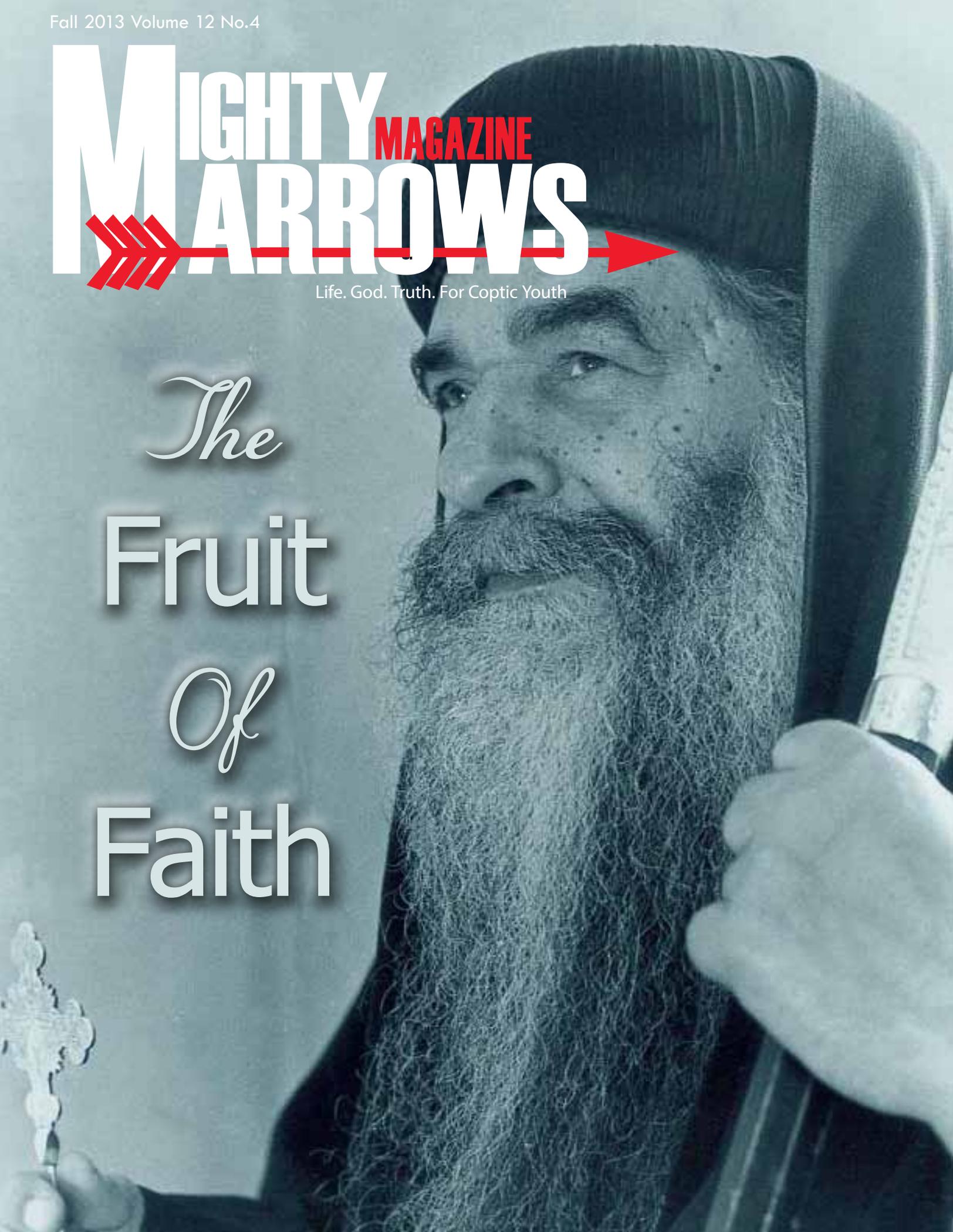


MIGHTY MAGAZINE MARROWS

Life. God. Truth. For Coptic Youth

The
Fruit
Of
Faith



“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth”

Psalm 127:4

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A PUBLICATION OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

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VICE PRESIDENT H.G. Bishop Youssef
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR Monastic Servant
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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Joshua Ekladios, Justine Ekladios, Carine Iskander, George Iskander, Sarah Mathoslah, Freda Tyab
SPECIAL FEATURED ARTICLE H.G. Bishop Youssef
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS George Bassilios, Marilyn Ekladios, Joseph Ghebrial, James Helmy, Theopeste Kerelos, Mariam Maher, Christine Massoud, Ashley Mong, Mareya Naguib, Laura Youssef
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In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

My Beloved,

The fruit of faith was sown with a modest and discerning request, “*And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith’*” (Luke 17:5). Since that time, the faith of the Church has remained solid, secure, strong, sound, and increased throughout the world despite years—centuries—of hardships and persecutions. The fruit of faith was cultivated by years of prayers, fastings, and services—not sadness, and never despair. The faithful today are filled with joy and continue to pursue the evangelization of the Christian mission, the building of churches, and the exemplary services to those in need. Ancient Coptic Orthodoxy is no longer an obscure, unknown faith in the West. The fruit of faith is evident in our multicultural societies of Coptic Christians. The more the persecutions increase, the more God seizes these tests to teach the true faith and to raise the state of the Christians by the fruit of the faith which produces more fruit and more faith. This, my beloved, is the heritage of the Coptic Orthodox Church. From the former days of old to contemporary times, the fruit of faith is savored in every generation because it is preserved with love and reverence for God. How then might we increase and strengthen our faith to be more spiritually equipped in the future?

Here are 10 points to remember:

- Learn the Holy Scriptures.
- Partake of the Holy Sacraments.
- Love the Lord with your all heart and mind and strength.
- Know how to defend yourself and your faith in spiritual warfare.
- Abstain from worldly distractions.
- Humble yourself before the Lord.
- Acquaint yourself with the saints.
- Rejoice in the Lord always.
- Serve God with reverence.
- Pray fervently.

God bless you,

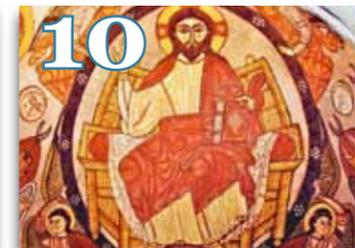
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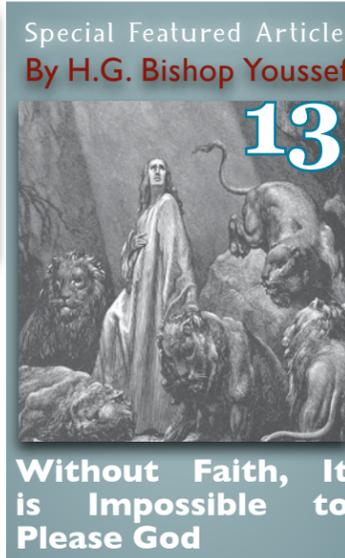
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FAITH

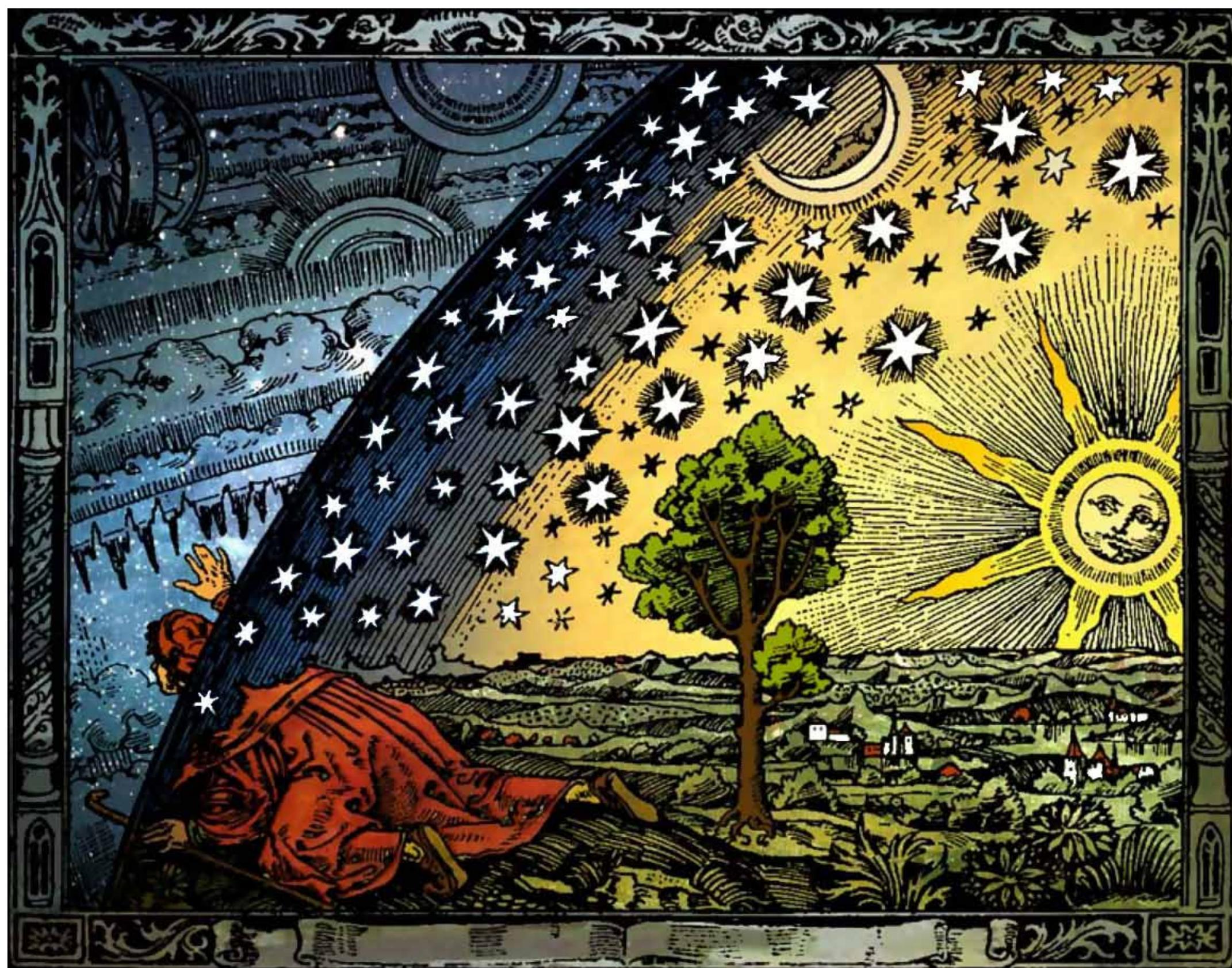
Belief without Evidence?

By James Helmy

(Author of the book, "Words For Our Time: The Spiritual Words of Matthew the Poor")

A constant reproach brought against us by nonbelievers is that Christianity's reliance on faith is an ignorant and cowardly retreat from brute reality. "Faith," to paraphrase one popular atheist, "is needed when there is a lack of evidence, or sometimes in the teeth of contrary evidence." It is the pride of scientists that they proportion their belief exactly to the strength of the evidence. When empirical proof is strong, their belief is strong. When proof begins to fade, their belief is weakened. And when contrary proof finally arrives, belief is withdrawn altogether. The Christian's form of belief on the other hand, they derisively complain, refuses stubbornly to move with shifting evidence. A faith that has "stood firm," despite its illogicality, is seen as praiseworthy; and the more absurd the belief, the more saintly the believer. The willingness to believe in something so stupendous as a miracle-working God, without clear and indisputable evidence, is regarded as an insane refusal to think.

We ought to begin by saying that, if this were an accurate description of the facts, as C.S. Lewis' has well pointed out, the coexistence within the same species of religious people and scientific people would be quite unexpected. How someone who is trained in the sciences, who has learned never to accept a hypothesis unless it is well-attested by experimental data and recommended by reputable journals—how such a person can turn around and profess belief in such a chaotic mass of unproven and supernatural stories as is found in religion—is inexplicable. But it is clear at least from history that, considering how many scientific pioneers have also been men of deep faith, the whole story of the collision between faith and science cannot be as hopeless as usually



portrayed.

The debate often turns on the distinction between belief and knowledge. A man says he believes something is true when his grounds for believing it are short of absolute certainty. "I believe it is five o'clock," says

a man who sees the sun just above the horizon on a winter day, because it is a reasonable deduction, though he admits he cannot say for sure. When a watch is

produced, he says, "It is four forty-five," not with the uncertain vocabulary of estimates but with scientific precision. If someone asks me if there is milk in my

fridge, I may answer, "I believe so," based on the presumption that that commodity is never allowed to disappear from the household. When I open the fridge

and see the milk, my answer becomes "Yes." In the first case of both examples, I profess belief in a proposition on reasonable grounds. In the second case,

the belief passes into knowledge.

Now we must apply this distinction to a more lengthy analogy to get closer to an understanding of how sensible people can believe in God. Say I am invited, along with my wife and baby, to a friend's house for dinner. I get there ahead of my wife and baby in order to help my friend prepare, and my wife says she will arrive between 3:00 and 3:30 pm. The doorbell chimes at 3:10 pm, voices are heard at the doorway, and I hear the typical click-click of my wife's heels. If someone were to ask me if my wife had arrived, I would respond, "I believe so," but with only a moderate certainty, for it could well be another woman who had arrived with similar shoes. Now, if in addition to the foregoing evidence I heard a baby's squeal, my conviction would be stronger but still not absolute. If in addition I believed myself to have faintly heard my wife's own familiar voice, my belief would be strengthened to almost certainty, and I would say, "I am pretty sure she is here," but still without the absolute proof of seeing her physically.

the circumstances of our metaphorical party to account for the apparent counter-evidences and doubts that arise in such belief: I am in the house, it is past 3:00 pm, I see my wife's bag and my baby's stroller, but I cannot myself spot them. I ask several visitors if they have seen my wife, and each of the respondents says yes, they believe they have seen her, but because of the density of the crowd, they are not absolutely sure. I finally run into my best friend, a good, honest, and intelligent man, who has always proven to be reliable, and he tells me, "Yes. In fact, I was speaking with your wife not even five minutes ago." The unmistakable tokens of her presence, along with the consensus of the witnesses, and especially the confident attestation of my good friend, compel me to a nearly absolute conviction that my wife is indeed in the house. My conviction has not yet advanced to actual knowledge, because I have not verified the fact with my own eyes, but the signs and testimonies are so strong that my belief is virtually without doubt.

A skeptical friend enters the scene at this

point to reprimand my credulity. "After all," he tells me, "you haven't actually seen her, have you?" I protest that I have very good reasons for believing and that I will probably see her very soon. "But look," my persuasive friend retorts, "your baby's stroller and wife's bag are both popular brands and could very well be owned by someone else in the house. Another woman might have the same shoes that you recognize when tapped. The visitors may claim to have seen her, but they admit they are not really sure. And as for your good friend, well, it is possible that he was delusional, or perpetrating an intentional act of deceit. Even the most honest men can occasionally surprise you by their dishonesty, you know, and I could cite many examples."

The logical case for God is made in a similar evidence-versus-faith dilemma. On the one hand, I perceive evidences that clearly bespeak an Eternal Creator and Governor of the physical universe. On the other hand, it is always possible to sow misgivings here and there to render the

case just sufficiently doubtful to confuse the mind. I expected my wife between 3:00 and 3:30; I saw my wife's purse and baby's stroller; I heard the testimony of so many others; and I was assured by a very dependable friend of her presence. Surely, she must be there...but am I absolutely sure? The honest reasoning of my brain leads me inevitably to that conclusion, and it could only be dissuaded from that result by an obstinate cynicism that refused to take seriously any proof that pointed in that direction.

My faith, therefore, would be the fixed resolution of my will to maintain belief in the deduced conclusion despite the challenges of contrary objections. It is not a mere unwillingness to hear opposite argumentation but a refusal to be swayed by its faulty logic. I will believe my wife is in the house, because that's what the case appears to reveal; and the nagging doubts suggested by my skeptical friend must be simply shut out of mind. The idea of "faith" commonly invented and ridiculed by unbelievers would be analogous to my desire to believe that my wife was in the

house, when in fact no token of her presence could be found, and no one had ever claimed to have seen her. To believe in that way, in the complete absence of proof, in a sheer vacuum

My faith, therefore, would be the fixed resolution of my will to maintain belief in the deduced conclusion despite the challenges of contrary objections.

It is not a mere unwillingness to hear opposite argumentation but a refusal to be swayed by its faulty logic.

of reason, is a thing almost inconceivable. That is a caricature of faith that is artificially put up by antagonists to be swiftly and scornfully knocked down in an ecstatic frenzy of grunts and hurrahs.

But it must be said out of fairness that the unbeliever is not always ruled by a spiteful desire to eradicate faith wherever it is found. The skeptical friend described in our simple parable will be recognized by the reader of the Gospels to be a reflection of the Apostle Thomas. Although a number of good testimonies for the risen Lord were presented to him by reliable sources, he was adamant in his unbelief until the evidence was furnished before his very eyes. "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). He has done us a great favor by his doubting; for his sober and incredulous mindset clearly rules out the possibility of any involvement in a supposed mass-delusion regarding the resurrection—an argument frequently invoked by unbelievers. Sadly, if Thomas were born in the twenty-first century rather than the first, it is very likely that he would not have believed. Christ no longer treads our earth to show us the nail-prints. The same might be

said of St. Paul: nothing short of a personal appearance by the risen Christ was capable of convincing him. But then, these two saints' disbelief have become a strong spur to belief for us; for we see that even the most energetic and animated propagators of early Christianity were not stupid and mindless cogs acting on a blind passion, but rather sober, shrewd, and judicious men who finally gave the reins to faith once the reason was satisfied.

There is one piece of "evidence" in the party-parable that I have not yet stressed: hearing my wife's voice. That would be the final and unmistakable proof for the Christian mind. Once one has heard God's voice—not necessarily as an audible resonance, but any simple and clear "communication" from the Divine—it cannot be doubted and will not be forgotten. Alas, this greatest of proofs is simply inaccessible to the hardened atheist. Christ could not perform many miracles in Capernaum because of their unbelief, say the Gospels (Cf. Matthew 13:58). For some inexplicable reason, in the sublime counsels of

God, His own powers of doing wonders in human life are circumscribed or delineated by our very faith. It is no good trying to reassure the unbeliever that once he sees a miracle, he will believe. He will never see a miracle because he refuses to believe. The rich man in torments begged God for permission to return from the dead and warn his living brothers to amend their lives. The request was refused—for "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

Faith is, finally, intimate trust in a God who always keeps His word. It stands upon good reasons and solid experience, and prudently refrains from making the insolent demand for "100 percent proof"—a condition that would prevent us from believing anything at all, from the details of ancient history, to the geology of subterranean earth, to the chemical composition of water.

¹ Lewis, C. S. (1959). *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company. On *Obstinacy in Belief*.

MAKING AN IMPACT

Tasony Mervat

An Article by Marilyn Ekladios



The Holy Book of Acts 9:39 depicts a group of women mourning the loss of a friend—a beloved steward distinguished by compassion and modesty. They displayed her works of charity before the apostle Peter so that he could grasp the depth of their grief (Acts 9:39). Fast-forward to the twenty-first century and unveil an unpretentious portrait of an ordinary woman, who married an ordinary man, and lived an ordinary life. He became a priest and she accepted to become the wife of a priest. It sounds simple, but there is great love and sacrifice in this narrative, not only between them, but it is an account of how love grows and overflows.

Tasony Mervat Mansour came to be known and respected by droves of people—clergymen, laymen and women, youth and elderly alike. They marveled at her in-

telligence—an accomplished zoologist with a doctorate degree, a woman rooted in a cultured Christian upbringing, a steward with the most refined etiquette, an adoring wife and mother, a vessel of spiritual prudence, and a gracious human being who held her composure during a very arduous illness that took her life at the end. Even throughout the pains and struggles of her infirmity, she continued to be a beacon of strength and inspiration to her cherished daughters—an extraordinary example of faith. Until her last breath, Tasony Mervat's life with her beloved husband, Reverend Father Marcus Mansour, was one of joyful togetherness—through studies, work, friendships, family, and service.

When people think of heroes, they often envision a mystical person—an idealis-

tic assessment of what they yearn to be, but fear the risk. Real people cannot be so kind, so generous, so loving, so willing to sacrifice for others even if it hurts—so they think. Then along comes someone real, someone with whom they can identify and with whom they can share their burdens. What kind of person can this be? This kind of person must have special qualities and characteristics, not only to come into someone's life and home, but also into one's heart. This person must be appareled in Christ above all—His love must engulf this kind of hero.

Tasony Mervat was born on March 10, 1950 and reposed in the Lord on May 10, 2006. She and Rev. Fr. Marcus Mansour were married for nearly thirty years, since August 3, 1976, and had two

daughters—now adults and professionals. Tasony Mervat had a unique mission—a special calling. We rarely hear much about a priest's wife, but most people in the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States have either known Tasony Mervat personally, served with her, or know something special about her. Often, the wife of a priest quietly serves in the background and avoids any kind of recognition. This, too, was known about Tasony Mervat despite her vivacious life of service. Being in the spotlight can be uncomfortable because it is a place that must tolerate criticism. Tasony Mervat had a different mission and she knew how to handle the pressures of service in the public eye. She was a humble, seasoned steward with a delightful sense of humor. Her services extended from Egypt to North America to Europe to Australia.

The light that was shown through her faith and kindnesses was no ordinary light. It was the light of Christ. She rejected approbation for her academic prowess and remained content to attend every Liturgy and service officiated by her husband, Rev. Fr. Marcus. She desired the heavenly rewards more than an inflated salary compensating her esteemed scholarly knowledge. The Lord looked upon her sincerity and increased her in spiritual wisdom—far exceeding her earthly proficiencies. Serv-

Tasony Mervat

ing the flock of the church He shepherded became a self-effacing but spiritually uplifting vocation for Tasony. Thus, she lived her life as a candle on a lampstand that could not be hidden (Matt 5:15).

His Grace Bishop Youssef, Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, commemorated Tasony Mervat, saying, "Death does not and will not separate us from Tasony Mervat Mansour because she is alive in the paradise of joy." His Grace praised her for her wisdom, intellect, commitment, and love for the Holy Bible, which continues to impact many generations. He hoped she would be a seminarian professor and acknowledged the immense services to which she had been devoted—the architect of many manuscripts and programs. Not only at the church level, but also at the diocesan level, she was a steward whom he personally entrusted with much of what is written on the SUS Diocese website still today. He referred to her as a "peacemaker" and revealed her instrumental role in organizing events between two dioceses.¹

Like Tabitha (Dorcas), whose ornate garments sewn with her own hands articulated her love to God by serving His people (Acts 9:39), Tasony Mervat's breath and spirit remains entwined in an abundance of precious words and services still able to reach and

touch the lives of many. Like the saints in paradise who now behold Tasony Mervat Mansour, her model of piety will be eternally memorialized.

On October 26, 2013, the youth of St. Mary and St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Churches in Arizona participated in the annual "Team Tasony" for the Breast Cancer Society Walk which dates back to 2006.

A note from the writer: I thank H.G. Bishop Youssef and the Mansour Family—Rev. Fr. Marcus Mansour, daughters—Mrs. Nermine Bologos and Mrs. Mary Soliman, for sharing their thoughts and words about Tasony Mervat Mansour, the beloved steward who enriched the lives of many. I did not have the privilege to have known Tasony Mervat personally, but I had only heard about her and came to know her through her services. It has been a great honor for me to pay tribute to this remarkable pillar of our time.

¹ Tasony Mervat Mansour the Pure Hearted Servant

REFERENCES:

Holy Bible—New King James Version.

Edited by Father Marcus Mansour: Tasony Mervat Mansour the Pure Hearted Servant.

RECEIVING THE PROMISES

By Theopeste Kerelos

Imagine a young child whose loving parents have promised that, if he behaves for a given period of time, say six months, they will give him all he wants for his birthday. This scenario is very similar to our relationship with God. Our merciful Lord promised us that, if we fulfill His commandments, we will inherit eternal life. But, how do we know that after all our hard work on earth, we will receive the promise? The secret to believing God's words, and thus, being motivated to fulfill His commandments, is faith. Indeed, it was not in vain that St. Paul said, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Obviously, we need to define faith, in order to apply it to our lives. We quote St. Paul: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Basically, faith is believing that God's promises will eventually come to pass, even though they have not yet been revealed to us. Actually, faith is not merely believing, for "even the demons believe—and tremble"

(James 2:19). Therefore, reciting the creed during the Church services without actually applying what we say is not faith. Rather, we show our faith by fully understanding the words we utter and applying those words to life. For instance, when saying the phrase, "He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead," one must trust that there will be a judgment day, on which God will reward those who fulfilled His commandments and will punish those who disobeyed Him. Similarly, when saying the phrase, "We look for the resurrection of the dead and life of the age to come," one must fully believe that the dead will rise and that the righteous will inherit eternal life. By comprehending these concepts and trusting that they will come true, the believer is motivated to obey God's commandments and to strive to receive God's promise: eternal life. This is what St. Paul meant when he defined faith in the aforementioned verse.

Continuing to define faith, St. Paul adds, "By [faith] the elders obtained a good testimony" (Hebrews

11:2). He then points out diverse prominent biblical figures in the Old Testament, and their exemplary faith. One example is Noah, who built an ark according to God's commandment. He had faith in God's words that a flood would come and destroy all the inhabitants of the earth, and his faith was not shaken by the fact that God's words came true a hundred years after he built the ark. Another example is Moses, who led the Jews out of Egypt by having faith that God would be able to deliver His people. Moses did not know how God would deliver His people, but he obeyed all of God's words, believing that God would fulfill His promise.

Turning to the New Testament, we observe hermits who go out into the wilderness, abandoning all worldly cares and devoting their entire lives to asceticism. Also, during the various ages of persecutions against Christians, multitudes of people stood courageously in front of emperors and governors, proclaiming their Christianity and eagerly enduring torture and martyrdom. We are celebrating the saints who grew in virtues like love, prayer, obedience,

silence, and so on. What other than faith in God's promises could possibly motivate these people to go to such great extents? No doubt, these people had faith that their strife was not in vain, but that God would grant them eternal crowns as He promised.

Having these great heroes to imitate, and knowing the biblical explanation of faith, it is now our turn to show our faith in God's promises. We know that one day God will come to reward people according to their deeds, so we must not delay in fulfilling God's commandments. Anytime we face a roadblock in our spiritual life, our faith in God's promises should drive us on. Remember the scenario of the young child who will receive all his desires for his birthday if he behaves. In like manner, we will receive God's promise of eternal life if we carry out God's commandments during our earthly life. Once again, the key is to maintain our faith that our strife will lead us to eternal life.

WHY AM I, AND WHO AM I? These must be the two ultimate questions of reality—the reason and purpose of life. The first is out of your control, but not the second. You had no choice in your existence, or in being created, but certainly you have a choice in what you do with your own existence.

Evolution or creation? The first is devoid of reason beyond the propagation of dominant genes of carbon life forms. The second is far more powerful and ventures beyond mere temporal carbon existence and into eternal realms of life through faith. You may not yet know this, but it is immensely empowering to realize why you are created (the answer to 'why am I') and, just as importantly, your real purpose or objective in life (the answer to 'who am I').

He "did not create it in vain" (Isaiah 45:18). God rejoiced when He made man "Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him" (Isaiah 43:7). So, is His glory the reason for my existence? Surely God does not need to create me in order to be glorified, or to gain more glory. God is not vain and certainly does not need me for more glory. Humans simply do not have glory to give. He is the source of any true glory. In fact, were it not for God, we would not know what 'glory' means. He defines it. So, we were created of His own volition in order to share with Him His glory. He did this out of pure and simple love. "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

But what is your real purpose in life, what is the objective? We often hear that life is short. This is not a cliché. Life is short

indeed. Nonetheless, your life is crucial to you. Not so much because your name is written in it, but because whatever you do during your short lifespan on Earth will determine the state of your existence throughout eternity! Your earthly life is your sole opportunity. There is no repetition, reincarnation, second take,



By Boulis Ibrahim

To Be Or Not To Be, And How

or a second chance. You can either spend your life meaninglessly, aimlessly, and purposelessly, or transform it with faith into something infinitely more.

Faith invigorates, rejuvenates, injects dynamism, sets God's hand into motion, and enlivens your world. It transforms your mere carbon existence into a life of an abundant joyous reality with an eternal future that is far more amazing than even fiction - what "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). It also imparts amazing abilities: "Through faith [they] subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions. Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the

aliens" (Hebrews 11:33-34). "Let Him fulfill this in my life and then I will believe," the non-believer argument goes. "Believe first, and then you will be able to do these things," God corrects the misconception of the order. Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23). "And Jesus said to

them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you'" (Matthew 9:28-29). Believe first, then you will be empowered to see miracles happening in your life, "for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater [works] than these he will do" (John 14:12). The true believer then shouts, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Then Christ replies, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

Now, do you want to live your life as a pitiful construct

in the matrix of surrounding worldly events, which ail to naught and at best nourishes no soul, or do you want to be a 'Neo' who believes in the transformation of temporal life events into eternal truths of light? It is your call. But your decision will determine 'who you are'. It will also determine whether you will fulfill or miss the purpose for which you were created, the answer to 'why you are'. You see, as Neo carried a fictional 'Prime Program' that manifested in him having superhuman powers within the matrix, in truth you can carry the 'Prime Program' of reality by which you can truly transform your life into eternally lasting events and deeds. This real Prime Program is called ... 'faith'.

An example is, you can wear perfume for a night out with your friends, or you can spill it with a contrite heart on Jesus. The woman in Mark 14 did the latter and transformed a mere worldly action into an eternal event of glory that will be preached in her memory to all generations till the end of time. God then took the woman's offering and, with her faith, transformed it to one with a purpose and for a purpose unto eternity. This woman then knew 'why she was' and 'who she was'—she was created for His glory and she was the one who anointed Christ before His death (Mark 14:8). Now, how would you like to use your ointment?

On the question of faith, there are no 'ifs' or 'buts'. There are no backdoor entrances and no second-class tickets to the Kingdom of Heaven. Either you believe or you do not.

I challenge you to transform your life.

Dare you believe?

“As a Coptic Orthodox Christian who converted from the Protestant faith, I can say earnestly that Orthodoxy is in fact the “straight” way.”

A Treasure Worth Sharing

By Ashley Mong

When Jesus founded His original church, He had a plan and structure established that was perfect in its design; so why would man ever deviate from it? Today—after many schisms, heresies, and disagreements—man has successfully split the body of Christ into countless different denominations and groups with varying beliefs and rituals, leading a large amount of people to not even understand or know anything about the original Church or that it still exists today; they have simply taken away what has been handed down to them generation after generation. What’s the point? The point is, anytime we deviate from Christ’s original plan and make our own, it never fulfills us the way we think it will; the result is a people hungering for God and searching for that “right church for them” because they long to satisfy that empty inner feeling. Even worse is a people who end up searching for other things to fill their lives because church isn’t doing it.

As a Coptic Orthodox Christian who converted from the Protestant faith, I can say earnestly that Orthodoxy is in fact the “straight” way. The Orthodox faith has enriched my life, and has brought me infinitely

closer to God. He continues to use this beautiful faith to change me from the inside out. Just one year since my baptism, I do not recognize the person I was. How could someone’s character and spiritual life be transformed so drastically in an amazing way, if orthodoxy wasn’t what Jesus intended when He founded His Church? Our Lord Jesus Christ did not intend for us to “go through the motions”, and He did not intend for us to have to fight so hard to feel connected to Him. Unfortunately, this is the way many people feel today.

I want to make a point here that evangelizing is not about guiding people to the Orthodox Church, but it is simply about guiding people to Christ through the Orthodox Church. Our faith is like a bus that takes us to Christ. Some may be walking on the side of the road and have no idea where they are going; some may be trying to get to Christ but walking is taking forever and it is difficult and tiresome. How much faster, easier, and more comfortable it would be if they could take the bus to where they wanted to go? Through the Orthodox Church, we have the holy sacraments, the fellowship, His body and blood, and all the tools that make this journey a lot easier. Why would you stare out

the window of this bus and pass someone by while watching him or her struggle through a storm trying to get to the same destination as you? Why not simply stop the bus and invite them in?

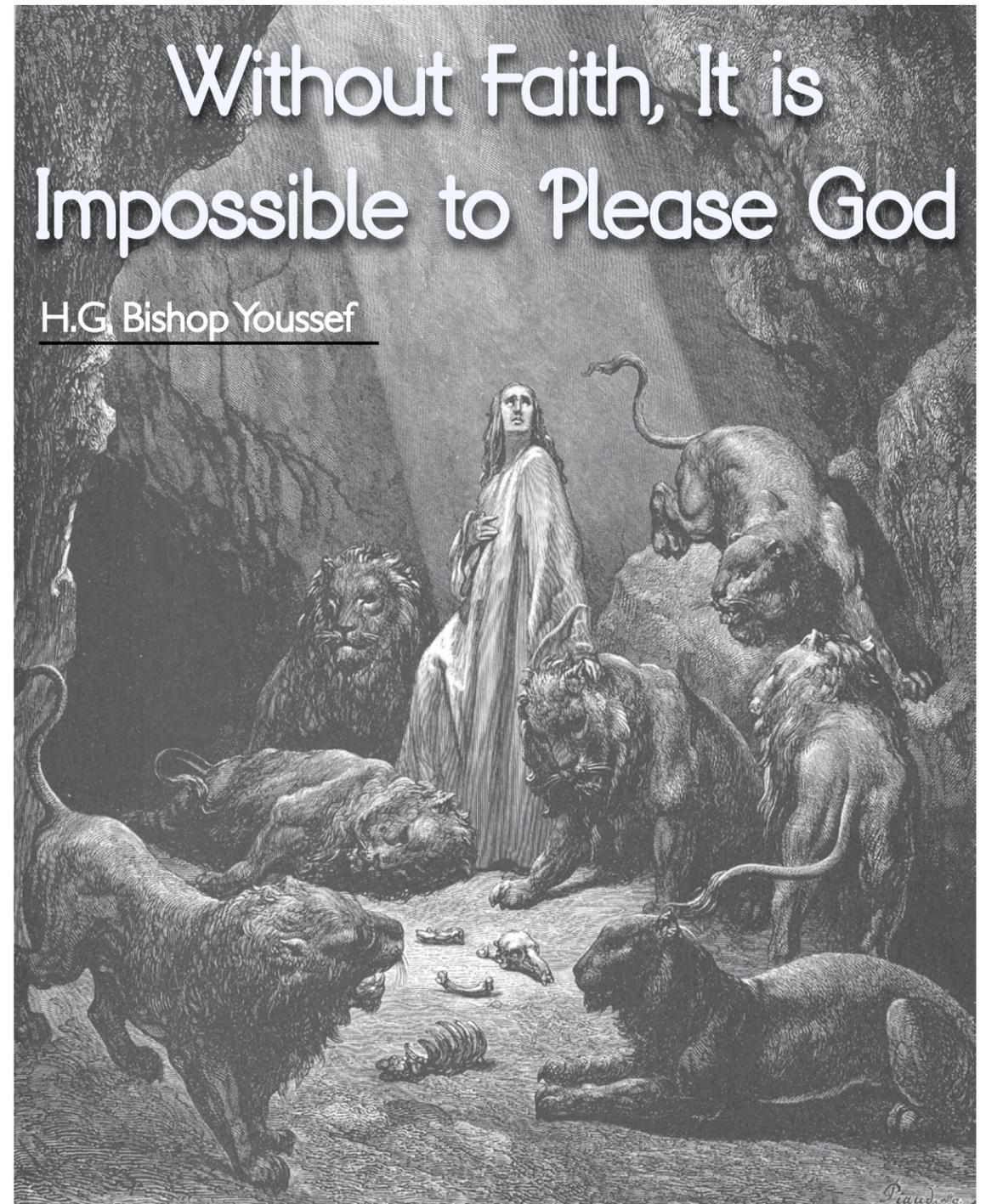
One of the biggest hindrances to evangelism is fear. Many people fear evangelizing because of rejection, or they feel they do not have a gift with words. It is important that we, as Orthodox Christians, share this treasure with others—never letting fear hold us back from what God is calling us to do. In the book of Exodus in the Bible, God speaks clearly to Moses about doubt and fear:

“Then Moses said to the Lord, ‘O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.’ So the Lord said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, The Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.’” (Exodus 4:10-12 NKJV).

If we pray that God will give us opportunities to evangelize, they will come when we are spiritually ready. When they do come, we must have faith that God will give

us the words to say to the people if we just ask Him. If the day when I met my Orthodox friend in my college class, he was too afraid to approach me and invite me to a Bible study, he would have missed out on the chance that God gave him to bring someone out from darkness to light. He would have missed out on the chance to discover how God can use him for evangelism. We never know what God is capable of doing through us until we surrender, obey, and allow him to speak through us.

Orthodoxy is a treasure that needs to be shared. It has been a vital tool on my path of salvation and my walk with God. If I didn’t have this Church and my Church family, I would still be wandering around trying to get closer to God, but feeling like I don’t know the way—which makes me wonder: how many more people are just like I was, thirsting for God but unable to quench their thirst—having no idea about this faith, but searching for a way to fill their cups? Orthodoxy is like an abundant spring that flows forth from God, and it is our job as Disciples of Christ, to direct people to this spring, so that they can fill their cups and never run dry.



FAITH IS CONFIDENCE, “... the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Have confidence that God has chosen you as a member of His faithful nation, endowed with love and understanding. “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Hebrews 11:3). Open your reservoir of faith and fill it to the brim. In good times, we will rejoice in the Lord and give Him thanks; and in hardships, we will likewise pray and give Him thanks and praise. Be confident in the Lord and let

your genuine smile never diminish regardless of the circumstances surrounding you for your hope is in Christ.

FAITH IS RELIANCE. It is the foundation of the Holy Scripture, the Sacraments, and the Tradition of the Church. Faith is the first step unto the path of salvation. When Satan connived his plan of deception, he began by chiseling away at Eve’s foundation by casting doubts and shaking her faith. “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’” (Genesis 3:1)? The relationship between God and man was the first covenant. Chipping away

at the foundation was supposed to cause gaps and holes so that the relationship could no longer stand. Unable to withstand this quake, Satan thought you too would succumb to his deception.

Though man weakened, God reaffirmed a plan for humanity. God was determined to rebuild man's faith and re-establish an even more solid relationship with Him—stronger than ever. Thus, we pray in the Prime Hour, "You gave us the Spirit of Sonship." This "sonship" had a heavy price that only the Son of God could attain for us. It cost Him His blood, suffering, and humiliation. God purposed that His children were worth His pain. What great love is this? When we profess our faith, not only with lips, but from the depth of the heart, He looks upon us and smiles. We rely upon His tender mercies.

FAITH IS TRUST. It is expressed in action. It demands and expects the fulfillment of Christian characteristics and the application of Christian principles. Faith demands a certain attainable standard of the believers to love—love their brothers and their enemies. Faith alone cannot save, because it is the partner of works—this is faith in action.

"Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). We trust in Him, in His goodness, in His justice, and in His mercy. We show him our love and trust by sharing what He generously gave us to give to others. "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

FAITH IS LOYALTY. It produces endurance. There is a better place known in the hearts of the believers—a real place that was personally prepared by the Lord Jesus for His beloved as He promised. "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

The martyrs loyally endured severe torments and welcomed death because their faith was engulfed in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without any doubts, they believed ALL His promises to be true. They remained loyal to Christ because their faith was not dependent upon being saved from harm, but rather because they

embraced His salvation wholeheartedly and His promise of eternal life with Him was etched in their hearts.

St. Paul enunciated a clear message reflecting his loyalty to Christ to St. Timothy, the bishop and beloved spiritual son to this apostle, "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Timothy 1:12). It is this pure faith that we witness even until this day when we hear and know that our church is being persecuted. Displayed before the world, we proclaim the same loyalty to our faith as did St. Paul when he said, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us" (2 Timothy 1:13-14).

FAITH IS CONVICTION. It is modeled by perseverance, and, like gold, is tested in the fire. Why would three young men facing persecution while in captivity, especially when they are enticed by the oppressors to have better food and accommodations,

not give in? Confident in God's power, Daniel beseeched the king's chief steward and spoke to him with absolute conviction in the truth, "Pleasetest yourservants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with us" (Daniel 1:12-13). The wise prophet, Daniel, did not feign with fear neither for himself nor for the three younger men. With faith and conviction, he spoke boldly and challenged the status quo.

FAITH IS BELIEF. It is the core of resilience. It assures the believer that all pain is only temporary. Whether in public persecution or in personal trials, the faithful turn to God for healing and repentance. Belief in Christ's healing power has repaired many from prodigal living, marital collapse, anger, strife, criminal behavior, and lewdness, because of its construction upon true repentance—the ultimate healing. Zacchaeus, the little man who climbed upon the mighty sycamore tree only to see Christ pass by, was resilient because of the belief in his heart (Luke 19:1-10). Even the

sinner must hope for mercy, just as the sick man who lay upon his bed of sin (for we know that his illness was due to sin, for the Lord told him so) was let down through the roof before our Lord Jesus Christ to heal him. In addition, the Lord compassionately acknowledged the strong faith of the true friends of this sick man, (Luke 5:19): "When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you" (Luke 5:20). The sinner and his loyal friends showed their resilience to reach the Lord no matter the travail because of their belief that He was the only one who could heal their friend.

FAITH IS COMMITMENT. It shoulders a ladder leading up to heaven, upon which have climbed the greatest saints. It is a firm and resolute stance. I must believe that my sins are forgiven each time I sincerely repent. Therefore, I am committed to keep the sacraments for the forgiveness of my sins. No penance is worthy of such grace. His grace is LOVE—a love like no other. We must be committed to Him as He is to us. Our commitment must be extended to His church. We must love and care for our church and serve God's people throughout the world. We must be committed

to go the extra mile and evangelize in His WONDERFUL name. Never does He remove His eyes from us. "Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings" (Psalm 17:8). We must reciprocate His love and keep our eyes upon Him at all times.

FAITH IS DEVOTION. It readily accepts. When the archangel Gabriel announced the Incarnation of the Word of God to St. Mary, she knew that her life would entail hardships. Despite this awareness, she accepted and submitted her will to the Lord because of her deep devotion to Him (Luke 1). She accepted the looming punishment of stoning an unmarried woman with a child. She accepted the imminent sword that would pierce her heart (Luke 2:35). She accepted all this and much more because she was perpetually devoted to God throughout her life. Her faith did not quiver at temporary adversity because she adored God above all else—even her own life.

"When the mother saw the Lamb and Shepherd, the Savior of the world, hung on the Cross, she said while weeping, 'The world rejoices in receiving salvation, while my heart burns as I look at Your crucifixion which You are enduring for the sake of all, my Son

and My God'" (Agpeya Prayer: Ninth Hour).

FAITH IS ASSURANCE. It culminates in virtues. I believe—so, I must do, I must think, I must be, I must say, I must endeavor, I must fast, I must give, I must pray. When asked why do you do the good that you do? The answer is the obvious: This is what my faith teaches me. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Be assured of God's love and willingness to accept your repentance and help you to grow in love, forgiveness, and in all virtues. Be assured that He is always with you.

FAITH IS LIVED. In His Epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul lists the faith that pleased God throughout the ages. Faith was tested amongst these great men. Their faith pleased God who rewarded them with His presence in their lives. They did not desire material compensation. Their heart was elated only by the presence of God. Their faith in Him was their real joy. We must examine ourselves in the light of our faith. What does our faith look like now? Does it resemble the faith of these fathers? How easy is it for us to be shaken by turbulent times and lose faith? "Nevertheless,

when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth (Luke 18:8)?"

FAITH WAS TELEVISED AND CAME TO THE FOREFRONT OF THE MEDIA IN OUR MODERN WORLD. Faith was recently given a title—"the Copts in Egypt". The faith of the Copts in Egypt during 2013 was displayed for the world to see—their faith was witnessed around the globe. The Lord must have specifically purposed this people to demonstrate the true faith. Though churches were burned, innocent Christian homes destroyed, their businesses vandalized, and any measure of security vanished, the world saw their tears while their arms remained raised in prayer as they returned and prayed in the rubble of their churches. Indeed, this is the kind of faith that pleases God. We are called to be a people of faith and to preserve that beautiful and marvelous faith for all generations. Endeavor ceaselessly with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, to please God. Remain strong, O people of God, and keep the faith. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). To God be the Glory, forever. Amen.

The Raging Battle In Your Heart and Mind

By Christine Massoud

I recently received an email from a reader asking for a deeper interpretation of “taking every thought captive.” I was asked what to do when a detrimental thought first comes to mind. Trust me, you know when it happens. I know you know simply because I know it too in my heart, whether it be out of nowhere or because I heard or read or—worse yet—saw something that made me think of [insert temptation here]. There’s that one split second that demands a reaction. I could be speaking of anything, any kind of thought really, positive or negative, but we all know the difference. So, I too, started to ask “What to do and how should I react?”

“You are getting into [your] four-door car by yourself. It’s late at night and you are in a rough neighborhood. In order to feel safe, what is the first thing you are going to do when you get in the car? Right. Lock the doors. How many doors will you lock? You may think this is a silly question, but think about it. If you only locked one or two or even three doors, would you be safe? Of course not. ALL FOUR doors must be locked to keep out an unwelcome intruder” (Ethridge, 67). Remember our first article when we talked about the four distinct areas where women are tempted? Remember we talked about how we women feel loved through our spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical needs? I referred to it as “table-legs” balance and the author’s example demonstrates it. We need to keep all four areas—our minds, our hearts, our mouths, and

our bodies—on lock down if we are to remain pure.

Before I go any further, I want to emphasize again how important it is to know that you and I by ourselves cannot do this. “We are tempted and hard-pressed from every side,” St. Paul tells us (2 Corinthians 4:8). And if we stop there, it looks pretty bleak for us, doesn’t it? But St. Paul finishes his thought: “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed, we are perplexed, but not in despair” (2 Corinthians 4:8). We know why we are hard-pressed and tempted. We are at war against an enemy who desires to devour us. But we also know that we’re not yet crushed and we should not despair just as St. Paul continues: “Therefore we do not lose heart” (2 Corinthians 4:16)! We know to whom we belong, God. We know that our help comes from The Lord. Therefore we should “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

So what’s on your mind? I recall this great quote by Samuel Smiles: “Sow a thought, reap an action; Sow an action, reap a habit; Sow a habit, reap a character; Sow a character, reap a destiny.” We want our thoughts to be godly, pure, positive, and pleasing. A good thought could lead to a positive action and so on. Now follow this same logic for a negative thought, specifically a sexual fantasy. Sow a sexual fantasy, reap a



one-time sin; sow a one-time sin (a slip up as you might call it), reap a habitual sin; sow a habitual sin, reap an impure character, and sow that impure character, reap its negative consequential destiny, being bound and enslaved to sexual sin. I want to point out that thoughts can be captors. Half way through that sequence we went from free to captives of sin. But God doesn’t want us captives. He wants us pure. “Finally, [sisters], whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

“No temptation becomes sin without our permission” (Ethridge, 75). This is huge! You were given a sound mind, a free will, a choice. The enemy can neither will you to sin, nor can genetics be blamed for taking control over your actions. Remind yourself often, “No temptation becomes sin

without my permission.” So how do we proceed? There are four ways that I’d like to share with you. I call them the four R’s. If you are reading the book, you’ll see three. I found a fourth! They are simply ways to train our minds to mind:

- + **RESISTING** - Leave temptation at the gate
- + **REJECTING** - Push out the bad
- + **REDIRECTING** - Bounce them off your shield
- + **RENEWING** - Fill up on the good

Starting with Resisting, we have to realize our choice in a lot of what we see, hear, read, etc. This by far is one of the most crucial steps. It is simply self-instituted censorship. In my small group, this took on many different shapes. We started by simply recording our activities. We each kept a log, similar to what you would do while dieting. We called it “what am I subjecting my face (eyes, ears, mouth, and mind)

to?” After the shock of what was actually penetrating our senses wore off, we began to look for ways to minimize that number. It meant change: One left her laptop in the living room when she got in bed at night. Another stopped answering guy friends’ calls after dinner. Another started reading non-fiction books about marriage and relationships rather than

romance novels. Another chose to stop listening to secular music and started listening to Christian music. I already mentioned mine, which was slowly limiting my TV time and eventually giving it away. Once we set these boundaries, we used each other for accountability and encouragement. I ask that you find one or two ladies with whom you could build trust, that can encourage you as you each seek a better mind.

Rejecting is one with which I struggle the most, especially with thoughts. I am by nature a thinker, a learner, and an analyzer. Good compliments, and bad or even constructive criticisms, swarm their way into my thoughts and occupy a great deal of my time. Even if they are favorable, they could have an adverse effect on me, like building up my pride. I had to really work on a quick way to identify whether a thought is worth dwelling on or not. I found out I was not the only one to do that, and it really comes down to individual identity. What makes you rise and

fall emotionally? Is it a boss, a relationship, your parents, someone else? It could even be someone from your past or your childhood. I had to clean house, so to speak, and get faster at rejecting thoughts coming into my mind. Here’s a short questionnaire that I have used and has become a habit for me. I have shared it with other women and it seems to be helping. First, does [insert here] fit my Christian values? Am I encouraged or discouraged by [insert here]? Finally, does [insert here] uplift or depress me?

Our Lord Jesus Christ modeled Redirecting better than any man or woman on earth. We will all be tempted. He was too, but we know He was sinless. He did what I call “bounced the temptation off his shield” during the temptation on the mountain. We know that St. Paul describes us having a spiritual armor and that our shield is the Word of God, The Scriptures. Jesus wasted no time answering back Satan with the Word. He knew the Scriptures. He fired

off one verse after another to ward off Satan’s temptations. We have the power, through the Holy Spirit, to do the same. His word is everywhere, so get yourself a better shield. Dig and find an online search through the Scriptures and type in your temptation. I did this for “eyes.” Here are some of the ones I am using for my shield:

God telling the people about His words: “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deuteronomy 6:8).

God calling the prophet Samuel and telling me: “Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the Lord will do before your eyes” (1 Samuel 12:16).

Job, a righteous man, even while tempted to reject and deny God was reminding himself: “I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman [man, in my case]?” (Job 31:1).

And one of David’s many

to remind me: “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:8).

There are many more, so I encourage you to do the same. Let God’s word give you the shield that would be strong and filled with His power, so that any temptation that comes your way, He would give you words to ward it off. A favorite Bible teacher, Beth Moore, once said as she encouraged us, “Make the enemy sorry he ever messed with you!”

Finally, Renewing, which is simply the practice of doing all these over and over again. It’s not easy, but we are not alone. It’s hard to resist, but we have the Holy Spirit in us, Jesus Christ as our intercessor, and God who sees our hearts and our desire to overcome. We also have each other. Please pray that God sends you women in the body that can come alongside you and encourage you while you encourage them.

And remember, “a righteous [woman] may fall seven times [but she will] rise again, but the wicked shall fall by [her] calamity” (Proverbs 24:16). Here’s another quote that hit home for me: “Either sin will keep you from the Bible, or the Bible will keep you from sin” (Ethridge, 83). And lastly, “He will keep [her] in perfect peace who trusts in Him, whose thoughts turn often to the Lord” (Cf. Isaiah 26:3)!

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One of the greatest indicators of whether we are living a life of unwavering faith or not is to gauge the degree of joy that we exemplify in our daily living. Scripture tells us that faith produces hope and hope begets joy. Therefore, Faith → Hope → Joy.

Faith Produces Hope

The word hope, as it is often used in the New Testament, does not bear the idea of doubt or uncertainty (as is commonly used in our vocabulary).

"I hope it does not rain today."

"I hope that my team wins this game."

Rather, hope grounded in faith points to a certain and solid expectancy. Hope is something in the future which has not been realized or received, but is an absolute certainty simply because God has promised it.

Consider these verses from St. Paul's letters:

- "Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom 5:2).

- "For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Gal 5:5).

- "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father" (1 Thes 1:3).

Faith looks to what exists now and relies upon it. Hope looks forward in anticipation of what is to come. Faith is grounded upon the character of its Object (Christ). Hope is grounded upon our faith in the promises of Christ. We can proclaim and say: "I have faith in God's ability"

The Joy of Faith

Faith → Hope → Joy.

By George Bassilios

or "I have hope in God's promises."

Hope Begets Joy

As a believer, I must have faith in God's ability, and hope in His promises, to live a life of utter joy.

Imagine that the Vice President of your corporation, a man with extreme clout and power, approached you and asked you to work on a specific high visibility project for three months. If successfully completed, he will give you 50% increase in your salary. This man approached you because he values and appreciates you. What would you do? I assume that you would gladly embrace the offer and carry out the assignment with diligence and determination. For what reason do you do this? You have faith in this person's ability to carry out his promises. After all, he is the Vice President and is certainly capable of delivering, and on top of that, he chose you.

This faith is grounded in this person's power and it gives you hope that after three months you will have an increase in your pay. I assure you that you would not have had the same motivation nor interest had this offer been made to you by one of your colleagues. Simply put, your colleague

does not have the same authority as the Vice President.

Finally, how will you feel during these three months? I am certain that you will be filled with joy and delight, hoping that you will be rewarded because of your faith in this man's ability to deliver on his promises.

Likewise, the Christian believer lives a life of steadfast faith in the ability and love of Christ who promised the heavenly reward to those who love Him and endure to the end. As St. Paul said, "Hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end" (Heb 3:6). This life of hope brings forth joy and delight. "Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Pt 1:8).

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The bad news is that we cannot get God. We can only own, control, and have power over things less than ourselves. The good news is that God has already gotten us. We cannot climb to heaven to get Him, but He came down to earth to get us. So what do I need to do to become attached to God and attain joy?

Very simply, as we have previously said: have solid faith in His love and anchored hope in His promises. This, my dear friend, is the golden key that will open the door of joy and delight in your life.

seek other things because it will ultimately lead to joy.

You do not say: "What good is joy if it can't buy money?"

You say: "What good is money if it can't buy joy?"

It is also evident that we have not fully found this joy. We do not seek something we have already found. So, if we are still seeking joy, that means we have not fully found it yet—not enough of it at least. Yet, we cannot stop seeking it.

What Really Makes Us Joyful?

Sadly, the world has conditioned us to look for joy in empty places such as fame, wealth, honor, and power, but there is one place where joy is to be found and lived. Only with God. Only the One Who made you can satisfy you. Nothing else and no one else is big enough. Trying to fill that deepest longing inside you with the things of this world is like trying to fill the Grand Canyon with marbles.

You must know that nothing less than yourself fulfills yourself! The whole world is less than your self. There is only one thing greater, and it is God. He designed us this way, and we cannot change that. How can we get Him? We can get things less than ourselves, but how can we get God?

The bad news is that we cannot get God. We can only own, control, and have power over things less than ourselves. The good news is that God has already gotten us. We cannot climb to heaven to get Him, but He came down to earth to get us. So what do I need to do to become attached to God and attain joy?

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FAITH OF THE APOSTLES

Do You Know How The Apostles Died?

From "Inspiring Words For The 21st Century"; Shared by Joseph Ghebrial



DO YOU KNOW HOW THE APOSTLES DIED? This will serve as a reminder that our personal and business sufferings are minor, especially compared to the intense persecution and cold cruelty the Disciples and Apostles of Jesus Christ faced in their times because of their undying faith.

St. Matthew: Suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound.

St. Mark: Died in Alexandria, Egypt, after being dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.

St. Luke: Was hanged in Greece as a result of his tremendous preaching to the lost.

St. John: Faced persecution when he was boiled in huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. He wrote his prophetic "Book of Revelation" on Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

St. Peter: He was crucified

upside down on an x-shaped cross. According to church tradition, it was because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died.

St. James: Just "The Leader" of the church in Jerusalem, he was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a fuller's club. This was the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during "The Temptation."

St. James the Great: Son of Zebedee, James was a fisherman by trade when



Jesus called him to a lifetime of ministry. As a strong leader of the church, James was ultimately beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian.

St. Bartholomew: Also known as Nathaniel, he was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed for our Lord in present day Turkey. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia where he was flayed to death by a whip.

St. Andrew: Hewas crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers, they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two

days until he expired.

St. Thomas: Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church in the sub-continent.

St. Jude: Was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.

St. Matthias: The apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded.

St. Paul: Was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in 67 A.D. Paul endured a lengthy imprisonment, which allowed him to write his many epistles to the churches he had formed throughout the Roman Empire. These letters, which taught many of the foundational doctrines of Christianity, form a large portion of the New Testament.

This is an important message for all Christians, and a testament of faith for all others. Throughout history, Christianity has proven to be the most loving, giving and profoundly devout religion known to man.

(Inspiring Words For The 21st Century) <http://www.inspire21.com/stories/faithstories/FaithofTheApostles>.

Pope Cyril The First:

By Mareya Naguib

The Pillar Of Faith



As the church goes through this difficult time of persecution, God reminds her, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20). True faith is not easy to attain. Faith requires God's grace and help, to be empowered with this fruit of the Holy Spirit. However, when we trust in God with all our hearts, faith in God will increase and God will be able to use us for the glory of His Name. As the church perseveres against extremist ideology sweeping through Egypt, the church's role becomes more evident by maintaining the faith and purity of her believers. Pope Cyril I, the Pillar of Faith, fought this same battle to keep his children from heretical teachings and false beliefs.

St. Cyril, the 23rd patriarch of the See of St. Mark, was raised by his uncle Pope Theophilus. At the school of Alexandria, he studied theology and philosophy—subjects crucial for defending the Orthodox faith. After many years of education, his uncle sent him to the monastery of St. Macarius in the wilderness where he became a disciple to the righteous old monk Sarabamon. Sarabamon taught young Cyril about church books and the sayings of the desert fathers. After five years in the wilderness, St. Cyril returned to his uncle in Alexandria. Delighted by St. Cyril's knowledge

and progress in the faith, Pope Theophilus ordained him a deacon. He was then appointed as preacher of the Cathedral and became Pope Theophilus' right hand man, helping clarify theology to the congregation, according to the Orthodox faith.

His simple, yet deep, words captivated the hearts of his audience. His charisma and eloquence brought many to the faith. When Pope Theophilus departed on October 15, 412 A.D., the council voted on St. Cyril to be the next patriarch for the Coptic Church. St. Cyril was the 24th patriarch in the succession of patriarchs of the Coptic Orthodox Church; he was enthroned October 17, 412 A.D., two days after his uncle's departure. The Church was enlightened by his gift of preaching and his wisdom in theological studies. His primary focus was to refute those against the true Orthodox faith and to teach pagans about Christ.

During St. Cyril's era, he was faced with a false Christian teaching about St. Mary, the mother of God, known as the heresy of Nestorius, the Patriarch of

Constantinople. Nestorius denied that the Virgin was the mother of God (Theotokos) and described her as just the mother of Christ (Christotokos). He preached that Christ was not the Son of God but was fully human with no divinity. Two hundred bishops assembled in the city of Ephesus discussing this false teaching, inquiring how to eradicate this heresy. God gave Pope Cyril His Grace to be the defender of the true Orthodox faith, and St. Cyril debated with Nestorius. He explained to him the heretic nature of his opinion, and warned him of excommunication and exile from his Chair, if he did not change his flawed opinion. Nestorius was eventually removed from his Seat.

St. Cyril composed the famous Twelve Chapters wherein he explained the true faith, refuting the error of Nestorius. He wrote many books and homilies explaining that God the Word is One Nature and One Person incarnate. Because of the heresy propagated to the people by Nestorius, Pope Cyril wrote for the Orthodox

Church the Introduction to the Creed which we recite every day in church and in our prayers: "We exalt you, the mother of the True Light..." in order to refute the heresy, and remind the congregation of St. Mary's true identity as the mother of God. Pope Cyril continued in his strife, fighting and defending the Orthodox faith, for 31 years until he departed in peace on June 27, 444 A.D.

Pope Cyril, the Pillar of Faith, was filled with the Holy Spirit when it came to having strong faith in Christ. He was not born with this virtue, but rather he spent his youth learning and studying more about Christ. He grew in his life of worship and built a strong bond with Christ, which helped him gain knowledge of God's true identity. As our mother, the Church, faces persecution for the true faith, we must stand strong like Pope Cyril I and defend our beliefs to anyone who may ask us why we are bound so tightly to Christ, not willing to deny Him even if it means death. As believers watch their church burning down, it is important to neither give up hope in Christ, nor deny their God and not believe in His Will. As one church, all must stand strong and remember, "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). For the faith that brought the Nestorian heresy down is the same faith that moved the Mokattam Mountain. Thus, it is faith that keeps our precious Church handed down from one generation to the next for the past two thousand years.

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I TRIED SEVERAL TIMES TO READ THE BOOK OF JOB, but once the arguments between Job and his friends started, I found myself jumping to the end of the book. I could not understand what they were saying and could not follow the logic. That was until God opened my mind one day, and through the Holy Spirit, I was given the understanding, and patience, to read the whole book, including the back-and-forth arguments. I stood in awe at what I learned. I felt for Job, and was wondering about the same things he wondered. I realized the greatness of this man of the Bible—his steadfastness, his knowledge of God, and his endurance to what had befallen him. I am still amazed at how, in the middle of all his calamities, he did not charge God with wrong (Job 1:22).

From that time, the book of Job became a source of consolation and a school that teaches me many lessons. A reading of the book, focusing on Job's faith, brings forth wonderful pictures. One can see how fruitful a small seed of faith is, and how it bears more fruits at different levels until one reaches the end of the race.

The Lord said that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed. It is a small seed, yet it grows into a large tree that hosts the birds of the air (Luke 13:19). The Kingdom of Heaven starts in our hearts where the first seed of faith is sown. This smallest of seeds grows as we grow spiritually and in favor with God. The tree then bears many fruits, which become food for others around us.

Since faith is "the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1), our mustard seed is in believing that God exists, that He is real even though we cannot see Him with our own eyes. It is believing in God's love, in His righteousness and His judgment. The initial fruits are then: fearing the Lord and departing from evil (Job 28:28). We can see that Job, not only feared the Lord, but he made sure that his children did likewise. After his sons and daughters had feasted, he would send for them, sanctify them, and offer burnt offerings on their behalf. "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts," he would say (Job 1:4-5).

Other fruits of faith at this level are faithfulness (Job 1:22), serving God, and strengthening weak hands and feeble knees (Job 4:3-4). In chapter 29, we see more, such as delivering the poor and fatherless (12), becoming eyes to the blind and feet to the lame (15),

Lord said, "Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (Jn 15:2). Fruits of this level are learning about, and personally experiencing, God, and His attributes. Job gained knowledge of God's wisdom (Job 9:4,19; 28:20-28). He learned that God is omnipotent (9:11-13), has counsel and understanding (12:13), strength and prudence (12:16), is the fair judge (21:22, 24:22-24), and that He rewards the laborer (7:1-2). Job learned that God's presence is fearful (23:15). He learned to trust in God and His caring fatherhood (13:20-21), and to trust in The Redeemer (19:25). With this came the knowledge of human frailty and God's majesty (Job 26), and human weakness and God's goodness. The personal experiences Job had, empowered him to reason with God in truth. Several times, he would turn from his friends and pour his heart out in front of The Almighty.

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29). This is the level where our faith is tested and perfected. Job trusted God, even when things did not make sense to him. He accepted, without sinning, the loss of his possessions and offspring. He endured the destruction of his health. He endured false accusation. He held fast to his integrity and fought the good fight and finished the race.

Job humbled himself under the mighty hand of God (Job 42:3). He deserved to reap the most rewarding fruit of all: seeing God. "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You" (Job 42:5).

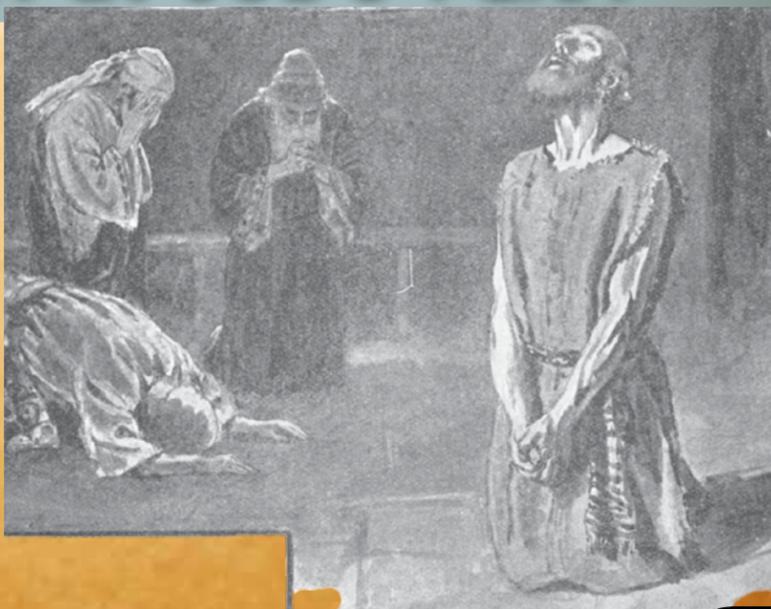
May we grow in faith as Job did. May we be watchful of the seed that is in our hearts and nourish it so it will grow into the perfect knowledge of God. Amen.

By Mariam Maher

A look at Job's Faith

rescuing the victims (17), bringing joy to the widows (13), being just and righteous (14), and possessing wisdom (21). In chapter 31, we see fruits of faith in areas such as kindness to those whom one rules (13-15), cheerful giving (19-20), hosting strangers (32), relying on God and not on materialistic possessions (24), having a pure heart (1), and even loving one's enemies (29-30).

The Holy Spirit then works within us to get to a higher level of faith. The



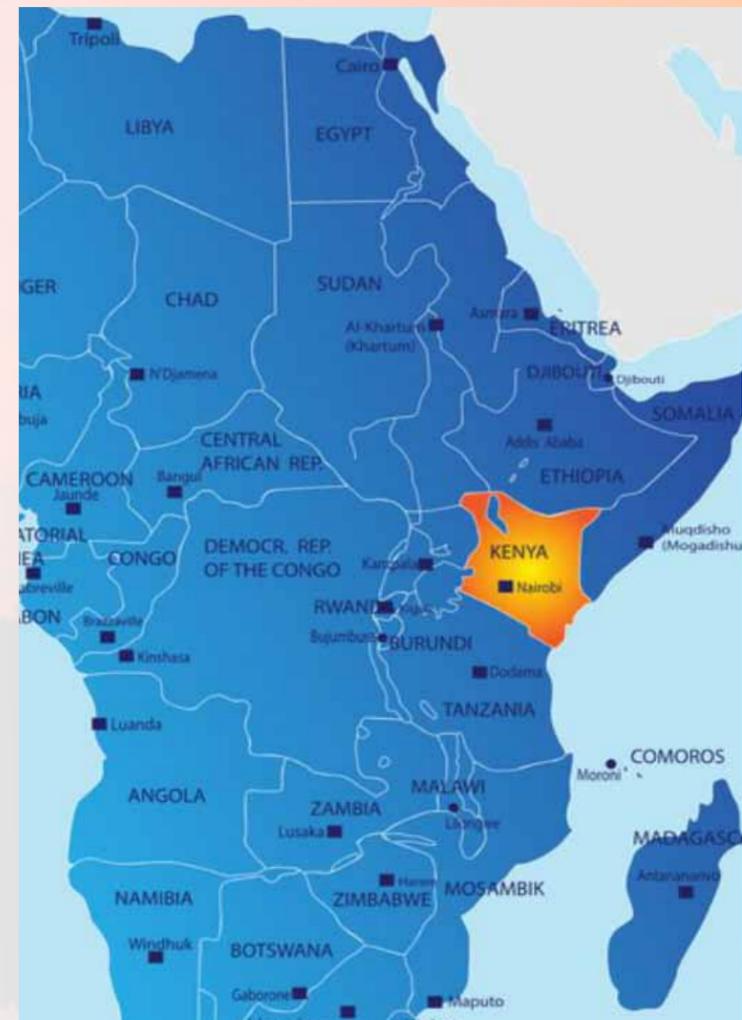
Oh, Beautiful Kenya!

By Laura Youssef

OH, BEAUTIFUL KENYA! This mission trip was by far the best time of my life. One thing that I will never forget is how lively and active the Spirit of God was there; I saw His work there more powerfully than anything I've seen in my life. Until then, I had never seen so many people on fire and passionate for God; these people spoke not just from themselves, but with help from the Holy Spirit within them.

One of my first home visitations was in Nairobi. I was so scared to go on this visitation because I did not feel ready to share the word of God with them. I did not understand the concept of not relying only on my preparation, but instead, going in and simply letting the Holy Spirit speak through me. I was scared that I wouldn't know what to say, or that the Holy Spirit wouldn't speak through me. So on the bus, I prayed about my fear, and I remembered a part from

2 Corinthians 12:9-10, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...For when I am weak, then I am strong." This was so comforting to me. On the bus, I also prayed for a message to tell the people, and I knew I had to share this verse the Lord had just given me. As I descended from the bus, my friend and I



pray that His Holy Spirit may be a fire in us that sets other people on fire for Him too. Let Him lead us by His Holy Spirit to serve Him, and let Him fill us with His Holy Spirit so that whatever we say or do, it may be all of Him and not of us. Let us pray that this Spirit may be ALIVE in us and in our service. And let us always remember that we are nothing but tools for Christ.

Second, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of quiet time in the morning. He must fill us in the morning, so we can fill others throughout the day. We cannot serve others while we are empty. And, do not be selfish! When God gives you or tells you something, don't keep it to yourself! He filled you, so now go fill others!

Third, do crazy things for the Lord; serve Him outside of your comfort zone!

We are able to serve God just like the apostles. Our Lord Jesus Christ sent His disciples two by two, with nothing upon which to depend, like a moneybag or a knapsack, but wanted them to fully rely on Him. He also sends us out into the world, having nothing on which to depend, except His Holy Spirit.

Finally, "MISSION IS NOT AFRICA; MISSION IS JESUS!" Amen.

conversed about what we were going to share with the people. Amazingly, we both had the same verse! God had a plan and was truly speaking through us. As we went on our visitations that evening, the Holy Spirit was working through each one in our group in amazing ways. In every single house, our Lord Jesus Christ spoke through the person giving the message with beautiful words, and I wondered from where these words came. Even in one house where we visited, we became tearful—feeling the presence of our Lord amongst us. I can't tell you how strongly I felt the Holy Spirit in every

single home we visited that night. Words cannot describe this night; neither could our tears express how we felt that night from the joys of seeing the Holy Spirit so powerful and alive. This was the most impacting night of the trip for me.

Things I learned from the trip that I would like to share:

First, let us all pray for the Holy Spirit to be alive and active in us! Let the Holy Spirit be renewed in us. Let His Spirit guide us in all service! Service is every day, every second of the day. It is every opportunity I have, wherever I am. Let us

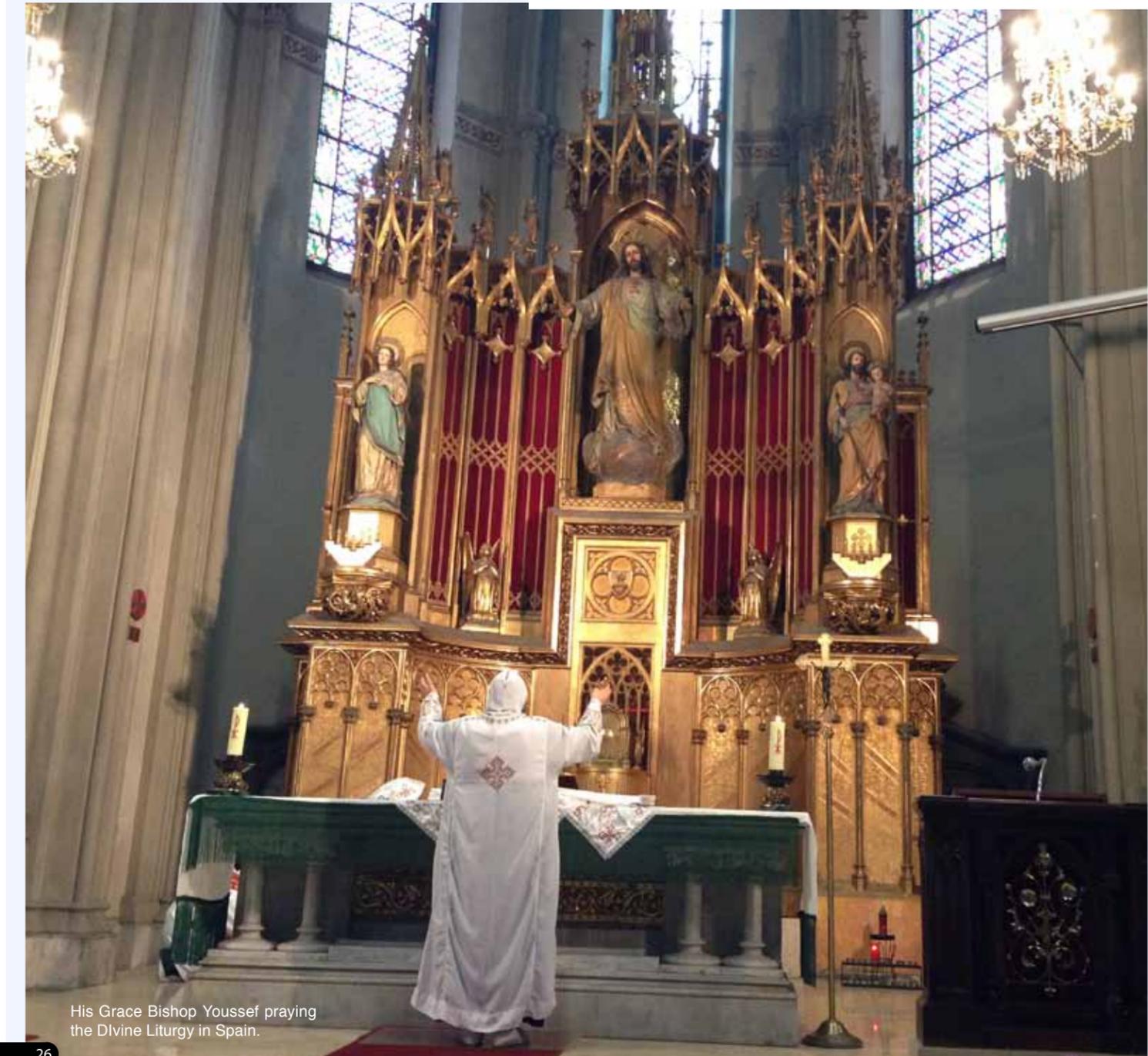
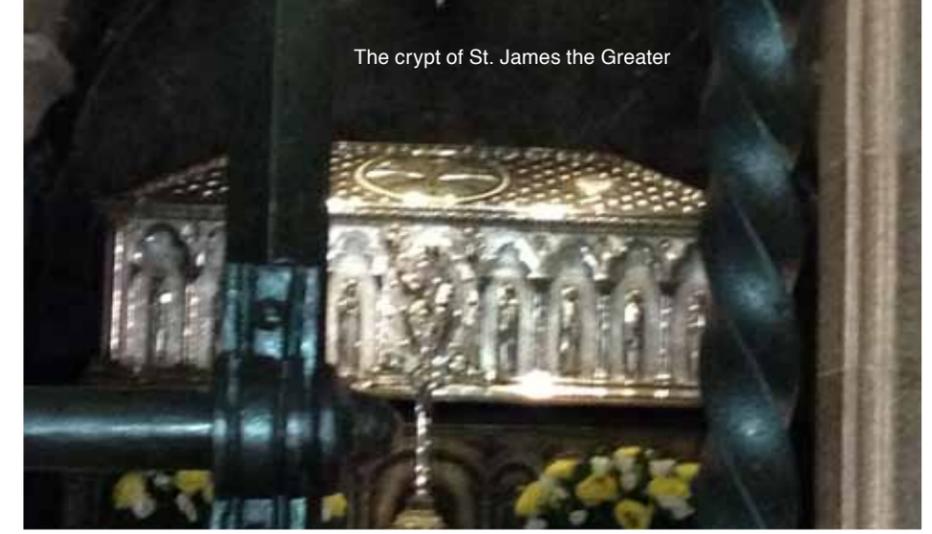




Kenya Mission 2013



Spain 2013



His Grace Bishop Youssef praying the Divine Liturgy in Spain.

Photos From Around The Diocese



St. Clement Christian Academy



St. Clement's Christian Academy—students, faculty, and staff, was blessed by a visit from His Grace Bishop Youssef on August 12, 2013. Here are some photos of this great blessing!

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FMP Class of 2013 Graduation



Rev. Fr. Daoud Lamie, Dallas, TX, Family Retreat



Ordination of Fr. Abanoub Habeeb, St. Abanoub Coptic Church, Eules, TX



2013 Evangelism & Apologetics Conference



QUESTION & ANSWER

New FALL 2013 Edition
GENERAL QUESTION
 And its Answer

Q: How does one answer and convince those who require tangible evidence in order to believe supernatural facts? For example people who do not believe that the Holy Bread and Wine is really transformed into the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ?

A: Some people believe that "seeing is believing". However, with supernatural facts, the opposite is true; and "believing is seeing". Therefore it is Faith which sees first and not the human eyes. St. Augustine puts it perfectly well by saying, "To have faith is to believe what you can't see and the reward of faith is to see what you believe." People of western culture, having grown up in a cynical materialistic world, are being taught early in life to disregard anything they cannot see or touch. That is why they tend to dismiss the unseen and unexplained. Seeing is not believing at all. Some things you see are not worth believing in because they are meaningless and false. In reverse, there are many things you will only get to see if you believe in them first. Believing comes first; seeing is a likely consequence. To a significant degree, our belief in the possibility of something determines its likelihood of happening. They say; if you believe you can or you believe you can't—either way you are right! For if you believe something is impossible, it almost becomes impossible. Conversely, if you firmly believe something is possible, you stand every chance of succeeding. So, if God said "this is my Body" then it is His Body as simple as that. We should believe in it and then through the experience we will see it with our internal eyes. The Holy Bible defines faith saying "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). It is not a matter of evidence that something is true or not true. Orthodox Christians never claimed that the bread and body are materialistically changed into flesh and blood; but that by the power of the Holy Spirit, they become the Body and Blood of our Lord. What is the evidence that this is not true?

New FALL 2013 Edition
BIBLE QUESTION
 And its Answer

FROM THE EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS, CHAPTER 1

Q: For what three things was St. Paul especially thankful regarding the Thessalonians?

A: Their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope.

St. Clement Christian Academy Help St. Clement Academy win a \$200,000 TOGETHER FOR SAFER SCHOOLS Security grant

For Immediate Release

Bishoy Saad, Principal at St. Clement Academy

(615) 333-9281

ebichoy@yahoo.com
 stclementacademy.com

Nashville, November 13, 2013 – St. Clement Academy has been nominated for a TOGETHER FOR SAFER SCHOOLS grant from STANLEY Security. St. Clement could win up to \$200,000 in STANLEY Security installed products and services to help secure our students and facility. The funds are awarded to the schools that receive the most votes at stanleysaferschools.com between November 5th – December 13th. We need support from our local community to vote and help St. Clement win \$200,000.

It's important that our school improves our security so we can focus on what's really important – education. School administrators, staff, teachers, parents and our local community have the chance to vote daily for the chance to win. The school with the most votes will win one Grand Prize of \$200,000 in STANLEY Security installed products and services. Three runners-up will win individual prizes of \$100,000 in STANLEY Security installed products and services. Each vote also counts as an entry for our school to win a daily prize. Winners will be notified in December and prizes will be awarded in 2014.

STANLEY Security is committed to providing safe learning environments and we invite you to join us in making our school safer by voting for your school to win the TOGETHER FOR SAFER LEARNING grant.

Please vote at www.stanleysaferschools.com

Events & Activities

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www.suscopts.org/svrm/

Family Ministry Program:

fmp.suscopts.org
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<http://tsp.suscopts.org>
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Girls: Dec 21-24, 2013

Boys: Dec 25-28, 2013

THY College Convention

Dec 18-21, 2013

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The Coptic Church celebrates the induction of His Holiness Pope Kyrillos (Cyril) VI and Archdeacon Habib Girgis as officially recognized saints. May their prayers be with us. Amen.