

MIGHTY MAGAZINE ARROWS

LIFE. GOD. TRUTH. FOR COPTIC YOUTH.



**“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
so are the children of one’s youth”** Psalm 127:4

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In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

ΠΙΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΓΓΩΝΙΖΕΤΑΙ: ΘΕΝ ΟΥΛΕΘΕΛΗ ΑΓΓΩΝΙΖΕΤΑΙ

My Beloved Youth,

Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen! The fifty joyous days following the glorious Holy Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is a very significant time in the lives of the children of God and in the whole world. In the wisdom of the early church fathers, the readings of each Sunday reveal depth and dimension, further enlightening us about the Holy Resurrection and bringing us closer to the Holy Feast of the Pentecost. Let us contemplate on this journey where Christ meets us again and again to reveal the concealed messages of the Old Testament and to take us into the revealed truth found in the New Testament. In this Spirit of truth, He planted the seed of the New Church. St John the Beloved carries us throughout this journey with the Holy Gospel readings below:

First Sunday	Christ Our Faith (John 20:28,29)
Second Sunday	Christ the Bread of Life (John 6:35)
Third Sunday	Christ the Water of Life (John 4:14)
Fourth Sunday	Christ the Light of the World (John 12:46)
Fifth Sunday	Christ the Way to Life (John 14:6)
Sixth Sunday	Christ the Conqueror of the World (John 16:33)
Seventh Sunday	Christ Announces the Comforter (John 15:26)

At the end of these exultations and processions of the holy joyous fifty days, we rediscover the love and grace of God the Holy Spirit. Our limited abilities would not stand to absorb the profound teachings of Christ’s holy church without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He is our Comforter, Helper, Teacher, and Defender against the accuser. The Holy Spirit is He who always abides in us to bring us to eternity where we may live with God forever.

May the peace and joy of these holy exuberant days fill your hearts with the knowledge, assurance, and confidence of Christ’s unfailing and unwavering love for you, now and always. Glory be to God forever, Amen!

God bless you,



**Bishop Youssef
Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States**

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Mighty Arrows Spring 2010

THE MONASTIC AND MONASTIC RELATIONS

By H. E. Metropolitan Bishop
Abbot of St. Demiana's Monastery

March 17, 2005

*In the Name of the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit, One God.
Amen.*

MONASTIC LIFE:

Undoubtedly a monastic's goal in the monastic life is to live a life of lowliness of spirit, a life of exile, death to the world, and the life of Christian perfection by fulfilling the commandments. Likewise, one lives a life of praise and becomes a companion to the angels, as the Divine Liturgy says, "You have given to the earthly the praising of the seraphim." I would like to emphasize the meaning of the refrain to a song said to St. Anthony, although monastics are not usually occupied with songs.

***"You were sublime ...
A human who became
akin to the heavenly angels
or were you an angel
who left your heaven
and became human like us"***

This is what people in the church currently say about St. Anthony. Were you elevated until you became like the angels, or were you an angel who left heaven and be-

came a human? It is a mere meditation, but without doubt, the concept of monasticism for the people, the Fathers, and the church is one of an angelic life. In it, one prepares now for the life of the kingdom, as it entails severing oneself from the world, "Severing from all to unite with the One."



COMMUNITY LIFE VERSUS SOLITARY LIFE **Monastic Relationships And The Monastic:**

Now, let us examine a monastic's relationship with other monastics, in light of these spiritual principles. One peculiar behavior we observe in some monastics is setting a goal for the life of solitude and stillness. Yes, this is imperative as the word Μοναχός (Monachos) means hesychast, one who lives a solitary life, but we might find one practicing the life of exile and solitude towards fellow monastics, while opening the door, heart, and ears to lay people. This one recoils from monastics inside the monastery, but does not withdraw from socializing with seculars

(refusing to receive monastics into the cell, or cave, but receives lay people). What exactly is the meaning of *this* solitude? This one might protest, "I practice the life of solitude inside the monastery in order to stay away from its news and problems. I want to live in peace in the monastery. I do not

want to have relationships with monastics that would lead me to hardships. As for seculars, they are not associated with monastery politics, and so I could live in peace despite their visits or interactions with me." This behavior is an absolute failure, and is wholly rejected, because the saints say "we are strangers brethren, therefore let

us be complete strangers." If you want to live a life of exile, it should be genuine, not the mere appearance of solitude. Conversely, I say a person should grow distant from lay people and socializing with them and continue in the relationships with the monastics. When one reaches complete exile with regards to relatives and monastery guests, then one begins withdrawing from the coenobitic community.

Since we are speaking about the monastic relationships with other monastics, I wanted to begin by clarifying that some counter-behaviors that do take place do not agree with the concepts we received from the Fathers regarding the life of exile and solitude.

To be continued

PSALM 151

1 I was small among my brothers,
and the youngest in my father's house;

I tended my father's sheep.

2 My hands made a harp;
my fingers fashioned a lyre.

3 And who will tell my Lord?

The Lord Himself; it is He who hears.

4 It was He who sent His messenger
and took me from my father's sheep,
and anointed me with His anointing oil.

5 My brothers were handsome and tall,
but the Lord was not pleased with them.

6 I went out to meet the Philistine,
and he cursed me by his idols.

7 But I drew his own sword;
I beheaded him, and took away disgrace
from the people of Israel.



a TREE OF RITUALS

By Miena Armanious

For a long time I struggled with the rituals of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Since I was a child growing up in the church, I noticed how rituals played part in many of the arguments, conflicts, and even quarrels among the congregation. On the other hand, when I visited a church that did not practice rituals during worship, I saw harmony and apparent peace among the congregation. I contemplated more about it and found that there was more to the issue. In this article, I will try to present an analytical judgment on rituals based on biblical concepts.

In *Matthew 7:17-20*, we read: *"Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."* The Lord has given us a way to discern between good and evil. With human wisdom I applied the concept in the biblical passage above to my observations on rituals in the church. My preliminary conclusion was not favorable; rituals cannot represent a good tree if they are the source of quarrels among the congregation. Since we deal with absolute concepts, a follower of a bad tree is not going to bear any good fruit. I know many accept this simple argument but let us examine it more profoundly!

"Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

Matt. 7:17-20

If we go back and read the biblical passage above, we will find that it conveys two messages: a tree is judged by its fruit, and a tree cannot bear good and bad fruit at the same time. As a member of the Coptic Orthodox church, I also witnessed the positive spiritual impact that practicing rituals has on myself and on others. Just a second! Now we have both good and bad fruits from the same tree. This cannot be true! It has to be either good or bad. Clearly, the picture is not clear!

It may seem like I am confusing myself and my reader. How do I clarify my point? I am reminded of something I learned from my academic advisor. He once told me, "When you become confused, go back to the basic rules." Don't over complicate the problem! It can be much easier than you think. This advice was given in a scientific context, but generally, I have found it to be a very enlightened one. Let us return to the basics on trees and fruits.

Firstly, the fruit must be of its own family; an apple tree can never bear an orange. As naive as it sounds, it is a simple fact, yet we miss it all the time. Before we make a judgment on a tree, we should first make sure that we picked a fruit of the same tree and not of another. Secondly, good and bad can exist within fruits and trees of the same family. It is nonsense to assume that an apple tree that was planted in my backyard will bear bad fruit because a similar apple tree in my “neighbor's yard did.” Thirdly, a tree, whether it is good or bad, needs soil. Without taking care of the soil, a good tree is not going to survive the way it is. What does the soil represent in this context? This is where many are misled; there is a misconception among many that the church is the soil. The true soil lies within our human nature. We are the land owners. This is not a personal vision, but rather a biblical one. Recall the parable of the sower given by the Lord. He used the soil to describe the human nature when receiving the word of God. Fourthly, to maintain the soil in a good shape, it requires effort from both a land owner and an experienced farmer.

In *1 Corinthians 3*, St. Paul talks about Apollos and himself as the ones who water and plant. What did Sts. Paul and Apollos represent at the time? They represented the church's authority. Therefore, it is biblical to say that the farmer who plants and waters is the church. In the same manner, one can conclude from the parables on stewardship in *Luke 16* that the land owner is God, and we, as human beings, are the land stewards. A good farmer cannot help without the permission of the land steward. Likewise, a responsible land steward will not be able to provide professional care to his land without an experienced farmer. With regards to this analogy, we should reapply the biblical passage that talks about the tree and its fruit to rituals.

Can rituals be represented as a tree? Of course they can! What type of fruit can this tree bear? With little contemplation, one will find that the fruits are self-consciousness and discernment.

How could this be? I will tell you how: Ego is one of the most dangerous and contagious diseases that infect human nature. One way this disease manifests itself is through self-righteousness. What makes it dangerous is that it is very hard to diagnose. Practicing rituals demands different levels of interaction between the congregation and the clergy. Through these interactions, one can easily discern the spreading of this infection both on a personal basis and on a group level. Rituals push us to reveal who we are, instead of pulling out the nice spiritual mask. A good diagnosis is the first step towards healing. It is similar to paying visit to a doctor who uses top-notch medical equipments for diagnosis. This doctor will be able to administer effective medicine. On the other side, a church without rituals will grant its members a nice spiritual atmosphere; everyone is enjoying a peaceful and joyful time but no spiritual healing. It is similar to a doctor who relies on pain-killers; they will give temporal relief, but no real cure.

Now I understand why in my Coptic Church I sometimes see and experience unpleasant things. Rituals forced me to see myself and others without a mask. Sometimes I see things that I do not like, but I would rather see my real face than a pretty mask. I would rather accept others for who they are, than masks of who I want them to be. It is up to the land steward to make the decision whether or not to allow the farmer to help him with his land.

THE GIVING TRIANGLE

By Reid Fanous

To paraphrase a business related book, "There is no economical activity unless someone sells something and another buys it." Along a similar train of thought, it should be no stretch to say there is no life unless someone gives and another receives. After all, God gave us life twice: first, in the very beginning, *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."* (Genesis 2:7); and second, no matter how much we try to follow the law, we just cannot do it on our own, and thus Jesus came and gave us everlasting life, *"But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."* (John 4:14) So, God the Father exercised His life by giving us life, while His Son, accepting the ultimate agony of dying on the cross, gave us everlasting life. Because life is a blessing that we receive, it follows that, giving, which is an expression of this life, is also a blessing. Indeed, in giving, we exercise being alive, and in turn, we deeply sense and appreciate this blessing. Our God is a giving Father.

One may approach the topic of giving with some trepidation (that stems from the human fear) that by giving he or she will be losing. Such fear can paralyze us, preventing us from ever contemplating the subject, out of worry that when we understand we may find ourselves giving and thus suffer a loss. Such fear assumes that the acts of giving and receiving become a zero sum game: what is being given is taken from one pile, that of the giver, and added to another pile, that of the receiver. But what if it is not a zero sum game? As it turns out, it is not. What if both piles multiply exponentially? They do. What if it is a win-win situation? It is. *"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."* (Luke 6:38)

For the mathematically oriented, let us picture two communities of 100 persons each. In Community

S the people care only about themselves individually. In Community B, each cares about the other 99, in addition to himself or herself. If I were a member of Community S, there is only one person that cares about me, and that is myself. If I were a member of Community B, there are a full 100 people that care about me. Yet, if this reward, in and of itself, makes us open up a little to consider giving in more detail, then the act of giving is reduced to a mere business transaction and takes away the mystery that separates giving from selling. Therefore, supported by faith, let us attempt to scratch the surface of the blessing of giving.

As we contemplate this blessing in preparation for exercising it, a number of questions pop up: To whom to give? What to give? How to give? When to give? Why give? Who gives. As we delve into our exploration, we might think of giving and receiving as two opposite ends of a single line connecting the giver and the receiver. Yet, upon further investigation we find it more of a triangle connecting three corners, which are not only related but are in union. We may call it the GRG triangle: Giver - Receiver - God. In giving, we are actually giving back to our Father of what is already His as we pray in the Liturgy. Surely He is fully capable of satisfying all of us more than abundantly. So why does He not give directly (i.e. straight line between Him and the receiver)? Why do I need to get involved? Why a triangle?

This very triangle, with circulation among its three corners, is a demonstration of a few things. First, our unity in Him, or from His perspective, as you give to your brother, you are really giving Me. As King Solomon stated, *"He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given."* (Proverbs 19:17). Second, our unity with our brothers and sisters, *"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"* (1 John 3:17). Third, how we honor Him is also proof: *"Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase."* (Proverbs 3:9). And finally, how we love Him, for there is nothing I hold dearer to me than giving it to Him. Remember Abraham who was about to offer Isaac to God.



Obviously what we give depends on what the receiver needs, which goes well beyond the common form of material or monetary contributions. Our needs span a fairly wide spectrum including the need for encouragement, education, knowledge, assistance with tasks we can no longer perform, healing, companionship, attention, sense of security, sense of being needed, consolation, respect, appreciation, compassion, sympathy, kindness, understanding, and sharing to name but a few. Digging further we find that whether it is financial or any other form of giving, it invariably boils down to giving time. The financial contribution we make originally comes from time converted into money. Is not the money we earn the result of selling our services measured in time? Is not time the commodity we are all given when we enter this world to invest? Therefore, we essentially give from the fruits of investing that commodity which we received from God the Father in the first place.

Meanwhile, the majority of the needs listed above require giving personal time and attention. Since we are given various measures of this commodity, time, it follows that any of us can be a giver. Jesus set the example of giving, as He gave of Himself in obedience to the Father in order to allow us direct access to Him. So when we give, we give of ourselves. We start giving by being interested in others, observant of their needs, praying for them, and when a match is identified between the need of another person and what we can offer, we are happy to move on to how we give. Before leaving this point, it is worth mentioning that even when we work we are giving of ourselves. Granted that at work we are normally compensated for the services we render. However, if we look at work as an act of giving, our work will be far more productive and effective. As a farmer, you are satisfying the nutritional needs of the public. As a computer programmer, you are making others more productive when using your software. As a healthcare provider, you are helping others to be healthy to perform their responsibilities.

Once a giving opportunity is identified, there are a few guiding principles to watch and keep while

giving. First, the giving must be triggered by a willing heart, and delivered from our free will with no coercion. *"Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering."* (Exodus 25:2. Also see: Exodus 35:5 and Deuteronomy 16:10) Second, the giving is in complete secrecy and only on a need to know basis. In most giving, it is only the three heads of the triangle that know about it with special care given to the feelings of the receiver. When considering the person in need on the receiving end, we are driven by a rich combination of compassion and empathy. Compassion is to satisfy part of that



person's needs, and empathy in appreciating the receiver's position. *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their*

reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly." (Matthew 6:1-4) A third guiding principle has to do with the person on the receiving end, who can be a friend or enemy. *"If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink."* (Proverbs 25:21) Numerous relationships have been restored, as well as friendships started, by exercising this third principle.

The joy of the blessing of giving is succinctly expressed by the Lord as told by St. Paul: *"I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"* (Acts 20:35) One possible starting point to exercise this blessing is to begin the day by making a commitment to be open for others' needs. Likewise, we can end the day by identifying two of the day's specific incidents or individuals to mention in our prayers in the evening.

From Fear to Worship: Habakkuk the Prophet Part 3

By Christine Massoud

God doesn't answer our prayers because we are lacking this attitude—we are simply not willing to wait long enough. We throw up a prayer, and then move on to the next activity to occupy us, without waiting for God to respond. We need to live our lives with an attitude of expectancy and antici-

If you've been reading through this series on Habakkuk, you know that most of the first chapter does not give the reader very much hope. We saw a great deal of doom and gloom and calamity, exhibited mostly by the Chaldeans coming in to take over the earth. In chapter two of the Book of Habakkuk, we finally see one of the most promising first signs of hope. Beginning in the very first verse, we can see that Habakkuk is now ready to truly listen to God's message to him regarding the questions and concerns weighing on his heart: *"I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and I will answer when I am corrected"* (Habakkuk 2:1).

These five words in the second verse really touched me deeply: *"Then the Lord answered me"* (Habakkuk 2:2). I want to just park on those five words today—"Then the Lord answered **me**." Recall from the first chapter Habakkuk's frustration in believing that God was either not listening to him or simply not doing anything about his problems: *"O Lord, how long shall I cry, and you will not hear?"* (Habakkuk 1:2). Now, we see this reminder that God has been listening all along, and I wonder if God was just waiting for Habakkuk to get to a place where he could be **still and quiet long enough to lis-**

ten to God's answer. This example from Habakkuk's life is just one precious reminder that when we cry out to the Lord, He always hears us and answers us, not always in our time or in a way that we would have hoped, but He does answer us. Isn't that what we have already seen in the Book of Jeremiah? *"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know"* (Jeremiah 33: 3).

Now a question comes to mind. How long had Habakkuk been waiting and listening for an answer in that watchtower, at that watchpost? Well, the obvious answer is that we don't know because the Scripture doesn't tell us. However, we can say that we know he waited as long as it took for God to answer. We can't determine the length of the time span between verses one and two. Did God answer him in three minutes? Three hours? Three days? How long was he at that watchpost? Recall from previous articles that the "watchpost" referred to does not need to be interpreted literally. Rather, the watchpost refers to an attitude of expectancy—waiting on God, saying, **"Lord, speak. Your servant is listening."** Habakkuk waited, listening for a response from God, with no regard for the time that passed while he was waiting. Perhaps so many of us feel that

pation of God's answer to our prayers, patiently and alertly waiting until God gives us what we need. We will see that this concept of waiting on the Lord is a recurring theme throughout the Book of Habakkuk.

What does it mean to have the Lord answer us? What does that look like to us? You say, "I have set myself on my watchpost because I want to know God's answer to how I should deal with this issue in my school, or my church, or my workplace. How should I expect to hear from God? Am I going to have a dream? Am I going to have a vision? Am I going to hear an audible voice?" "How will I know that God is speaking to me?" Well, as we read in Hebrews, prior to the completion of Scripture, God frequently used methods such as visions, dreams, and audible voices to communicate with His people. In the Old Testament, it was not unusual for God to speak in those ways. Now that we have the completed Scripture, God speaks to us through His Word and by His Holy Spirit who lives within us.

***"Lord, speak.
Your servant
is listening."***

From Fear to Worship: continued ...

In Habakkuk's day, God was telling him, "You're going to face persecution. There's going to be chastening; there's going to be suffering, and you're going to need faith to face the coming invasion by the Babylonians." How are you going to live in a day of crisis? By faith: *"The just shall live by his faith"* (Habakkuk 2:4). Up until this crucial point in the book, Habakkuk is losing his mind trying to figure out how to understand what God is doing, grappling with the unfathomable issues of His providence, His sovereignty, and His plan. God tells Habakkuk, and us, to "live by faith." And from that point on, Habakkuk just begins to rest his arguments, his mind, his heart, his life, and his future, in faith—faith that **God knows what He's doing. God will do all things right, and what God does is good.** The command to "live by faith" is not just for Habakkuk and people who are facing the Babylonians. We have to live by faith in a day when we face affliction, adversity, suffering, and challenges. **We need faith.**

And here I struggle to even continue typing. **FAITH.** The righteous will choose to live by faith. It's a choice, an hourly, daily, life-long choice to live by faith. Faith is, according to Merriam-Webster, the "firm belief in something for which there is no proof: complete trust." I choose to see it differently. Faith, in my understanding (and I'm not hoping for a breakthrough in Christian Doctrine here), is the belief that what took place in the past will take place in the future: that should provide enough proof. When you, on a very deep level, know that only God was there for you that day or

night, when only God could have gotten you out of a certain situation, when only God could have known your circumstances and your struggle, you possess the grounds for faith, in essence, proof. Simply put, my faith in God is a very personal belief that the way He protected, provided, counseled, and saved in the past, is the same way He will continue to do so in the future. His promises, which I have consistently seen fulfilled in my life, will continue to take place if I wait on him to fulfill them. We always blame the Israelites for lack of faith after having seen the Red Sea split in half for them, but we are just as easy to blame. We have watched God over and over fulfill "His end of the deal," and yet we always think he won't—this is a lack of faith. So here's what I have had to do: I have to remind myself of all those times when I finally decided to step out of the way, when I realized (sometimes after a long time) that I was not strong enough to handle the situation and that my only resort was for Him to take over, which HE DID. When life got to a point when it was all out of our hands, we gave it over to God. When we watched a loved one struggle, when we realized that the consequences for our actions are going to catch up with us, when we realized deep inside that only God can save us, which He did when we let Him, then we can say that we have discovered the true meaning of faith.

Now some of you may say, "What if that didn't happen in my life? Then take His promises and live by them. Christianity is very personal, and God wants YOU. St.

Paul, Hebrews 11, lists the men and women that made up the "Great Hall of Faith." These men and women of Scripture days pleased God by their faith, because, without faith, there is no pleasing Him. Have you ever struggled in a friendship or relationship where the other person never trusted you? No matter how much you said it, showed it, and "proved" it? How pleased were you with that situation? Were you frustrated? God is the exact same way.

You know what's true of all those men and women of faith? They lived their lives believing that God's Word was really true. They banked their lives on it, which is the whole message of the scriptures. Bank on Him and He will prove His truthfulness to you over and over, just take the time to look closely. He is doing things in our days we would not believe, even if we were told. Faith in God's promises, faith in God's presence, His protection, His provision, and His power: every area of your life, if you want it to please God, requires faith. **God has and can meet your needs in any way He chooses IF YOU LET HIM.**

The command to "live by faith" is not just for Habakkuk and people who are facing the Babylonians. We have to live by faith in a day when we face affliction, adversity, suffering, and challenges. We need faith.

How do you face the future with joy and confidence? You walk by faith. As you face decisions in your life (Should I take this job? Should we move to this location? Should I marry this person?), you have set your hope in Him. It shows great faith to believe that He will continue to deliver us. So say this: "I will continue to set my hope in God and to believe that He will continue to deliver me and give me joy in Him. If my circumstances never change, I will hope in God." What areas of your life require you to walk by faith? Do you resent them? Do you resist them? Do you run from them, or do you embrace them? Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

So from this point on in the book of Habakkuk, after God says, "The righteous shall live by his faith," you will notice that Habakkuk doesn't ask any more questions. We've said earlier that it's not wrong to have honest questions asked from a searching heart. However, something clicked in Habakkuk, and he realized that he will not, now or ever, fully understand the ways of God, which is okay. See, if we can predict the outcome, if we can see and understand all the purposes of God, then we cannot say that we have faith! Habakkuk realizes that whether or not he can see and understand God's plan, God is at work. He can trust God

from his personal experience with Him. In His time, the vision will be fulfilled.

All will be well, and in the meantime, what does he do? He walks by faith: **"The righteous shall live by his faith."** Put your

mind at ease, your God will take care of it. Choose, at every hour of every day, to remember His fulfilled promises in your life and choose to trust that he will show Himself to be faithful.





The Bride: A Glorious Church

By H. G. Bishop Youssef

Who is this bride for whom Christ was so determined to give Himself up? What has she done to deserve His love and suffering? All that He asks of her is that she submits to Him in faith, He who is gentle and lowly of heart. By doing so, He gives her His peace and grace and abundantly pours His blessings upon her. She is the church, the body of believers, and the human soul. Our teacher St. Paul the Apostle allegorically compares a cherished wife to the church. *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blem-*

ish" (Eph. 5:25-27). She is you and I, whom He purchased with His precious blood and for whom He received thirty-nine lashings tearing His flesh, was humiliated and smitten with a reed, and upon His holy head was placed a crown of thorns, all these were meant for you and I to endure. *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ"* (Eph. 2:13). The cost of redemption was immense, but the betrothal is the victory.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13).

Some may have thought He had forgotten us, and rightfully so. His assuring words attest to His loyal promises and enduring love: *“Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me. Your sons shall make haste; your destroyers and those who laid you waste shall go away from you. Lift up your eyes, look around and see; all these gather together and come to you. ‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘You shall surely clothe yourselves with them all as an ornament, and bind them on you as a bride does’.... All flesh shall know that I, the Lord, am your Savior; and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob”* (Isaiah 49:14-26). With joy, He trampled upon every thistle meant to cause us to stumble. The scholar Origen says, *“Christ has borne our sins and has been bruised because of our iniquities. The punishment which was owing us, in order that we might be chastised, and might obtain peace, has fallen on Him.”*

By His death, resurrection, and ascension, He gave us life. Restoration of the human soul to a godly image came about by putting on us Christ Himself in our Holy Baptism. This is a great Mystery in the path of Salvation. This is the beginning of our commitment to our Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ. Through this holy sacrament, one dies with Christ and rises with Him; thus, *dying in Christ and rising in Him*. The *thief on the right*, in the last moments of his life, obtained his salvation in that literal sense, for not only did he die with Christ, but having repented and confessed his faith, he also died *in Christ*.

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Never is one without hope, until the last breath. Through Christ’s holy resurrection, we may boldly shout, *“where is your sting, O death,”* the greatest enemy to humanity? The bride is the soul who has gained spiritual maturity through the guidance of the church. This is not of a chronological age, but of a pure heart adorned with the sacramental rites. Thus, the struggling church, the kononia of believers, and the human soul will be the triumphant bride who overcame and endured until the end. What will the bride have overcome? Temptations, apathy, lukewarmness, vanities, hypocrisies, chal-

lenges, heresies, persecutions, and the lusts of the world are among the contentions and struggles. The well lit bright lanterns, prepared, trimmed, full of oil, and carried by the *five wise virgins* (Matt. 25:1-13) are the constant fruit of repentance purifying the soul and making the hearts ready for the coming of the *Bridegroom*.

The church remains alert throughout the night, praising and worshiping her Savior and King in the Bright Saturday of Joy, where we obtain the blessings of the oil. In the readings of the Holy Book of Revelation, the identity of the anticipated bride is revealed by one of the seven angels to St. John the Evangelist: *“‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God”* (Rev.21:9-11). The church remains in constant joy throughout the fifty days following the holy resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, triumphant in His victory.

Throughout those glorious days between the holy resurrection and ascension, our Lord taught the apostles the way of Salvation and the role and rites of His holy church — the vine which He personally planted. He established the church, the keeper of *the true faith* which He authorized to hold the key to His everlasting kingdom. He sanctioned and fortified her forever that she may lead us, His bride, the body of believers, victorious in Him. *“For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father”* (Eph. 2:18). The Lord Christ sent us the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father to dwell in us so that we do not strive alone. He is the Advocate who leads the bride to His everlasting kingdom.

The Bride: A Glorious Church

Continued

Helper: *"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:15-18).*

"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning" (15:26,27).

Interpreter: *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20,21).*

Intercessor: *"For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26).*

Reminder: *"Bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26).*

Teacher: *"He will teach you all things" (John 14:26).*

The church victoriously exults in the great triumph of our Lord Jesus Christ, proclaims His death, and confesses His holy resurrection and ascension into heaven in every Divine Liturgy. Amidst our struggles, we rejoice in the hope of His return, that He may find us ready to meet Him and be His bride. *"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Is. 61:10).*



A Homily of our Holy Father Abba Shenouti the Archimandrite

Brethren, if we want to escape God's punishment and find mercy in His eyes, let us sit every evening alone by ourselves and search our souls for what we presented to our guardian angel to offer to the Lord.

Again, as the night goes by and a new day dawns and light prevails; let us search ourselves to know what we presented to our companion angel to offer to the Lord.

Let it doubt that us—male or young or was bap—name of the Son, and Spirit has signed to a angel until his death to Him every his assigned has done by night. Not unaware of have done. bid. He is e d g e a b l e it is written, the Lord are



be beyond everyone of f e m a l e — old, who tized in the Father, the the Holy been as—designated the day of report to day what individual day or by that God is what we Heavens for—more knowl—about it. As the eyes of watching all

the time everywhere on those who commit evil and on those who do good. Rather the angels are servants installed by the Creator of the universe for those who will inherit the salvation.

Our journey on this earth is long and full of various obstacles, especially for youth. To live a Christian life is not easy, for many times we struggle and fail. The reason being that sometimes we tend to find ourselves unsatisfied with what we have, often craving more money, higher education, better jobs, prestige, and so on. The result is that we run after other gods and drift away from the true God. The strong foundation that was once established in us becomes weaker by the day, and we become more vulnerable against sin and fall in despair. So what would satisfy that hunger in us, and what would give us strength to defeat the evil one? St. Paul the apostle found what satisfied his hunger and gave him power, especially during his time of weakness. He shared with us his finding and source of satisfaction saying, *"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death."* (Philippians 3:10)

To know Him is a very strong expression that reveals the depth of a personal relationship one can have with Christ. To truly know Christ, means to realize the many blessings God has given us. Our existence in this world was because of His love for us. He endured passion and suffering in order to give us life, that we may be delivered from sin and be reunited with Him. Therefore, in order to know Christ one perseveres to acquire three virtues, which are love, humility, and hope.

When the world turns its back on you and you feel alone, when true friendship is no longer found, and when your plans come to destruction, know and be sure that God loves you. Despite our sins and past history of failure, Christ is still willing to take us back. His love for us is unconditional, not because of our goodness but simply because He loves us. Therefore, we ought to love God as He loves us (1 John 4:19). When we meditate on the lives of many saints, we see the fruit of their love toward God. Their love was not based on fear, but rather love that made them eager to give up their lives and be martyred than to sin and displease Him. As St. John the beloved taught us, *"Perfect love cast out fear."* (1 John 4:18) The more you love Him, the more you will want to live with Him and therefore, the more you will despise sin.

Many of the desert fathers have told us about their deep relationship with God; however, they warned us saying that the more we try to abide in God, the more persistent Satan becomes in his wars towards us. So how can one be saved? One of the desert mothers, Amma Theodora, once told a story saying, *"There was an anchorite who was able to banish the demons; and he asked them, 'What makes you go away? Is it fasting?'"*

They replied, 'We do not eat or drink.'

'Is it vigils?'

They replied, 'We do not sleep.'

'Is it separation from the world?'

'We live in the deserts.'

'What power sends you away then?'

They said, 'Nothing can overcome us, but only humility.'"

Do you see how humility is victorious over the demons?" Therefore brethren, no matter how close you think you are to God, always ask for His help. If you are blessed with a peaceful life, then learn from Abba Macarius who taught us saying, *"When we do not experience warfare, we ought so much the more to humiliate ourselves. For God seeing our weakness protects us; when we glorify ourselves, He withdraws His protection and we are lost."* Therefore, *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."* (James 4:10)

No one said that our life on earth is going to be easy. The world expects certain values that contradict our Christian nature. Our primary goals as Christians differ from those of the world. As a result, these can be sources of temptation and new means of martyrdom. Yet let us not despair but have hope as Christ promised us saying *"These things I have spoken to you that in Me you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation;*

but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) **Yes, Christ overcame the world by His resurrection, breaking all the rules of nature. He abolished death by His death, and for our sake He was counted with the sinners so that we reunite with the heavenly. We do indeed need the power of His resurrection to overcome the evil one, the temptations of this world, the grief and sorrows that are in our lives, and to give us strength to live as the children of God.**

"That I may have fellowship with Him in His sufferings, being made conformable to His death." (Philippians 3:10) It has been said that a true friend will be there with you during your time of need to comfort you and help you. Those moments are the ones that draw you closer to your friend, for you appreciate that they did not leave you during your time of need. Same with our relationship with Christ, those moments of intense sufferings and tribulation are what bring us closer to God. We realize that He is our only refuge, and in Him only can we find comfort and peace. The more we share in the fellowship of His suffering, the more we grow in the likeness of His death and resurrect with Him. So, smile and be happy for you are God's child. No matter what life throws your way, just remember we are strangers in this world but soon we will find comfort and peace in our new heavenly home. Christ came to save us that we may live a life of resurrection rather than despair.

**The Holy Resurrection
in the Life of Youth
By Maria Mansour**

Ordinary people



Serving in Extraordinary Ways

PILLARS OF OUR TIME CANTOR MIKHAIL GERGES EL BATANONY

By Marilyn Ekladios

“Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! Sing out honor of His name; Make His praise glorious” (Ps. 66:1).

A great part of worship in the Coptic Orthodox church comes from the sacred and powerful hymns and chants which have been passed down throughout many generations. The Cantor Mikhail Gerges El Batanony is one of those giants who helped foster the love for church music and preserve it in the Coptic Church. We are indebted to this man of faith, who taught us to express our devotion through the beautiful, but at one time, forgotten hymns and chants used by our forefathers.

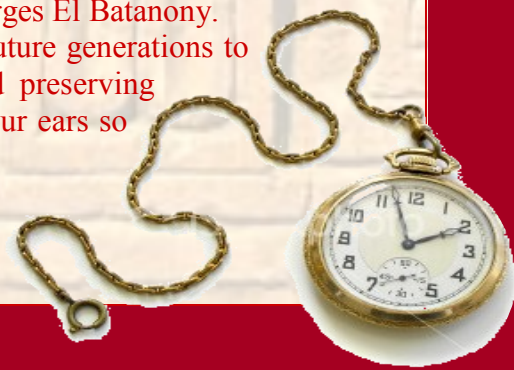
Cantor Mikhail was a perpetual student of church music. He was himself a student of two great cantors, Morcos and Armanious. His beautiful baritone voice resonated throughout the church. Not only was he respected by the people, his peers, and the clergy, but Pope Kyrrillos V also had the greatest admiration for Mikhail Gerges who could gracefully recite any church hymn with perfect pitch and tone. Because of his diligence and astute knowledge of all hymns, he was appointed the Archpsaltos of the Patriarchate. The cantor became a professor and mentor to many students in the Theological Seminary.

Although his family was well to do, his father's love of the church and her music was instilled in his young son who had failing vision. Mikhail Gerges mastered all hymns with the greatest ease, proving his talents to be a magnificent gift from God. While many would have sulked in the disappointment of having a disability, Cantor Mikhail Gerges maintained a positive outlook and shared his God-given abilities with the world. He is renowned not only among the Coptic community, but to all church loving people throughout the world who strive to preserve its rich heritage through music.

Much of the hymns we think we know today are due to the tireless efforts of this man who was a pioneer in recording the most accurate rhythmic notations of the hymnologies of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Hymns that would have long ago died out were revived by Cantor Mikhail Gerges El Batanony.

Whether one is a deacon or a servant, male or female, we owe it to future generations to maintain the beauty of this amazing form of praise to God. Learning and preserving church hymns is a vital link to our past and to our future. Let us fine tune our ears so that we may learn to praise God befittingly.

<http://www.coptic.org/music/keraza75.htm>



The Great Feast: A Renewed Spirit

By James Helmy

We may have prayed this Psalm many times without realizing that it has the power of resurrection hidden within it. For when David prayed it, there was much that had *died* in his life: his purity, his spiritual strength, and his child. He found himself on his knees; he wept in agony all that night over the devastation wrought in his life by one moment's sin. Psalm 50 was a heart-felt petition for God to lift him out of his pit and grant him renewed life. It was a request for resurrection. Everything had died, including his joy. But by God's mercy, all was brought back to life. His purity was replaced by a fervent holiness; his lost strength was renewed into a healthy vitality; and in place of his dead son arose the great Solomon.

Everything in human life that is sustained by itself, and is not continually renewed by God's grace, quickly dies. Every friendship, every pursuit, every belief, everything that gives delight—including the spiritual life—tends to fade

away and die out in the course of time. If any of these is to have lasting significance, it must be *renewed* constantly.

We have all felt this bitter experience. Our best friendship suddenly grows cold; our exciting new job becomes monotonous; our once warm and exuberant faith is now stuck in the mud—all things meet their human end. It is what happens when a person shifts the focus from God to the thing itself. That relationship or job which was once a delight because it was for God's glory has now become a source of delight in itself; and so it must naturally die. Resurrection is now needed. And only God's blessing can do this work. New life and meaning can be breathed into these dead bones. But the breath must come from the nostrils of God.

If something precious has "died" in your life, do not worry excessively. It may be an indication that you have let it run on its own fuel for too long. You have come to admire it

excessively on its own merits, and the gift has become more important than the Giver. Our blessed Savior, in His love, has let it die; but if you entrust the entire situation to Him, He always intends to raise in its place something very new, fresh, and wonderful.

During this 50-day period of celebration, let us all beseech God for renewal of every detail of our worn lives. Life should not be weary! Christ did not come to die and rise in power, to lead a troupe of weak, disappointed Christians. But we will always be disappointed if we accept life the way the world normally does. For to Christ, "normal" is far below standard. "In Your presence is *fullness of joy*; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). Nowhere, absolutely nowhere, will we find this "fullness of joy" except in Christ. And He grants it most fully to us by the power of resurrection working in our lives.

Χριστος ΑΝΕΣΤΙ

~The Fathers Speak~

He said concerning Abba Pior that every day he made a new beginning.

Abba Poemon

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

"I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple is what is evil" (Rom. 16:19). This word means that we are always children, always new as those who share in the new Word...For this reason, let our whole life be springtime; let the truth within us never grow old.

Clement of Alexandria
The Teacher

He [St. Anthony] indeed did not hold time passed in his memory, but day by day, as if making a new beginning...increased his exertion for advance, saying continually to himself Paul's word about "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead" (Phil 3:13)...He observed that in saying "today" he was not counting time passed, but was one always establishing a beginning.

Athanasius
Life of Antony

Psalms 51:10

**"Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me."**

Many youth in this generation tend to worry about things when they do not go their way. Whether it is difficulties in school or hardships at work, most of the time people continuously worry about what will happen next. We tend to forget that God is the one leading our lives in the direction that befits His will. Most of the martyred saints only focused on Christ, so they never worried about what they were going to eat or where they were going to sleep. Since they trusted the Lord and had faith in Him to provide for them, their victory was in the Lord and they trusted Him with all their hearts.

On Baramouda 1, the three holy virgins Agape, Eirene, and Shiona (Susinia) were martyred. They were from Thessalonica and worshipped Christ as their parents had. They chose a life of chastity and they agreed to devote themselves to asceticism. They fasted and prayed unceasingly, visited the convents regularly and participated with the virgins of the convent in their prayers and asceti-

cism. When Maximianus the Infidel reigned, he restored the worship of idols and shed the blood of many Christians. These saints were afraid and fled to the mountains and hid themselves in a cave devoting themselves to their worship and asceticism. Because the Lord loved their devotion and strength, every week He would send them an aged Christian woman to visit them and bring them all the things they needed. She took the work of their hands to sell and distributed any remainder as alms to the poor. One day a malicious person noticed this old woman's frequent visits to the mountain. He followed her secretly until he knew the cave that she entered. He hid himself so she did not see him on her way back, thinking that she was hiding precious things in it. After she left, he entered the cave and he found the precious pearls, the brides of Christ standing and praying.

He bound them, dragged them away, and brought them to the Governor of Thessalonica. He asked them about their

faith and they confessed that they were Christians worshipping He who was crucified. The governor became enraged with them and tortured them profusely. The three saints held on to Christ more and more and accepted the torture in silence. They did not deny Christ and they were not shaken. The governor was fed up with them, so he cast them into the fire. Finally, they delivered up their souls and received the crowns of martyrdom.

They were victorious to the end, and they knew their ultimate prize was having an everlasting life in heaven. They did not worry about what the governor was planning to do to them. Like Psalm 16:8 says, "I have set the Lord always before me;

because he is at my right hand, I will not be moved," these saints followed it word for word. Similarly, we should not worry or be shaken when calamities come our way, but we should remember that through Christ we can overcome any trouble. Always remember: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. For the Lord is my strength and my song; He also has become my salvation" (Isaiah 12:2).

Synaxarium



STS. AGAPE, EIRENE, & SHIONA VIRGINS & MARTYRS

By Mareya Naguib

answer

answer



SEARCH THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

HOLY BOOK OF GENESIS



CHAPTER 15

1. What did God ask Abram to do as proof for inheriting the land?
2. What are the boundaries of the land to be given to Abram's descendants?
2. How does a person's love relationship with God affect families?
3. Why was there an outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah?

CHAPTER 16

1. According to the Angel of the Lord, what would be the characteristics of Hagar's son?
2. What resulted when Abram and Sarai tried human ways rather than God's ways to have a child?
1. What position must Lot have held in Sodomite society?
2. Why did Lot's daughters make him drunk?
3. What nations descended from Lot?

CHAPTER 17

1. List six things in God's promise to Abraham.
2. What is the ruling on the uncircumcised male? And why?
3. Why did Abraham fall on his face and laugh?
1. Give verses in chapter 19 which show that Lot could not influence his sons-in-law.
2. Wasn't Abraham more to blame than Abimelech?
3. How did Abimelech vindicate Sarah?

CHAPTER 18

1. Why did God let Abraham in on His plans?
1. Did God agree with Sarah's demand to get rid of Hagar? Why?
2. How did Abimelech recognize that God was with Abraham?

CHAPTER 19

1. What position must Lot have held in Sodomite society?
2. Why did Lot's daughters make him drunk?
3. What nations descended from Lot?

CHAPTER 20

1. Give verses in chapter 19 which show that Lot could not influence his sons-in-law.
2. Wasn't Abraham more to blame than Abimelech?
3. How did Abimelech vindicate Sarah?

CHAPTER 21

1. Did God agree with Sarah's demand to get rid of Hagar? Why?
2. How did Abimelech recognize that God was with Abraham?

U, Will like this....
THE U IN JESUS

Before U were thought of
or time had begun,

God stuck U
in the name of His Son.

And each time U pray,
you'll see it's true,

You can't spell out JesUs
and not include U.

You're a pretty big part of
His wonderful name,

For U, He was born;
that's why He came.

And His great love for U
is the reason He died.

It even takes U to spell crUcified.

Isn't it thrilling
and splendidly grand

He rose from the dead
with U in His plan?

The stones split away,
the gold trUmpet blew,

and this word resUrrection
is spelled with a U.

When JesUs left earth
At His Upward ascension,

He felt there was one thing
He just had to mention.

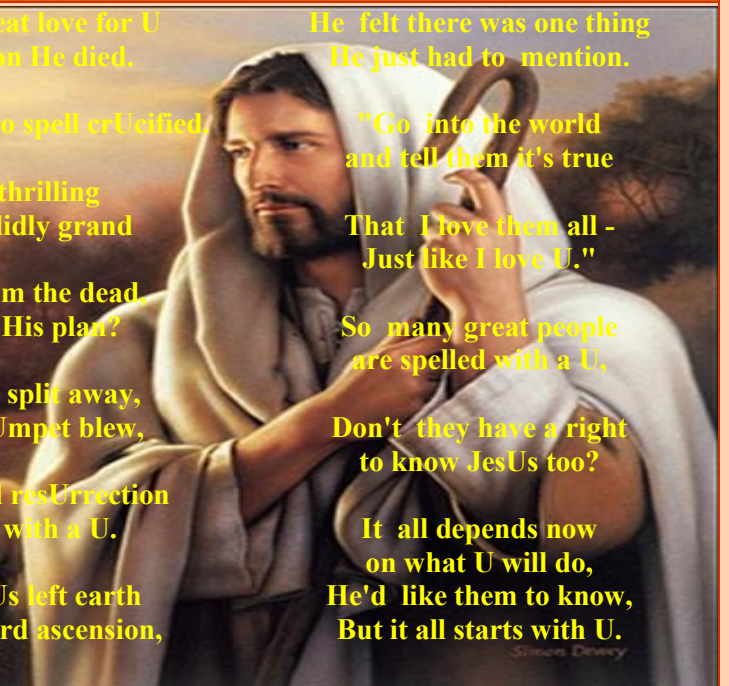
"Go into the world
and tell them it's true

That I love them all -
Just like I love U."

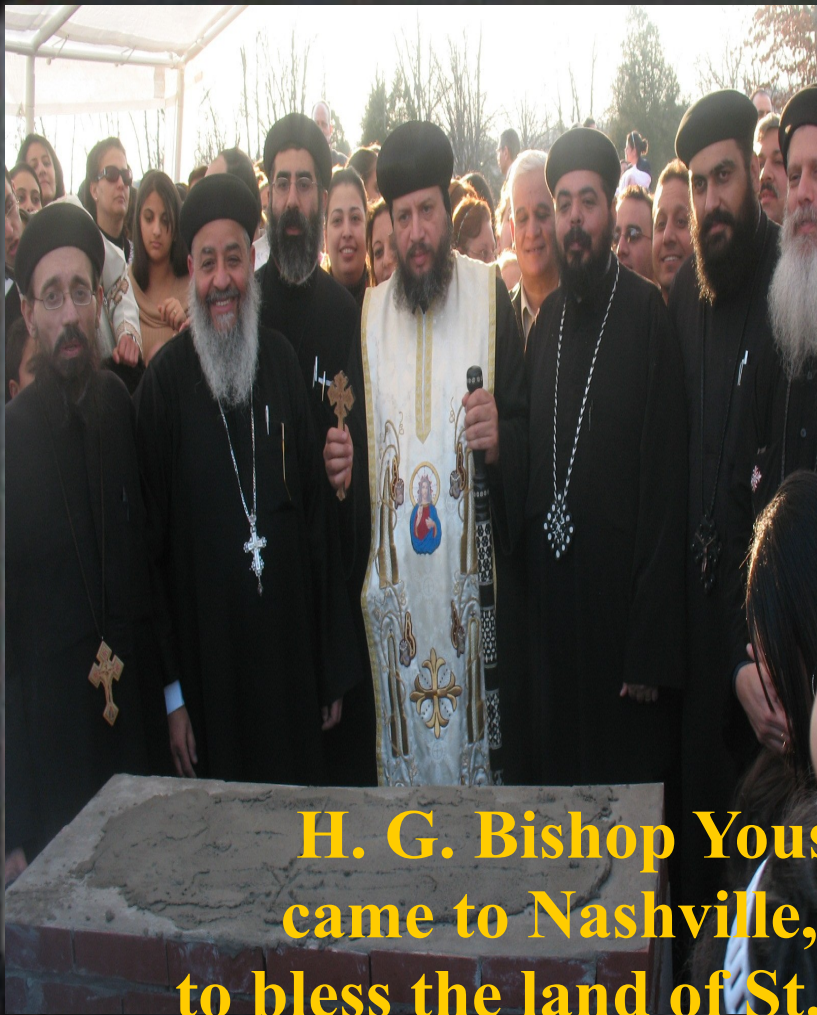
So many great people
are spelled with a U,

Don't they have a right
to know JesUs too?

It all depends now
on what U will do,
He'd like them to know,
But it all starts with U.



Special Moments in the SUS Diocese



**H. G. Bishop Youssef
came to Nashville, TN
to bless the land of St. Pishoy
and to lay the cornerstone of the cathedral.**

Photo Courtesy of Maria Mansour

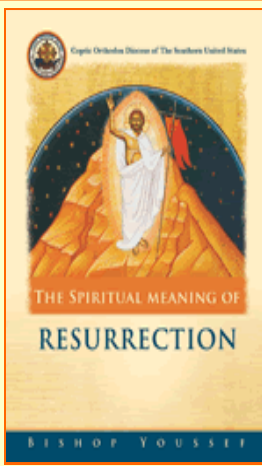


**N
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Contemplations On The Resurrection
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The Seven Words Of Our Lord
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