything about the essential action, only your feelings about that action. In summary, relativism is the belief that there are no objective moral values that transcend culture or the individual. This is why many people begin or end their moral judg-

ments with qualifying phrases such as, “It is only my personal opinion,” “Of course I am not judging anyone’s behavior,” or “If you think it is all right, that is okay, but I’m personally against it.”

MORAL ABSOLUTES

Morality is prescriptive (an “ought”), not merely descriptive (an “is”). Morality is an obligation, for which a person is accountable. An absolute moral obligation is:

- An objective (not subjective) moral duty — a duty for all persons.
- An eternal (not temporal) obligation — a duty at all times.
- A universal (not specific) obligation — a duty for all places.

If Relativism were true, then there must be something to which all things are relative, yet that thing is not relative itself. In other words, something has to be absolute before we can see that everything else is relative to it. That is the nature of relations; they exist between two or more things. Nothing can be relative by itself, and if everything else is relative, then no other relations are real. There has to be something which does not change by which we can measure the change in everything else.

Measurement is impossible without absolutes. Even moral relativists make such statements as, “The world is getting better (or worse).” But it is not possible to know it is getting “better” unless we know what is “best.” A less than perfect is only measurable against a perfect. Hence, all objective moral judgments imply an absolute moral standard by which they can be measured.

Moral absolutes are unavoidable.

Statements such as “You should never say never,” “You should always avoid using always,” are absolute moral statements. So, there is no way to avoid moral absolutes without affirming a moral absolute. Total moral relativism becomes self-refuting.

MORALITY AND CULTURE

Many argue that because of the varied moral codes amongst cultures, morality is deemed to be a “cultural construct.” However, a closer look reveals another picture. Apparent moral differences often represent *differences only in perception of the facts of the circumstance not a conflict in the values themselves*. For example, unjustified killing of human beings has been wrong in every culture at every time in history. What has changed is the concept of justification. Hitler justified killing Jews because he considered them subhuman. In the Hudson Bay tribes, children killed their own parents as an act of kindness instead of letting them live to what they saw as an unproductive old age.

Another example is the dispute over abortion. Much of the debate is a conflict about facts, not fundamental values. Those who are pro-life think abortion is wrong for it takes the life of an innocent human person without proper justification. In most cases, those favoring abortion agree that human persons are valuable. They disagree, though, on whether the unborn child is indeed an innocent person. Here the fundamental values are the same but there is a disagreement over the facts that influence the application of such values.

The belief that morality is a “social construct” fails for it wrongly assumes that each culture has a unique set of moral values. It also makes it impos-

sible to criticize another society’s practice, because there is no external standard by which this society is judged. Finally, it makes it impossible to practice moral reformation. If a society’s laws and cultural values are the ultimate standards of behavior, then the notion of moral improvement is nonsense. If cultural values are the highest possible law, then there is no way for those values to be better than what they are at any given moment. They can only be different.

LOGICAL INCONSISTENCIES

As we delve into the heart of Moral Relativism we discover that its tenets are built on sand (Mt 7:26). It cannot stand against the winds of truth and logic. Below are a few reasons that expose the incoherence and logical inconsistency of Moral Relativism:

RELATIVISTS CAN’T ACCUSE OTHERS OF WRONG-DOING

Relativism makes it impossible to criticize the behavior of others, because relativism ultimately denies such a thing as wrong-doing. If you believe that morality is a matter of personal opinion, then you surrender the possibility of making any moral judgments on anyone else’s actions. You can express your emotions, tastes, and personal preferences, but you can’t say others are wrong. Nor can you critique, praise, or fault them. It would be like trying to keep score in a game with no rules.



RELATIVISTS CAN’T COMPLAIN ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Relativism is inconsistent with the concept that true moral evil exists. For evil to exist, there must be some things that are objectively wrong: these things we call “evil.” Evil as a value judgment marks a departure from some standard of moral perfection. But if there is no standard, there is no departure. As C. S. Lewis has noted, a portrait is a good or bad likeness depending on how it compares with the perfect original. Relativism denies such a standard. C.S. Lewis noted: “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?”

RELATIVISTS CAN’T CLAIM ANYTHING IS UNFAIR OR UNJUST

Justice and fairness are two more concepts that make no sense in a world devoid of moral absolutes. The words themselves have no meaning. Both concepts dictate that people receive equal treatment based on an external standard of what is right. This outside standard, though, is the very thing denied by relativists. After all,

how can there be justice or fairness if there are no moral requirements to be just and fair? In relativism there are no rules, requirements, or demands.

RELATIVISTS CAN’T PRACTICE MORAL REFORM

With moral relativism, moral improvement or reform is impossible. Relativists can change their personal ethics, but they can never become better people. How can one get “better”? Moral reform implies an objective rule of conduct as the standard we shoot for. But this rule is exactly what relativists deny. If there is no better way, there can be no improvement. Further, there is no motivation to improve. Relativism destroys the moral impulse that compels people to rise above themselves because there is no “above” to rise to, ethically speaking. Why change our moral point of view if it serves our self-interest and feels good for the time being? In relativism, morals can change, but they can never improve.

RELATIVISTS CAN’T HOLD MEANINGFUL MORAL DISCUSSIONS

Relativism makes it impossible to discuss morality. Ethical discourse involves comparing the merits of one view with another to find which is best. But if morals are entirely relative and all views are equal, then no way of thinking is better than another. No moral position can be judged adequate or deficient, unreasonable, unacceptable, or even barbaric.

The only course of action truly consistent with moral relativism is complete silence. If they speak, they surrender their relativism. If they do not speak, they surrender their humanity. However, if the notion of moral discourse makes sense intuitively, then moral relativism must be false.

As we have seen, moral accountability, praise, blame, justice, fairness, moral improvement, and moral discourse (all

depend on some external moral absolute for its application. Relativism rejects the premise that such an absolute standard exists. If relativism is true, then we must dismiss these apparently universal moral concepts as pointless. If, on the other hand, we have good reason to believe these concepts are true, then some external, objective standard must exist.

WHAT ABOUT TOLERANCE?

To the relativist, tolerance means, “I ought to tolerate the moral opinions and behavior of others who disagree with me. I should not try to interfere with their opinions or behavior.”

We need to understand that tolerance ought to be accorded to the person. Whether his/her behavior or ideas should be tolerated is a completely different issue.

People can believe whatever they like and they usually have the liberty to express these beliefs. But, they may not behave as they like. Some behavior is considered immoral and/or a threat to the common good, and is therefore not tolerated, but rather, restricted by law.

Tolerating people should be distinguished from tolerating ideas.

Civic tolerance demands that all views should get an equal hearing and consideration not that all views have equal worth, merit, or truth.

Most of what passes for tolerance today is not tolerance at all, but rather intellectual cowardice. Those who hide behind the myth of neutrality are often afraid of intelligent engagement. Unwilling to be challenged by alternate points of view, they don’t engage contrary opinions or even consider them. It’s easier to say “you intolerant bigot” than to confront

the idea and either refute it or be changed by it.

CONCLUSION

Finally, Moral Relativism may give us the false sense of moral liberty but it ultimately rings empty. As one Harvard graduate stated in his commencement address: “The freedom of our day is the freedom to devote ourselves to any values we please, on the mere condition that we do not believe them to be true.”

The death of truth in our society has created a moral decay that has rooted itself in the fabric of our society.

The problem stems from the fundamental attitude of the human race, that we want to make the rules; we want to create and design our own options; we want to dictate our own terms. We want, if we may, to construct our own reality. We don’t want to be compelled to submit to a reality that lies beyond us.

May God grant us to remain steadfast and immovable (1 Cor 15:58) in the midst of this perverse and crooked generation, among whom we should shine as lights in the world (Phil 2:15). Glory be to His Name Forever.

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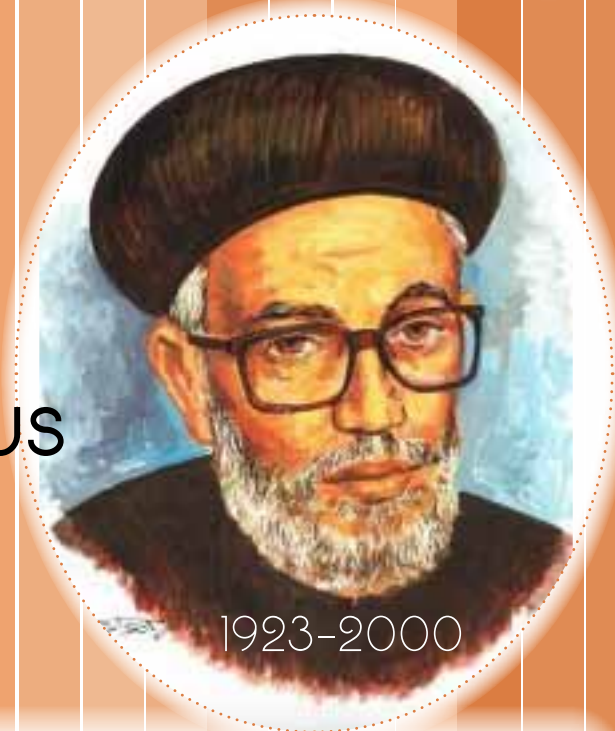
Pillars of our Time: Ordinary People Serving in Extraordinary Ways

MAKING AN IMPACT

Metropolitan Athanasius of Beni Suef

A Powerful Friend to the Poor and Weak

An Article by Myriam Fahim



Born AbdelMesih Bishara, of deep priestly roots, the late Metropolitan Athanasius has a very intriguing personality. He was known for his energetic fatherly love and special care for his flock's needs, especially in times of mourning and celebration. He had two strong targets in his service: intellectual/political, and social/domestic.

He was an intellectual—a profoundly educated man who shared and disseminated his gifts. He was a student, and thereafter, a professor in the Clerical College. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III commissioned him to lecture at the Clerical College in London. He studied the Holy Bible thirstily, and held a weekly Bible Discussion throughout the thirty-seven years in his diocese. He encouraged many to study abroad, sometimes personally helping fund their studies, and was the first to initiate an Annual Diocese Patristics Conference. He was an active member of the World Council of Churches and other inter-church organizations for thirty

years. He was ahead of his time.

As you can deduce from the late metropolitan's many activities, he was a man of dialogue. He fervently wished to reunite the different Christian denominations and worked on establishing an active dialogue with them. He also found ways to live peaceably with the ruling Muslim majority, which helped his diocese prosper and flourish.

It is well known that Bishop Athanasius loved the poorest of the poor people. He visited them in his diocese before setting foot in rich people's homes. Until his health failed him, he apparently tried to visit every one of his parishioners at least once every year!

His heart moved with love for the poor, seeing their needs, he established hospices, hospitals, medical facilities, senior citizen homes, nurseries, schools, and vocational training centers for marginalized people. In 1965, he founded the

Daughters of Saint Mary in Beni Suef with the blessings of Pope Kyrillos VI to help maintain and service these facilities. The deaconesses in this order are "serving nuns," as opposed to contemplative nuns. They practice monasticism but also help the poor, the sick, and the differently-abled. These sisters overcome social barriers and run several projects.

He went home on November 16, 2000 after struggling with cancer and several other illnesses. May his love of the poor and needy be remembered and rewarded.

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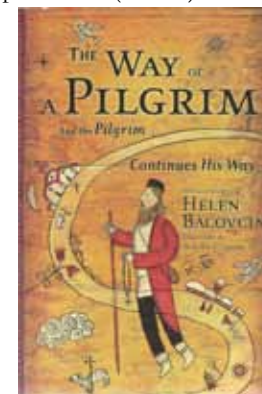
Prayer Where art thou?

By James Helmy

Prayer is, almost without debate, a rapidly deteriorating gift in the Church. The depth, zeal, and the earnest expectation with which God's saints of old took up this ancient practice can hardly be found among us presently. It was seen, among other things, as a weapon. Whenever the devil or any of the cares of this world assailed the soul, the Christian immediately unsheathed this powerful defense to disarm and dismember the enemy. But when the modern Christian unsheathes this indispensable weapon—when the fire of prayer cools and spiritual life deteriorates—the enemy finds opportunity for renewed attack. It is no exaggeration to say that God's army today is beset by an alarming sluggishness in prayer.

The rebuttal that one has religiously observed the minimum "requirements" prescribed by the Church will not stand. The outward posture one adopts during the Liturgy is not in itself prayer. The repetitive and endless Agpeya exercises which one fulfills night after night, omitting the proper spirit, cannot guarantee true prayer. Even all the hymnology and singing and music we employ in Church can be, and often is, executed routinely, and so add up to less than a minute's worth of prayer. There is a strange assumption about that, if we have endured a "service" that involves a pulsating of the vocals and a flickering of the eyes, then we have adequately done the job. It is enough to say that no exterior phenomena, without a corresponding interior devotion, can truly constitute real communion with God. We do not intend at all

to convey the idea that it is necessary to disparage outward forms in order to stress inward realities. Bending, kneeling, and uplifting the arms are very important indeed; but without a movement of the heart, they are mere "vain repetitions" (Mt 6:7).

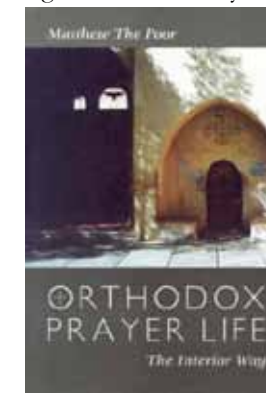


In *The Way of a Pilgrim*, a Russian believer is unsettled by the biblical injunction to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17) and sets out on a spiritual pilgrimage to discover how the command can possibly be fulfilled. This journey takes him through inhospitable terrains and hostile climates, where he encounters certain churches and monasteries along the way in his search for the answer to what ceaseless prayer means. He finally meets a stylite, an ascetic spiritual father in the Russian tradition, who teaches him the Jesus Prayer—"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." His search was finally over. The prayer's remarkable conciseness, along with its utter simplicity to all times and circumstances that made it possible for the pilgrim to pray without ceasing. He was instructed by the stylite to recite the prayer a few hundred times, then a few thousand times a day, until it became resonant with the beating of his heart. He no lon-

ger needed to mentally recite the phrase; it had moved from the mind to the heart, and each palpitation of that sacred organ silently uttered the chosen words.

There are two lessons this account communicates to us: firstly, that an incredible amount of time and effort are required to achieve a meaningful prayer life; and secondly, that the prayer life we achieve should go with us wherever we are and work in us in whatever we do. Essentially, the journey must begin. To sit around and wait for a quality life of prayer to jump-start itself is of no use. The journey is long, arduous, and full of challenges, but the destination—so the pilgrim finds—is well worth the trouble.

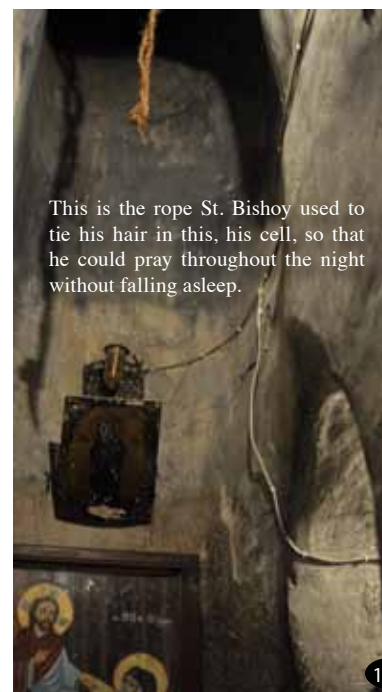
Our prayer life, indeed our entire spiritual life, might forever resemble a throbbing chrysalis waiting for the release of the beautiful winged creature. The novice in prayer—such as the Russian man—should never be put off by the struggle. There is a recurring stage in spiritual life which many people identify as an enemy and desire to flee once they find its dreary gaze fixed on them: spiritual dryness. A person, especially someone still young in the faith, stands with upraised eyes to commune with his God, and finds a perplexing silence. Outwardly, there is no sound, inwardly no movement. "What am I doing here?" he frankly asks.



"But spiritual dryness," responds the classic book *Orthodox Prayer Life*, "is not a sign of any kind of failure in a healthy relationship with God... [It] is a food

somewhat hard to digest but it is very nourishing... [It] does not take away the power to pray or to persist in prayer. It only deprives one of the fruit of solace one may have relied on in prayer... The best counsel at this time is to accept spiritual dryness as a call to humility and prayer" (pp 235-6).

Finally, perhaps the ultimate reason why prayer is vanishing from our lives is that we have lost confidence in its efficacy. Does God really answer prayer? Can I really ask for something very unusual and receive it? It all depends on one's attitude. Christ Himself made a quite astonishing statement: "Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (Jn 14:13). Of course, if I ask for the immediate knowledge of a foreign language, or the immediate ability to win marathons, or some other strange self-serving request, I will not receive it, because I ask amiss. But once the mind is tuned to God's own mind, and the will is trained to submit to His perfect will, and the patience is disciplined to wait for His perfect timing, then the most good and acceptable prayers spring from the heart. At that point we may confidently say yes, even the most extraordinary requests will be granted.



This is the rope St. Bishoy used to tie his hair in this, his cell, so that he could pray throughout the night without falling asleep.



H.G. Bishop Youssef

Prayer ENIGMATIC OF THE EAST

People believe prayer is an “exercise of faith” to be performed when there is time, at times of dire need, if there is a place for it in our schedule; or is it just an activity pertaining to the Divine Liturgy? Have you noticed that in the Holy Bible there is no mention of prayers offered by the corrupt, the angry, the adulterer, the murderer, and those that shed the precious blood of the saints? At some point, a faithful Christian must come to the actual realization that those full of strength, impregnated with wisdom, singing joyful hymns—are the ones who prayed.

Prayer is an exercise of patience, discipline, and faith. Prayer offers communion with God. Entreaty in prayer affords the earthly Christian a mysterious, unfathomable, and often difficult to comprehend communion with God that can be undertaken at any time and in the midst of any trial. While the qualities of our prayers are difficult to measure and the responses to our prayers often

difficult to gauge immediately, there is an undeniable need within each faithful Christian to pray and communicate with our Lord Jesus Christ.

As early as the first Holy Book of the Pentateuch, we are taught the need to pray:

“And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD” (Genesis 4:26).

Why was it important for Seth, the son of Adam and Eve, to call upon the name of the Lord? We most assuredly know that Cain his brother did not...

“And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls” (Joel 2:32).

How important is our prayer life? Did people in biblical times talk to God and can we be sure their prayers were ever answered? The Lord Jesus Christ’s genealogy is traced through Seth to Adam, showing that the true God became incarnate as true Man in order to acknowledge all

those who called upon His Holy name. Therefore, we can be certain that prayer is communication with God, the path to salvation. Therefore, it should not be entered into lightly and irreverently. It can be acknowledged with all certainty that prayers were answered according to the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Biblical beginnings and throughout the Old Testament, it was firmly established that true believers spoke to God through their prayers AND HE ANSWERED THEM.

Many more examples of prayer were addressed in the Holy Bible. Many varied forms of communication with God are addressed in the Holy Bible, happily through praises and thankfulness, bitterly through complaint, repentantly through confession, and pleadingly through petitions on behalf of the faithful believers and others.

“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name” (Psalm 100:4).

This Holy Psalm of the Prophet David teaches us we need to spend quality time in prayer. Not only individual prayer is called for in the Holy Bible but group prayer as well. Group prayer was an encouraging invitation to gather and spend time in worshipping the Lord. Following the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the disciples spread the Holy Gospel. Churches were first formed in the homes of Christians and later on in church buildings set apart for group prayer and worship emphasizing through the ages

time and again the importance of prayer.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself gave specific reference to prayer. He instructed and modeled prayer...

“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” (Matthew 6:9-13).

While the importance of prayer has been indisputably established, many questions often arise related to our Coptic Orthodox discipline of praying toward the East. Many questions often arise, such as “Is this a way of trying to be set apart from other religions?” or “Why does the Coptic Church always have to be different?”

My question to you is: are we actually different or are we the same and unchanged?

The Ante-Nicene Fathers, for example, St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) Egypt; Tertullian (c. 160-230) from Carthage, North Africa; Lactantius (c. 250-325) from Rome who lived in France; and Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) originating from Samaria all asserted that one must pray facing the East. This was the exact practice and belief of the early Christians. Not a mimicked worship stance taken from the pagans, but praying toward the East was a necessitated part of worship.

“Corresponding to the manner of the sun’s rising, prayers are made looking towards the sunrise, in the East” (St. Clement of Alexandria c. 195).

Perhaps because the sun rises in the East marking the beginning of the newness of a day and time, that wisdom was associated with the East in biblical times; also possibly due to the more advanced civilizations east of the Holy Land.

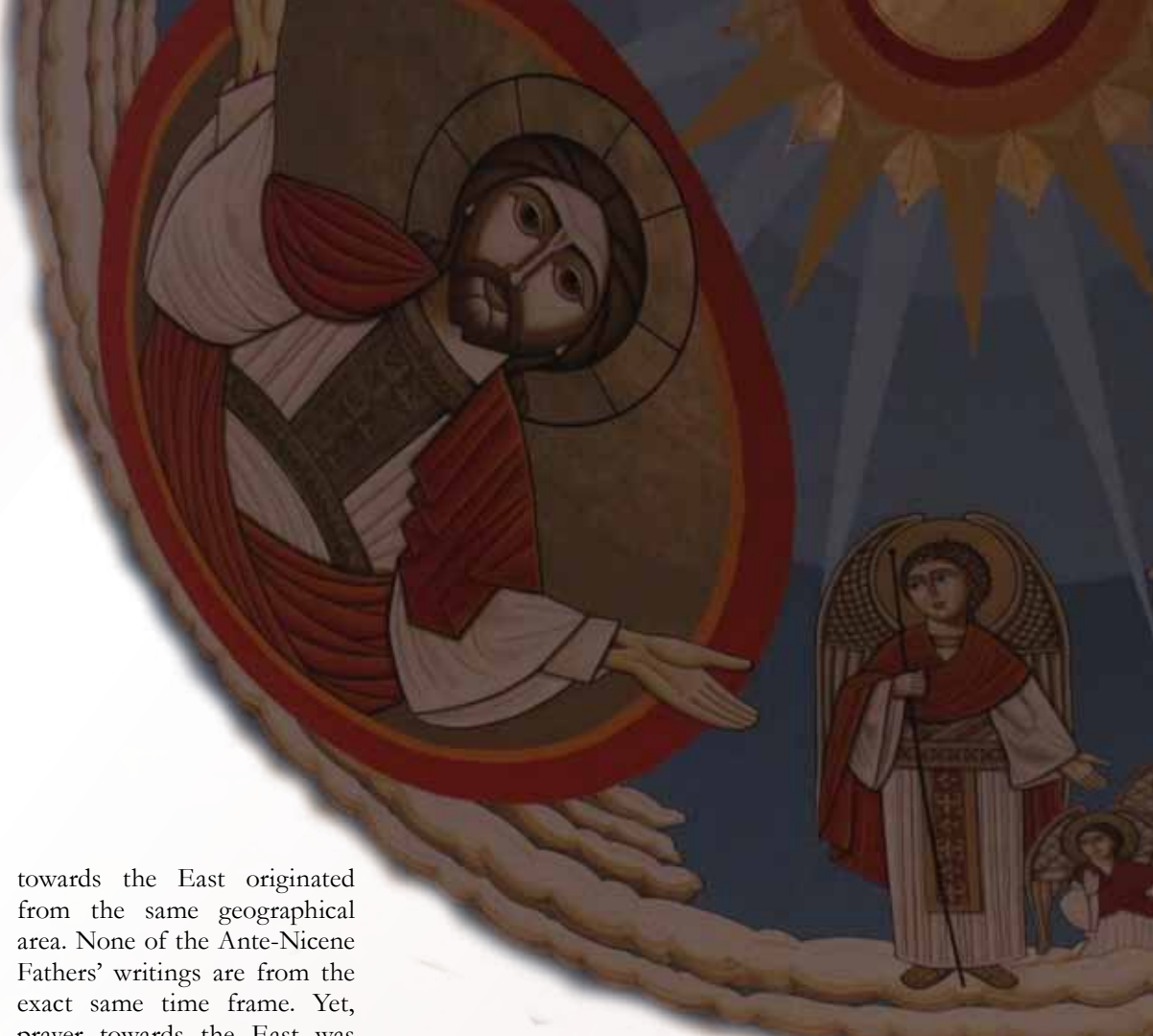
“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem” (Matthew 2:1).

Lactantius, an Ante-Nicene father, emphasized the East as the “Fountain of light and Enlightener of all things”. He also established two parts of the earth that are opposite to one another, and of a different character.

“I speak of the East and of a different character. I speak of the East and the west. Of these, the East is assigned to God, for He Himself is the Fountain of light and the Enlightener of all things. Furthermore, He makes us rise to eternal life... However, the west is ascribed to that disturbed and depraved mind, for it conceals the light. It always brings on darkness, and it makes men die and perish in their sins” (Lactantius c. 304-313).

Just as the Ante-Nicene fathers helped to interpret the teachings of the pre-Nicene era, most biblical scholars agree that they faithfully passed along the instruction that the apostles had taught to the Church. To be sure, if it was important enough to be written about by four major Ante-Nicene Fathers, it must be a substantiated affirmed practice of Church prayer.

After closer examination the reader will note that none of the writers upholding prayer



towards the East originated from the same geographical area. None of the Ante-Nicene Fathers’ writings are from the exact same time frame. Yet, prayer towards the East was such an important belief that all four specifically addressed it as a “rule of prayer”. So, is the Coptic Orthodox Church different or is it the same and consistent with the Early Church teachings that originated from the apostles themselves?

So strong must this belief and “rule of prayer” have been, that not only did early Christians faithfully and diligently carry it out, but those outside Christian beliefs took notice of the Christian stance toward the East...

“Others...believe that the sun is our god. The idea no doubt has originated from our being known to turn to the east in prayer” (Tertullian c. 197).

Again the pre-Nicene early Christians founded all their beliefs on Holy Scripture. There were no hundreds of written texts on interpretations, no radio commentaries, no internet

searches, and no multiple theological colleges to attend. Early Christians often quoted Holy Scripture from memory. Simply, and at the time, the early missionaries spread the Holy Gospel, the only reliable source for their fundamental beliefs was the Holy Scripture. It then comes as no surprise that the Apostolic Constitution addressed the East...

“Let the building be long, with its head to the East, with its vestries on both sides at the East end—so it will be like a ship” (Apostolic Constitution c. 390).

Earthly life can be complicated, with many complex problems, and be filled with adversities. Many of the ancient Church fathers were prepared for persecution because of prayer. Nehemiah was prepared to start all over in the reconstruction and rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem through prayer, St.

Stephen was prepared for death through his prayer, and the Lord Jesus Christ endured on the Holy Cross through prayer.

The Holy Scriptures says, “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days” (Daniel 6:10).

Prayer helps us make the most of our earthly life, look at the disadvantages to see opportunities, and repent but not repeat.

“His name shall rise up above the sun. And again, Zechariah says, ‘His name is the East.’” (Justin Martyr c.160).

May we all look toward the mysterious and miraculous East in spiritual seeking.

Thy Will Be Done

By Evraam Gorgy

Almost all Christians know the verse “Thy will be done” by heart; we say it every time we recite the Lord’s Prayer. During the Sermon on the Mount, Christ taught us how to pray, and then He concluded, “In this manner, therefore, pray” (Mt 6:9-13), in which He delivered the Lord’s Prayer. The ‘Our Father’ prayer is called the Lord’s Prayer because Christ Himself commanded us to say it each time we stand up for prayer. For this reason, in the Coptic Church, we say it at the beginning and end of every Church service, in accordance to Christ’s commandment. Tra-

dition dictates that Christians should recite this prayer at least 7 times a day.

When we sincerely say, “Thy will be done” we, we ask God to put into effect His divine purpose. We entreat God to help us make a decision, to show us the way. Another interpretation for this verse would be that we acknowledge that we are willingly submitting our will and lives to God’s reason, which we believe will always be good. Evidently, this is how Christ wants us to live; to submit our lives to Him.

We, in all humility, acknowledge that we want to be led by the will of God. Thus, saying “Thy will be done” is a sign of humility, which is a great virtue. The humble person is never abandoned or deceived since it is impossible for someone that is led by the will of God to be deceived. The Psalmist states, “Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever” (Ps 125:1). Also, those who trust in the will of God are never disappointed or angry if their will is not done. Many times we unhappily think, “Things are not going according to plan,” when circumstances change, but still we must trust that “Thy will be done.”

God’s purpose is concealed from us, and it might or might not be revealed or understood. St. Paul teaches in Romans 11:33: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.” God might use ways that are unfamiliar to us, perhaps to bring us back to Him if we wander away. He might test us to reveal our weaknesses. The will of God is sometimes felt in afflictions, like in cases of being born with a disability, living under persecution, growing up in a troubled family, etc. In such cases, one cannot understand the will of God. Nonetheless, we know and trust that He is

merciful and the lover of mankind. We believe that there is an age to come and those who have been suffering here on earth will receive their reward in heaven. In the end, it is the will of God and everything is in His hands.

God had given us the gift of free-will, meaning that we have the full freedom to choose whether or not we follow His will. In an affirmation to our free-will, God proclaimed, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.” (Deut 30:19). However, many times, intentionally or not, our free will stands in crossroads with the will of God. What we want is not what God wants for us. Every time we oppose the will of God, we fall into sin. In fact, the fall of humanity represented in Adam and Eve is essentially the story of misusing the gift of free-will. Man will never have peace or tranquility if he is opposing the will of God. Opposing the will of God is foolishness.

But why does our will sometimes oppose that of God’s? One of the reasons is being spiritually immature or lacking spiritual growth. Like a child who cannot understand his/her parent’s instruction, the lack of spiritual growth makes us short-sighted, unable to clearly understand God’s commandments. Understanding the commandments of God is essential in our relationship with Him. In Compline (the 12th hour prayer), we pray, “Make me to understand your commandments.”

The way the saints use their free will is different. The Holy Theotokos was very submissive to the will of God; in the Annunciation, she replied to the Archangel Gabriel saying, “let it be according to your word” (Lk 1:38). The Holy Virgin’s re-

sponse shows that she had the full freedom to accept God’s Gift. Her free will, however, was completely attuned to the will of God. The will of the saints and angels is in complete coherence with the will of God. Scripture witnesses for the angels saying, “Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word” (Ps 103:20). Once the angels hear the will of God, they immediately carry it out, as do the saints.

While we know and believe that the will of God is ultimately our salvation, yet, many times this process can hardly be comprehended. In other words, our lives can go through many unexpected changes that in the end will fulfill our salvation (if we stay faithful to the will of God). However, the will of God is not a mere plan for our lives that God will execute all by Himself while we sit idly by. God the Father wants us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to both submit our lives to Him and understand His commandments.

What if we want to have the will of God in a written form? What are the outlines of His will? Here, the will of God is simply keeping His commandments. When Scripture explains the will of God, it often presents it with a commandment and also a promise of eternal life. To name a few examples: St. Paul teaches: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess 4:3), and, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess 5:18). St. John the Theologian instructs that the will of God is not to love the world and its lusts: “And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 Jn 2:17). May God help us to fulfill His commandments, and show to us His ways.

Hannah, the Mother of Samuel



By Mareya Naguib

As a child grows up in the Coptic Church, he/she is taught many skills to fight the devil, as well as to communicate with God. One of those important skills is called “prayer.” Our mother Church has always taught us to pray unceasingly, and that prayer is the most important means of communication with our Lord Jesus Christ. We also have learned from our desert fathers and mothers that prayer is the only tool to fight temptations and to make our supplications known unto God. St. Ephraim the Syrian says that, “He who neglects prayer and thinks that there is another door for repentance is deceived by the devils.” So, we see that prayer is a spiritual weapon that God provides us with to fight against temptation, without which we are crushed.

God also taught us that whenever we need anything, we should simply lift up our eyes unto heaven and pray with

an open heart. If God sees our request fitting according to His Will, He has promised us that whatever “[we] ask in prayer, [we] will receive, if [we] have faith.” (Mt 21:22). God is so kind to His children that He reminds us that His eyes are “toward the righteous and His ears are open to their cry” (Ps 34:15). This is exactly what happened with Hannah, the mother of Samuel.

Hannah is a wonderful example who teaches us how to send up powerful prayers to God. Hannah was married to Elkanah, but was barren for many years. However, she and her husband were faithful to God and travelled to the tabernacle every year to worship God and to offer Him a sacrifice. Even though Hannah was barren, she truly loved God will all her heart and was thankful for all the blessings that God provided her in her life. The Bible tells us that she was so intense in her prayers and requests to God that Eli the priest thought that she was drunk, since he ob-

The Power of a Woman’s Prayer

served her lips moving with no words coming out, but, “Hannah answered and said, ‘No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord’” (1 Sam 1:15).

Hannah “begged God for one son so she could dedicate him to the Lord and he would be fit to serve in the tabernacle” (Bishop Youssef). When God answered Hannah’s prayer, her thankful soul responded with words of praise that were filled with an abundance of love for God, in which she said, “My heart rejoice in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.” (1 Sam 2:1). God listened to the fervent prayers and cries for a child that she lifted up to Him day and night, and God did not take away from her the blessing of being a mother. Because she loved God so much, and gave Samuel to the tabernacle, God blessed her with five more children after Samuel.

Women are naturally known to be emotional, which can aid them in building intimate relationships with Christ. God also respects a righteous woman’s requests and gives His ears to her just like He did with His beloved mother, St. Mary, in the wedding at Cana of Galilee. When a woman dedicates her life to God fully and is faithful to Him, He showers her with many blessings and gives her more than what she can ask or even understand. God loves those who pray to Him with an open heart and love Him from a pure heart. A woman’s powerful prayers can change God’s plans, and He will bless her with many heavenly and earthly rewards.

Work Cited

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Oh, My God!

Prayer, Power in Itself

Joseph Ghebrial

So, here you are on a beautiful clear sunny day driving home from work, making plans with your loved ones on the cell phone. The drive home from work has become such a routine that you don't bother thinking about that call while you're driving; it's as if the car just almost drives itself home. In a single second, a car up front has stopped suddenly for whatever reason and has caused a cascade of all the cars in front of yours to also stop suddenly, yet you're still not aware because that phone call is more interesting. However, God has other plans for you today than for you to recklessly get into another car accident, making this your third this year. So He allows you to quickly look up and take notice. "Oh, My GOD!!!" is what you scream out as you guide the car to a screeching halt inches away from mass destruction and financial ruin. This is clearly an example of God's love, patience, and guidance for us, BUT it is also an example of praying to GOD. Yes, even though it was yelled or screamed out in a state of panic or despair, "Oh, My GOD!" is a prayer, and a powerful one at that, I might add. It is a prayer in the purest fashion and comes from the realization that a person's humanity has little to no control or power over the problem or danger taking form. It's as powerful as making the

sign of the Cross, which our Church Fathers used to do before they were martyred.

Powerful prayers are not powerful because someone has more wealth or fortune, nor are they powerful because the person performing the prayer is physically glamorous, fit, or highly ranked in society. What makes a powerful prayer is simply a pure heart that is eagerly seeking more purity, humility, honesty, love, and God's ears. I say God's ears because GOD is very real! He may not be physically here to be touched, hugged, and adored, but He is here and extremely real. Therefore, we need to pray with His glorious image in our hearts and minds. Additionally, God has conveniently given us blessings to pray wherever and whenever, just to hear our voices. If we cannot find the time to face East, kneel down, or pray the Agpeya (as we should daily, of course), then He will accept the occasional "Hello my Father, I'm doing x-y-z today and I..." After all, He is our Dad and our everything, so He understands that our lives can get a bit hectic.

More important to understand is that the power of prayer is not the result of the person praying. Rather, the power resides in God, to whom we are praying. 1 John 5:14-15 tells us, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He

hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." No matter the person praying, the passion behind the prayer, or the purpose of the prayer, God answers prayers that are in agreement with His will. His answers are not always yes, but are always in our best interest. When we pray passionately and purposefully, according to God's will, God responds powerfully! Our prayers being answered is not based on the eloquence of the words. We don't have to use certain words or phrases to get God to answer our prayers. In fact, Jesus rebukes those who pray using repetitions, "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him." (Mt 6:7-8).

I have been told many times that God loves children and mothers and that He holds a very special place in His Heart for them. Their prayers are very special to Him and He hears them well. Their prayers are special because they are pure, honest, unbiased, and full of humility. A mother's prayers are extremely powerful because her whole life and all her prayers are for the sake of others, for her home, her children, and her family. A mother's entire goal in life is to see her family's wellbeing and future full of nourishment, peace, and

protection. This can also be seen in the simplest of primate animals all over the globe. And, of course, children are most favored by God because they offer the most pure-hearted prayers, without expecting secondary gains. Their hearts are open.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us the Lord's Prayer as a model prayer, and He, Himself, often went off to pray, setting an example for us to do the same. In Matthew 14:23, it says, "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there." If He needed to go off and pray, how much more do we need

to do likewise? Praying should not be something we do out of duty and routine. Prayer is talking and listening to our loving, all knowing, heavenly Father. Therefore, the Bible is full of accounts describing the power of prayer in various situations. The power of prayer has overcome enemies (Ps 6:9-10), conquered death (2 Kin 4:3-36), brought healing (Jam 5:14-15), and defeated demons (Mk 9:29). God, through

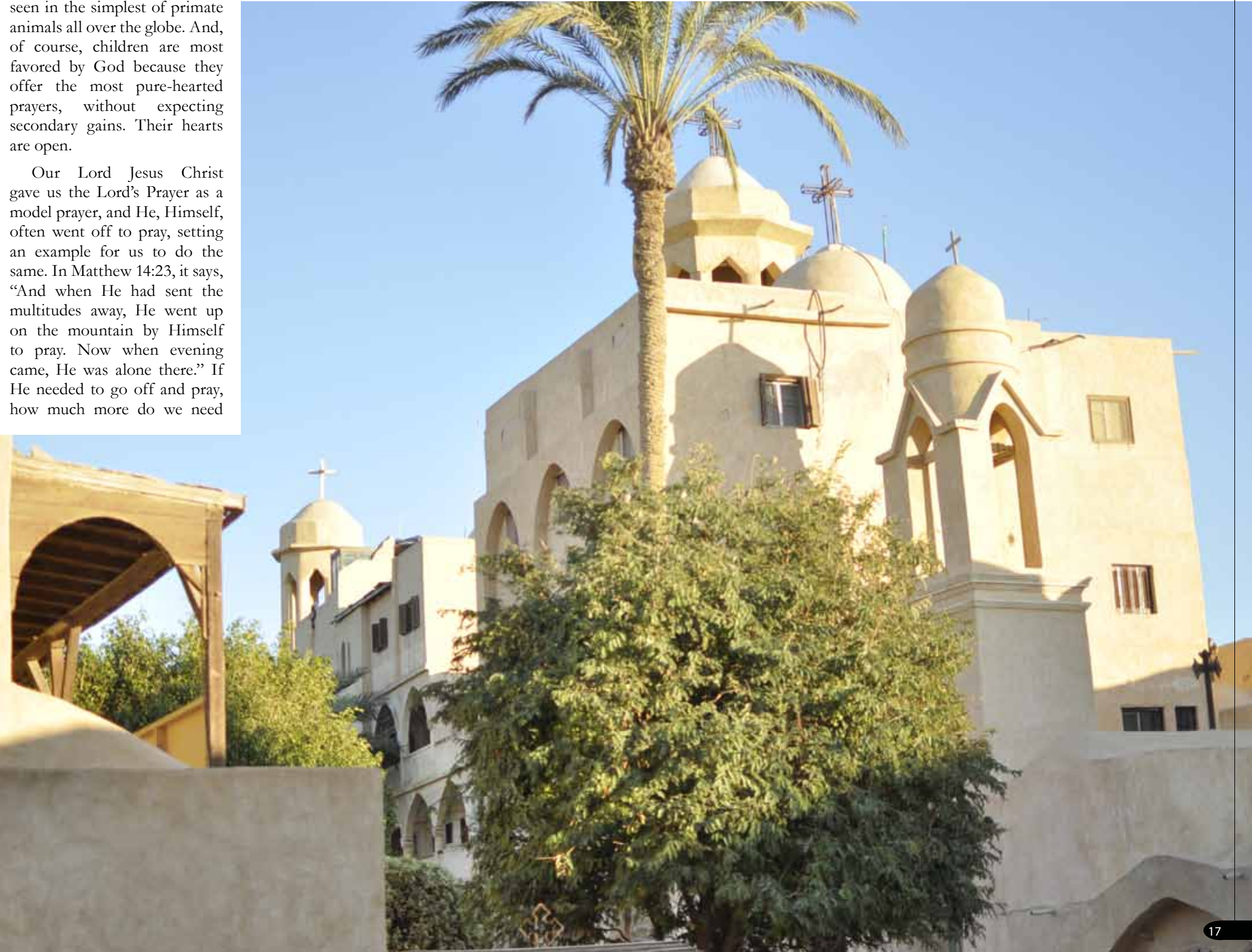
prayer, opens eyes, changes hearts, heals wounds, and grants wisdom (Jam 1:5). The Epistle of St. James tells us to pray for wisdom when we don't know what to do (Jam 1:5). In Philippians 4:6-7, prayer is connected with receiving God's peace. In Ephesians 6:18, prayer is a very important part of battling the forces of evil. We are also told to pray for those in authority over us (1 Tim 2:1-2). In both the Old and New

Testament, we experience the results of prayer.

The power of prayer should never be underestimated, because it draws on the glory and might of the infinitely powerful God of the universe! If you need an example of a prayer, read Matthew 6:9-13, known as the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is not a prayer we are supposed to memorize and simply recite to God. It is only an example of how to pray

and the things that should go into a prayer---worship, trust in God, requests, confession, protection, etc. Pray for these kinds of things, but speak to God using your own words.

The enemy of prayer is pride, greed, carelessness, and self-assurance. Prayer shows our dependence on God, His power, and His wisdom. Prayer is powerful and so important for our survival.





From a Monastic's Journal

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:8-11).

While Herod, the fox, sank into deep sleep, drowning in his desires, and while the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees were lost in their false masquerade, deceit, and deception, relying on their knowledge and status, while both these and those were drowning in false hopes of dreams of this vain life, we find in the vast bitter frost, shepherds watching over their sheep—alert, attentive, and meditating on the calm, enchanting, and fascinating nature with no distraction, but the sole concern of defending the sheep if a wolf attacks. Nothing is before them but the open, blue sky; in it they meditate and glorify the Creator for His awesome gifts.

These poor, watchful men were worthy to be the first preachers of the birth of the hope of Israel, of whose coming the prophets foretold hundreds of years earlier. The Israelites were anxiously awaiting their king and savior on burning coals, but to those poor, simple shepherds alone, the angel of the Lord appeared to bring the good news, assuring them not to fear, but to rejoice exceedingly since the days are fulfilled and the awaited hope of Israel has arrived to redeem and save His people, bringing light to their darkness. What joy and re-

joicing to the souls imprisoned by the enemy, once the news reached them that they will be freed at the coming of the Savior.

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom 10:15). Truly, how beautiful are those alert, watchful shepherds, who alone were worthy of this awesome grace. In the simple, innocent, tranquil souls that have no cravings for the world or extravagance, yes, to the poor in spirit was assurance not to fear. Yes, to them also is worthiness to see visions of the spirit, because "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him" (Ps 25:14). Blessed are the shepherds who sacrifice themselves for the flock, watching as if they will give an account on Judgment Day. Let them not think that their labor is in vain in the Lord, but they will be given by the Babe of Bethlehem the freedom not to fear, no matter how destitute their circumstance seems. Seemingly without a protecting wall and surrounded by enemies, they are surrounded by an invisible cloud of witnesses.

"Then the king said to me, 'What do you request?' So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight'" (Neh 2:4-5). This is the way of God's people: their life is but unbroken connection with their God. From Him they find their help, courage, and answered requests. They live continually in His presence (although He is close to each one of us). "Elijah said, 'As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand'" (1 Kin 18:15), and St. Paul said during his defense, "It is my prayer to God (Act 26:29 BBE), while he was engaged in a heat-

THE POWER OF PRAYER

A Matter of the Heart

ed debate and discussion. How much more the monastics, who are specialized for this internal deep work? How will their souls lift up and be released of the body's heaviness, soaring with Christ to be with Him always?

"Then the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: 'I have heard your prayer'" (2 Chr 7:12). How sweet it is when the Lord hears our prayers! This is the wish of every creature on earth; it is the goal of each worshipper running after perfection; it is a sure sign of intimacy between the Father and His son who walks according to His will and pleasure.

How can a monastic reach this, for his prayer to be heard by the Lord? This is impossible, except in completing the commandments of the Lord, because, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jam 5:16). How can we become righteous, being sinners who have no righteousness of our own? Yes, we can do all things through Christ Jesus, because He is our righteousness, and in Him is the perfection to our weakness. Therefore, we direly need to cling to Him and adhere to Him to the end, to be established in Him, and He in us. Thus, we will be able to bear the fruits of the Spirit, being firmly rooted and established in the grapevine, otherwise each of us will be as a withered branch that is cut off.

As to how we should pray, this is truly great, because not everyone who stands and re-

cites many or few words with the mouth has prayed. Prayer comes through many ways, various exercises, limits, and abilities, because it is food for the soul. It is also among the gifts of the Spirit. Let us ask God to give us true spiritual prayer that He not only hears, but also answers, based on His will. As to the Lord's hearing, He hears the heavens and sighs before the words, because He searches the hearts and tests the minds (Jer 17:10). As for how we can, through His grace, develop intimacy with Him, so that He answers our prayer, this is truly great: "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain" (Jam 5:17), and heaven answered his prayer. Oh, that my hand had the strength to write much more on this issue, but the beginning and the end is with the Almighty. His is the glory in His Church always, forgiving sins and accepting pure prayers, as all come to Him.

"Then the priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, to heaven" (2 Chr 30:27). "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God" (Act 10:4). "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God" (Act 10:31). "Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: 'I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears'" (Is 38:1-5-6). "I have surely seen the oppression of My people... and have heard their cry... Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me" (Ex 3:7-9).

How delightful it is for the Lord to hear our voices and for our prayers to come into His Holy! This is the heart's delight of those who love Him, who labor lifelong to fulfill His holy commandments, living before Him in uprightness of heart and purity of soul, if perhaps He will deign and accept their heaves and sighs, loosening their bonds from their visible and invisible enemies, so that they praise Him unceasingly with the praise of joy and elation. Then, when they call, He will answer. He remains with them in the difficult day, rescues and saves them, because they relied on Him. Blessed is our beloved God, Jesus the Savior of our souls, who deigned to come down from the height of His heaven to redeem us and unite us in His noble person.

Now I ask myself, is my prayer heard, and does it enter into His holy habitation? Or is it simply out of routine? If so, what would cleanse and purify it so that it becomes acceptable before Him? There is nothing that God takes note to look into, more than a person's heart, because, as it is the source of the bodily life, likewise, in the spiritual sense, it is the source of the soul's life, "For out of it spring the issues of life" (Pro 4:23). Let not a person say, I am a lay person, a monk, a priest, or a bishop. God does not look to all this, as humans do, for "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind" (Jer 17:10), knowing the depths. Yes, if the pastoral ranks, in their basis, in the house of God, are the model of spiritual excellence, how much more when monasti-

cism is specialization and consecration of the entire life for God?

I am terrified as a monk and a priest who is called by name and not by works, that what I put on would be a cause for my condemnation. People assume more of me, while God judges me otherwise. This is as St. Isaac advises: deeds save, even if without the image or the title.

Let us attend to purifying our hearts and cleansing our souls from the pains of the old man, with the Lord's help, so that the work of the Holy Spirit is renewed in us, as He mightily did on Pentecost. Let our souls be a dwelling place for Him, to intercede for us with inexpressible birth pangs, and from this tiny holy dwelling (our souls). "You are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you" (1 Cor 3:16). These are our prayers ascending as the scent of rich incense to the holy dwelling of our awesome God in the highest heavens. The Lord smells them and accepts us, receives our requests and answers them; He being the goal of our joy and soul's delight.

Take caution walking on the road, not to be enslaved to the laws and stumble attempting to fulfill them in the commandment of our beloved Christ. How many people lost the way when they turned the means into an end, "To the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor 1:23)? May the Lord shield us from right-handed attacks; the simple way is sure. All glory to our God, forever.



Bishop Angaelos is the General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom.

H.G. Bishop Angaelos explains ΠΑΠΑ Pope The Papal Selection Process



When this process was formulated in 1957, there were only a handful of these parishes, but they now number in the hundreds, serving between ten and fifteen percent of Coptic Orthodox Christians globally.

that this process leads up to the Altar Ballot at the final stage, through which God will choose the right shepherd for us.

2. The electoral process

The process for electing the new pope was formulated by the Coptic Orthodox Church and made law by the Egyptian Parliament, creating the 1957 Statute. This statute requires that within seven days of the passing of the Pope, the most senior metropolitan of the Holy Synod calls a meeting of the Holy Synod in order to elect an Interim Patriarch. HE Metropolitan Mikhaïl of Assiut, the most senior metropolitan, delegated HE Metropolitan Pakhomios to convene the meeting. At that joint meeting of the Holy Synod and the General Lay Council of 22 March 2012, HE Metropolitan Pakhomios was unanimously voted as Interim Patriarch.

At the same meeting, the Nominations Committee was appointed by the Holy Synod, and its role is to receive and process nominations for Papacy from the Holy Synod and the General Lay Council. This Committee comprises eighteen members in total, nine from the Holy Synod and nine from the General Lay Council.

Out of respect for the memory of our departed father His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and the feelings of the Church in general, the Holy Synod unanimously decided that it would not make or receive nominations until the forty-day memorial period for His Holiness was concluded on 26 April 2012. This period has now come to an end, and nomina-

tions are being received by the Nominations Committee.

Candidates, who must be at least forty years of age and have been in monasticism for at least 15 years, can be nominated by either six members of the Holy Synod or twelve members of the General Lay Council. Nominations are accepted by the Nominations Committee for up to sixty days after the departure of the late Pope.

The Nominations Committee considers all nominations and applies the criteria previously decided by the Holy Synod to all nominees. This committee accordingly undertakes an elimination process until a final list of candidates is determined. These names are then publicly announced and posted for a fifteen-day period, during which time challenges by eligible voters may be presented to the Nominations Challenges Committee. This committee comprises three members of the Holy Synod and two members of the General Lay Council.

There is a thirty-day period for the processing of objections and appeals against those objections, after which the ruling of this committee is final and a list of five to seven candidates is announced. A date is then determined for the papal elections; this date should be no more than thirty days after the determination of the names of those candidates.

On the first Sunday after the announcement of the election results, the names of the three candidates who receive the most votes are placed on the altar at a Liturgy celebrated by all

the members of the Holy Synod and thousands of Coptic faithful. At the end of that Liturgy, one of the three names is chosen from upon the altar, known as the 'Altar Ballot'; usually by a child. This is done by the drawing of one of the three folded papers, each containing one candidate's name; the folded paper is then opened, the name read out and held up to display before the people, announcing the next shepherd of the Coptic Orthodox Church as the 118th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark. To finalise the process the other two papers are also opened.

3. Those eligible to vote

Running parallel to this process is the appointment of those who will vote in the papal election, and this is administered by an Electoral Committee that is made up of members of the Holy Synod and General Lay Council.

Each diocese is represented by twelve lay members as well as members of clergy with official roles. Once the lists of those nominated to vote are presented to the Electoral Committee, that committee ascertains their eligibility and compliance with the general criteria in accordance with the statute. Once the final list is published and posted, there is a subsequent fifteen-day period for other voters to make any challenge to the proposed voters in writing to the Electoral Committee. Again, only those eligible to vote can object.

Those eligible to vote are: members of the Holy Synod, current and former members of the General Lay Council,

twelve representative lay members from every diocese, specific members of Clergy who hold official responsibilities within the diocese, current and former Christian government ministers and members of the Egyptian parliament, as well as Christian Journalists who work for daily newspapers and are registered with the Egyptian Press Association.

One matter that has been considered quite closely by the Holy Synod and the Electoral Committee is that of dioceses and parishes outside Egypt.

For the purposes of this election, where there are existing dioceses outside Egypt, these are treated in the same manner as those in Egypt with respect to the assignment of voters to represent that diocese; but where there are churches that do not fall within a particular diocese they are grouped within a long-term diocesan model and are treated as papal dioceses such as Cairo or Alexandria. In this case, they are also assigned twelve voters to represent them.

For the purposes of the papal elections, the United King-

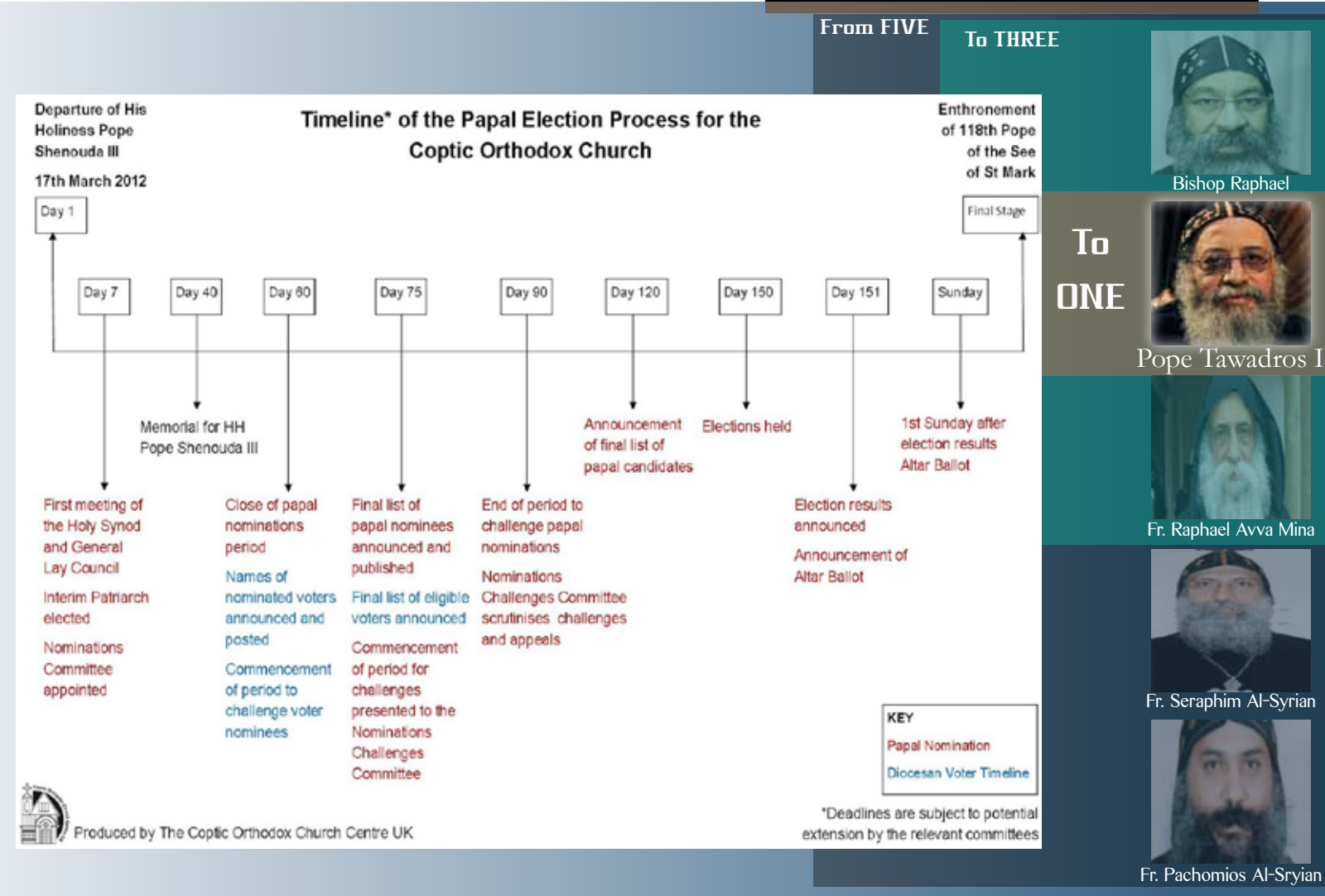
dom and Republic of Ireland are divided into four dioceses, and within each diocese those eligible to vote are: the bishop, twelve lay voters representing the diocese, and priests who hold official responsibilities. According to the papal election process, there may be, if the bishop chooses, a Consultative Committee of five lay members to assist him in determining the twelve voters from the diocese. The final voter selection represents as wide a demographic distribution as possible, taking into account parishes, geography, gender and age.

The entire electoral process is estimated to take approximately six months, with the expectation that the elections will be held around September 2012, subject to any extensions or unexpected delays. All dioceses will vote on the same day, and the Holy Synod will decide

the voting day pursuant to the statute.

Within these steps we find a robust process that includes: nominations from peers within the Holy Synod, nominations from laity through the General Lay Council, systematic scrutiny with a process of challenges and appeals, representative democratic election, and above all, the Altar Ballot that encompasses this whole process with a spirit of prayer and trustful submission to the will of God.

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BELIEVING GOD

Part 4

By Christine Massoud

In this issue we, will continue our walk to believing God, not just believing in God. The difference is what we talked about in the first issue of this series. If you haven't been reading them, please visit past publications at www.suscopts.org/mightyarrows. Because this series builds on itself, I pray that our past belief statements are being ingrained deeper and deeper within us. God is who He says He is, and God can do what He says He can do. The Almighty created you and me for fellowship and communion with Him. Frankly, that's the only reason. 1 Corinthians 1:9 reads, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." We were created with innate yearning for fellowship. Before the fall, Adam spoke with God as one with a friend. God wants to be a friend, a father, a provider, a supplier of good things, a miracle worker, a shoulder for you to cry on, and so much more.

This issue we will discuss one of the hardest truths for me, thus far: "I am who God says I am." I'm going to be honest with you. As soon as I start thinking about that statement, "I am who God says I am," my brain automatically jumps to the negative. I think: sinner, hypocrite, liar, etc., and I begin classifying myself by the sins I have committed and with which currently struggle. I think of harsh verses like "the wrath of God" (Rom 1:18), or "He will judge each one" (Cf Act 17:31), and somehow all His goodness, forgiveness, and grace dissipate

from my mind. Want to know what just happened? Spiritual warfare. If you have a hard time with the unseen concept, check these references out: Ephesians 6:10-12, 2 Corinthians 10:3, 1 Peter 5:8-9. Yes, He will judge. Yes, I am a sinner. But, these facts should bring me to my knees and closer to Him, not take me farther away. I want His grace. I want to be washed and made whole and clean. He promises to do just that, if we ask. Remember how we ended the last issue? We see little because we believe little, and we believe little because we see little. Well, let's end this cycle of unbelief and ask the All-powerful God to help our unbelief. Let's confess how very little we trust Him to take care of us, to forgive us, to do as He says, and let's listen to how wonderfully He describes each and every one of us. He came for ALL to be saved. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

So who are we? We do a lot of talking, but we don't act like we know who we are and who God says we are. The sum of our identity is found in 1 John 3:1, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" Ephesians 1, which we will revisit in a bit, states that He calls us "holy and without blame" (Eph 1:4). Us the sinners?! In His eyes, those who are His children are blameless, and if blameless means perfect; I just need to check out right now. We are not going to be perfect in this lifetime, and we know it. Looking at the definition in Psalm 19 verse 13, "Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless,

and I shall be innocent of great transgression." We are blameless when we don't have willful sin. We will not be perfect, we will not be sinless, but we will not be ruled by sin if we choose not to be. I lived so many years in my life with one sin clearly ruling over me, I'm sure you have too, but it is not your destiny and you CAN be free of it. He wants to set you free of it. That's His joy and generous spirit. Our God is a good God, as He says...

Read it with me, "Call upon ME in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Ps 50:15). The "you" here is two folds, the first being very personal. God is saying, "I want you and only you (insert your name here) to call upon Me." God wants us to go to Him, first, if I may add. I'm guilty of this a lot, in fact, just yesterday I was doing this. I did what I believe we in the Christian circles do all the time, we go through times of trouble, and we ask everyone, and I mean everyone, to pray for us. Five years ago, we would call family, friends, our Sunday School servants, our priests, our coworkers, etc. We would actually call them, and in ago-

nizing details reenact the situation to each and every one of them, asking for their advice and prayers. That was years ago. Yesterday, I did it all via a mass text. I saved time and was

extremely efficient, but I neither spent any time personally telling God what happened, nor praying for wisdom, guidance, or forgiveness. We are to pray for one another, but He knows what happened and, unlike all mortals, He can actually do something about it. So, the second point, which is the second "you," is the "you will glorify Me." This "you" is actually a communal you, you or us people. If we go to Him first in our times of trouble, we would know beyond a shadow of a doubt that only His involvement helped us. We will be at the height of gratefulness for His deliverance that we will make sure He gets the credit and that others know it. Now, the last point I will make here before we proceed is "the day of trouble." Let's ask an honest question here; has there been a day without its troubles? God didn't specify what kind of trouble. It's your troubled day; the definition of trouble is for a matter of fact, all-inclusive. And that's a great promise! I'm at the edge of my seat as I type

this truth. ALL your troubles, bring them to Him, His joy is to deliver you, and then for you and others to glorify His provisions.

Perhaps the most concentrated assessment of who we are in New Testament Scripture is found in Ephesians 1:3-7:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the richness of His grace."

What is this verse saying about who we are? In love, I am blessed, chosen, adopted, favored, redeemed, and forgiven. Let's speak these truths to our souls one more time: In love,

I am blessed, chosen, adopted, favored, redeemed, and forgiven. As I type, I feel the sense of empowerment God wants us to have. Say them often, keep them handy. Remember each one and see how loved you are by the Almighty.

These are just six of many powerful truths. Want to hear more? You are God's child (Jn 1:12), workmanship (Eph 2:10), and friend (Jam 2:23). You are picked out (Eph 1:4), beloved (Rom 1:7, 2; Thess 2:13), and His precious jewel (Mal 3:17). You have been redeemed (Rev 5:9), set free from sin (Rom 8:1-2, 6:14), set free from Satan's control (Col 1:13), and set free from Satan's kingdom (Eph 2). You have been given a sound mind (2 Tim 1:7), great precious promises (2 Pt 1:4), authority over the power of the

enemy (Lk 10:19), and access to God at all times (Eph 3:12). We are complete in Him (Col 2:10), sanctified (1 Cor 6:11), loved eternally (1 Pt 1:5), kept in the palm of His hand (Jn 10:29), protected (1 Jn 5:18), healed (Is 53:6), sheltered (Ps 91:4), secure (Jn 10:28-29), and hidden (Ps 91:1, 32:7). We are more than conquerors (Rom 8:37). We are victors (1 Jn 5:4), and we are on our way to Heaven (Jn 14:6).

Wow, is all I can say after typing all that. There is more, I'm certain, but for now, let these truths begin to transform our minds and speak truth to us about who we are in Christ, with the added effect of awe at His grace and love for each one of us. May these truths bless you and penetrate your heart and mind and help you see His awesome love for you.

ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE



By Sarah Mathoslah

Water spews out of a desert rock. A sea splits in two. No drop of rain meets the earth for three and a half years. Water turns into choice wine. Mountains are moved, barren women bear prophets, diseases are healed, temptations are resisted, and sins are forgiven. All these share two things in common: 1. They are seemingly impossible, and 2. They are possible in prayer.

Much in our lives can seem

unbearable, but with a God who has proven Himself throughout the course of history, we know that we can keep Him at His word. For "the words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Ps 12:6). And what does the Word say? "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (Ps 2:8). "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (Jn 15:7). "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Mt 7:7). These are just three of many verses of a God imploring His people to trust Him. "Ask, ask, ask!" He begs.

Not only does prayer make the impossible possible, or give us the things we seek to make our temporal lives easier, but

also as we pray, we ourselves are miraculously changed. For two people to develop a relationship, they must communicate. Thus, when we stand to pray we are inviting God to have a relationship with us. Even if our problem does not go away quickly, we have grown closer to God simply because we took the time to spend with Him. In our prayers, God begins to transform us. He changes our nature, our will, our intentions, and even our hearts to be more like His. Prayer also allows Him to show us His faithfulness, thus, increasing our faith.

We have been given an invaluable great gift, an open line of communication with the Creator. He that controls all things, the God of Heaven and Earth, the Great I AM, and the Savior of our souls, allows us weak and sinful humans to approach His eminence with our lives—our requests, our pains, our fears,

our emotions, our wants, our needs, etc. Not only does He allow it, but He also pays intense undivided attention when we do pray. Psalm 33 of the Third Hour in the Agpeya reads: "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are bent to their prayer." This imagery allows us to see a God in love with His people. Not only is He aware that we are praying, but He leans in close and bends His ear as if trying to clearly hear a whisper. It is as if all of heaven and earth have been wiped away and you, His praying child, are all that matters. He sees you, "the apple of His eye" (Zech 2:8), crying out to Him, and He hears you and is ready to answer you in whatever you need.

Prayer has the power to work many miraculous things both in and outside of us. Prayer is invaluable, but we must begin. We must ask!



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In the name of the Father,
the Son, and the Holy
Spirit, one God, Amen.



In truth, no words can accurately describe our time in Mexico. The group serving on this trip had a divine experience. It is clear that serving God brings inexpressible peace. Service brings with it a sense of oneness that cannot be duplicated, a sense of purpose that is lost in this world, and a sense of understanding that is liberating. When I see people living below what we consider to be the bare minimum, I must stop and consider what is essential in my own life. The people we met inspired us and touched our hearts. Take Carla, a fifteen year old Mexican native, whose view on life impacted us deeply. She spoke with such wisdom

MEXICO
Mission
Experience
Trip 2012

Reflections

and courage about things so deep; most people will never see the world as she does. Also, Amelia, who, even though she was battling the pain of kidney stones on a daily basis, never stopped serving us, and always with a smile on her face. The love of God shone brightly in these people and spilled over into us. Father Zakaria's love and dedication for his flock is Christ-like. The people love him as a true father; they have seen the love of God through him. His humility and service is an example to us of God's love. In hindsight, I see that we went to Mexico to serve, but they ended up serving us; we went to minister, but they ministered to us; we went to show love, but they loved us. They were, and always will be, our blessing. That, I believe, is divine. The bottom line is that the trip to Mexico was a glimpse of divinity. It was so hard to leave because we want more than just a glimpse of divinity; we want the whole thing.

May God be glorified through his children.

Amir Antonios



QUESTION & ANSWER

New Fall 2012 Edition
GENERAL QUESTION
And its Answer

Q: When we pray, is it appropriate that we ask for temporal, material things for ourselves and others? Considering our lethargic spiritual state, should we not instead be praying for forgiveness and grace, asking for God's Will to be done? I am wondering what we should request in prayer.

A: We learned from our Church, through the Agpeya, Holy Psalms, and Divine Liturgies, that prayer is composed of several components; each beginning with "The Lord's Prayer" followed by "The Thanksgiving Prayer". The formal definition of prayer includes humbly entreating, requesting, or making supplication to God. If you were to imagine that each time you prayed, our Lord would suddenly appear before you, what would you say, or ask? Most likely your prayer will not be superficial, and you will thank God, and kneel before Him, ask for His mercy and forgiveness, and ask Him to bless and heal your loved ones from spiritual and physical infirmities, etc.

In his epistle to the Philippians 4:6, St. Paul recommends confidence in prayer: "be anxious for nothing..." In other words, everything will be fine, do not worry, and ask God for what you want (without guilt). Because of your trust in God through prayer, He will grant you His peace, which is the real answer to any prayer and will exceed any material profit.

If you are diligent in your studies and efforts, God will help you when you pray humbly and contritely, assuming that there is no need to labor. St. Augustine who once lived in utter spiritual negligence and did not think he was in need of prayer, actually required intense bitterly tearful prayers from his saintly mother, Monica. The Lord saw her tears, heard her prayers, and answered them by transforming her son to a new man who would be renowned as a saint.

Let your heart be lifted in prayer throughout the day that you may find moments to draw near to God in reflection and contemplation of His presence around you. Indeed, each time you pray, God is there before you.

New FALL 2012 Edition
BIBLE QUESTION
And its Answer

FROM THE HOLY BOOK OF
THE WISDOM OF SIRACH

Q: In the Holy Book of Wisdom of Sirach, chapter 7, what is said about prayer in this chapter?
A: Never get tired of praying.

 THE LEAD PROGRAM 2012
PHOTOS
www.theleadprogram.org



H.O.P.E.
Hurricane Isaac Relief Fund

On August 29, 2012, Hurricane Isaac hit the shore of Louisiana with winds over 80 mph and 18 inches of rain. Many communities and homes were damaged in the storm, including those of our Coptic brothers and sisters in New Orleans. A relief fund has been set up online at:

<http://hope.suscpts.org/>

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Events & Activities

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Professionals Networking Together Make a Difference
www.suscpts.org/svrm/

Family Ministry Program:
fmp.suscpts.org
Program Registration: Dec 10, 2012

Theological Seminary Program
<http://tsp.suscpts.org>
Program Registration: March 15, 2013

The LEAD Program
www.theleadprogram.org

HOPE Program
Help Other People Excel: Social Services Ministry
hope.suscpts.org

Archangel Raphael Ministry (ARM)
Special Needs Ministry
www.copticangel.org

✝ If you wish to sponsor a child, a family, t-shirts, or an activity for the Special Needs Convention 2013, kindly contact:
Fr. Joachim Boutros: father_joachim@yahoo.com

DIOCESE EVENTS

Arabic Youth Convention: FL: Nov 9-11, 2012

Family Convention: FL: Nov 21-24, 2012

Pre-Marital Retreats: TX: Nov 16-18, 2012
FL: Jan 11-13, 2013

Marital Retreat: TX: Nov 16-17, 2012

Family Convention: FL: Nov 21-24, 2012

High School Boys Convention: FL: Dec 23-26, 2012

High School Girls Convention: FL: Dec 26-29, 2012

College Convention: FL: Jan 2-5, 2013

Graduate Convention: FL: Feb 21-24, 2013

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Courtesy Amir Antonios



October 21, 2012 - Fr. Seraphim Luiz
St. Simon the Tanner - Sarasota, FL
Courtesy Amir Antonios



September 30, 2012 - Fr. Pistavros Sedky
St. Mark - Nashville, TN
Courtesy Nabila Edward



October 14, 2012 - Fr. Philip Erian
St. Athanasius - Pensacola, FL
Courtesy Amir Antonios