

Spring 2015 Volume 14 No.2

MIGHTY MAGAZINE MARROWS



Life. God. Truth. For Coptic Youth



The Mustard Seed

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

Psalms 127:4

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

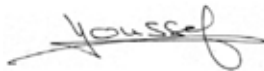
My Beloved,

Faith has two attributes—a virtue and a gift. Sometimes, we quickly lose our faith due to the many times we have been let down or have let others down. Face it—unfortunately, we are often inconsistent. Even some of the great prophets sometimes struggled with faith. Moses the archprophet struck the rock twice (Exodus 17; Numbers 20)—a sign of a lack of faith and disobedience even though he witnessed numerous miracles and even performed some by the word of the Lord. He did not understand that many of the symbols in these miracles were also prophetic about the Messiah, who would be crucified once for all—struck just as He ordered Moses to strike the rock just once.

Peter the disciple and martyr walked on water (Matthew 14)—an astonishing miracle. Yet for lack of faith, he looked at the impossible, though he had with him, our Lord who assured him and us that all things are possible with God—He is our strength, and not a single thing is too hard for Him (Genesis, 18:14; Job 42:2; Isaiah 41:10, 46:10; Jeremiah 32:27; Matthew 17:20 19:26; Mark 9:23, 10:27, 11:24; Luke 1:37, 18:27; Romans 8:31; Philippians 4:23).

We ruminate about nonsense and sometimes forget God’s promises that He is always with us, He will never abandon us, He calls His children, brethren, disciples, and His people, and many, many things has Christ our God said to empower us with faith in Him so we can be as strong as even the smallest of the seeds—the mustard seed that has the potential to grow in grandeur and strength and be a safe haven for others. The articles in this Spring 2015 Edition of the Mighty Arrows Magazine give us many perspectives of this great little seed and how it can transform our lives for the better, with complete security and confidence in God.

God bless you,



Bishop Youssef

BISHOP, COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

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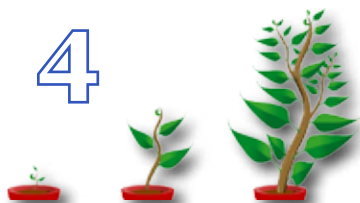
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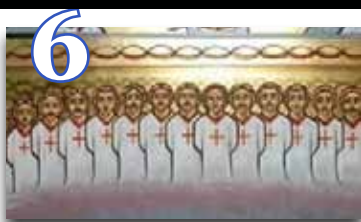
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A Lifelong Journey

God tends to our faith from the beginning and always

BY JAMES HELMY



A SOUND AND MATURE MIND IS THE PRODUCT OF A VERY SLOW GROWTH. The newborn baby begins her life with not even a hint of consciousness. Hunger, pain, and other biological drives provoke her to a fit of crying on a daily basis, but this stimulus-response exchange is no more meaningful than a plant's leaning toward the sunlight. Mentally, the baby is just a blank slate. With time, however, the growing human begins to interact with the world and to learn that things exist apart from her own self. The baby's parents, her bedroom, and even her own limbs become startling discoveries of her mind. She eventually learns mobility and realizes that she must navigate her way through a hazardous environment in order to reach her goals without excessive trauma. She also learns that there are other humans around her (like herself) who have wills (also like herself), and these wills often clash with her own, thus demanding either compromise or obedience—as when her parents turn her in for bed at an hour that does not please her. At birth, she has begun, in fact, a life-long journey of self-discovery.

She then begins school, and the interaction with hundreds of children like her begins to teach her what kind of person she is: how much kindness, politeness, jealousy, selfishness, or any other trait characterize her in comparison with the rest of her kind. She learns she has certain good attributes that other children lack, and that she lacks certain qualities that other children have in abundance. She continues on this journey of self-development and learns that certain patterns of

behavior repeatedly lead to success while others repeatedly lead to failure. Thus, her mind naturally draws up a set of principles by which the world is apparently governed and which ought to direct her own life. Unfortunately, however, she also discovers certain negative tendencies within herself which cause her to disobey the good principles, and so she learns the meaning of spiritual warfare.

Everything good in life requires toil. Everything worthwhile requires time. Everything noble and true and permanent requires commitment. Nothing that comes easily is permanent. Nothing offered as a short-cut or an escape from responsibility can bring true quality to one's life. The blessings of a certain action or situation may need many years of waiting before they can be enjoyed. The sweetest and ripest fruit in life is the result of a resolute will to face challenges.

These are the overarching rules of living that gradually dawn on a person and alter the course of her behavior at every age. As she advances in years, approaching the more seasoned stages of life, she begins to look back at the life that stretches into her remote past, and her mind takes stock. She might have begun as small and thoughtless as a mustard seed, but in time she grew—through education, experience, and error—into a mature, sturdy, fruitful tree.

The life of faith proceeds roughly along the same lines. Our faith in its infancy is but a young, naïve, vulnerable thing. It is barely conscious of anything but itself, and it thrives on simplistic



assumptions about God, about religion, and about spiritual life. Initially, no demands are made upon it, and no challenges provoke its growth. But then a person grows, and begins to collide with the external world, and discovers with surprise that his faith is not invincible. If he is not careful, it is liable to attacks from the outside, to internal weariness, to laziness, and even to death. He then realizes that in order to retain his faith, he must expend considerable stores of his energy to live righteously, to think purely, to pray consistently, and to read extensively, all in order to save his faith. His spiritual life has embarked on a journey of self-discovery.

Everything good in spiritual life requires sacrifice. Everything worthwhile requires time. Every good, true, and permanent virtue requires effort and pain. Nothing valuable comes easily. No spiritual joy is free. No spiritual life is without its mistakes, wrong-turns, and regrets, but his first great triumph is to learn not to despair. Faith might be a difficult thing, but the young man decides to meet its challenges one-by-one, and so he begins to understand what a new life in Christ means. God is far beyond his comprehension, but that's okay; he feels the comforting touch of the Divine Hand, and that is enough. The Bible plumbs

spiritual topics in a way that baffles him, but that again is okay; he will walk by the light that is given him. The colossal institution which he calls the "Church"—with all its complicated history, complicated rituals, and complicated people—makes his head absolutely spin. But again, it's quite alright; for his part, he will go into the sanctuary in silence to pray to his God.

Paradoxically, with the passing years, his own confidence and pride in his religious opinions may decrease, while his faith grows. His once staunch insistence on particular rites or dogmas contracts, while his simple trust in God expands.

denunciation against the Pharisees, who "*strain out a gnat and swallow a camel*,"¹ and that the great mistake of so many religious lives is the tendency to "*pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and neglect the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith*."² He turns to the Gospels, and finds there the purest and truest of all moral and religious teaching: be the salt and light of the world; hunger and thirst after righteousness; pray in secret; give your coat to him who asks; go the second mile; show mercy; be reconciled to your brother; cut off the sinning member; lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven; be anxious for

nothing.

Little by little, his soul increases in stature. He cannot measure its health like a doctor measures a blood pressure. He cannot record its progress like a farmer records the increase of a horse. He cannot project its future state like a business projects future revenues. The entire process is, in a way, hidden from his view. But according to our Lord's happy parable, the growth continues. It might even seem at times to lag or regress in times of doubt or hardship, but all the while, He who sees the entire track from His high vantage-point knows that we who can see only a few feet ahead are indeed on the right road.

God is ultimately in charge of this hard business of growing millions and millions of little faith-trees. We need not be distressed that our faith is not completely in our control. He is the Good Husbandman. We can depend on Him. We might even feel the need to cry out daily that desperate prayer, "*Lord... help my unbelief!*"³ while God knows every day what is needed to advance our faith. The person who makes it a life-long habit to rely (sometimes blindly) on God's wisdom, finds, at the end of many years, a robust tree planted in his heart—which many years prior was but a tiny mustard seed thrown upon good soil.

¹ Matthew 23:24.

² Matthew 23:23.

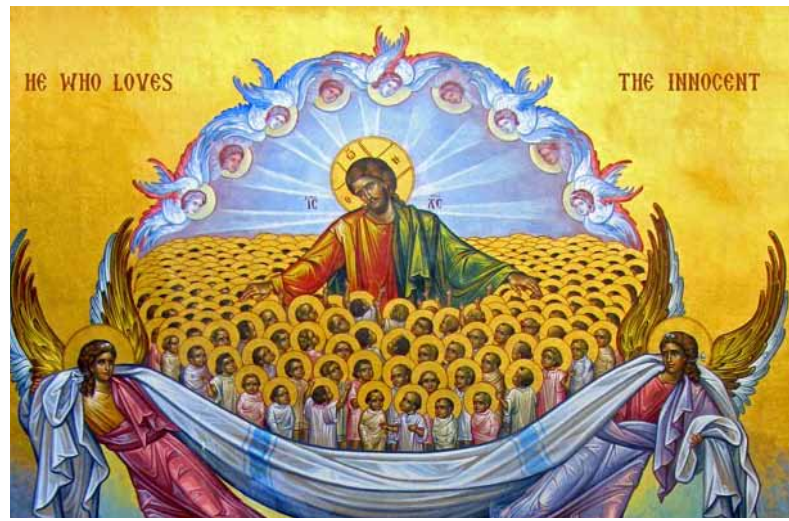
³ Mark 9:24.

21 Martyrs of Libya



Faith Sown in Christ, Flourishes before Everyone and Wins the Kingdom of God

BY MINA GIRGIS



“THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU”—THIS WAS THE LORD’S ANSWER TO THE PHARISEE’S QUESTION, “WHEN THE KINGDOM OF GOD WOULD COME?”¹ This answer was also directed to our fathers, the disciples, and in return, to every single Christian who believes in Christ. In many other incidents, our Lord spoke about the kingdom of God in parables; the simplest of those is about a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. That seed grew and became a large tree, beautiful in appearance, with many branches, and birds would come, make it their home, and nest there.² Moreover, speaking to the disciples and to us, our Lord confirmed, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”³

Anyone who believes in God today, searches for the Truth to lead him or her to that God. If they are Christians, they are to search then for how to gain salvation to be with God. In the Scriptures and through the fathers’ teachings, we learn that the kingdom of God is not a place, but a state of being with God, or the result of being saved. So how do we gain the kingdom of God, and have it within us? I believe we must have faith in Christ—the simplest form of faith, the faith of a child who walks with the parent, holding hands and worrying about nothing, knowing that the father or mother will never let go. If we can measure faith, we would need the smallest amount, just like the mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds planted, which becomes a tree. That small bit of faith would bring us the fullness of the kingdom of God, which is the huge tree that springs forth from the mustard seed. Not only that, but God uses our faith in Him to also bring others to Himself. As the kingdom of God is within us, others who see us, or even talk to us, may begin believing and having faith in God just because they have seen the result of our faith; just like the huge tree—birds see it from far away, so they come to it and take shelter.

There is no greater way of showing faith in Christ than martyrdom. Christ died for the Church to grant us salvation, and some choose martyrdom to show their

faith in Christ and gain salvation. The twenty-one martyrs recently martyred in Libya are a true example of showing faith, one that has not been seen in a very long time, even taking into consideration the many persecutions that Copts have experienced in Egypt through the years. They were youth who had left their homes and traveled to another country in search of a way to provide for their families. They did this with faith in our Lord that He would not leave them, however, the devil always declares war against the Son wherever faith in Him may shine. The devil, personified in terrorists, thought that showing their martyrdom in a theatrical manner would shake everyone’s faith, but the opposite has taken place. Believers were strengthened more in the faith, and the entire world has seen these martyrs sacrificed and their souls accepted into Paradise. For as much as the video of their martyrdom is brutal and sickening, it was a true showing of their faith in Christ. Every frame of that video, of every one of those martyrs, showed courage that none has been able to justify—each of them kneeling with their heads held high ready to meet Christ at the gates of Paradise. In them, we see the result of their faith in Christ just like the great tree that comes out of a small mustard seed.

God, the Holy Trinity, does not require too much of us other than our faith in Him. Through faith in Him, we learn the Truth and what we must do to reach Him. Our faith may only be shown through works, just as St. James informs us, “I will show you my faith by my works.”⁴ We must show the world our faith in every aspect of our life since it is all we have in this world towards the hope of eternal life. If we think about everything we have today, even our own flesh, nothing is ours. Only what we produce by instrumenting what we have can be presented to God as a small token for His great immeasurable philanthropy.

¹ Luke 17:21.

² Matthew 13:31–32.

³ Matthew 17:20.

⁴ James 12:18.

What Is the Mustard Seed?

Treasures from a tiny seed

BY THEOPESTE KERELOS



In the gospels according to St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, our Lord Jesus Christ likens the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. What makes the mustard seed so unique, and in what respect is the kingdom of God like a mustard seed? To answer these questions and understand this parable, it is important to realize that our Lord is not comparing the kingdom of God to the mustard seed itself but to the fruit that it bears. That comparison can be interpreted in various ways.

One way to view the mustard seed is as the **RESURRECTION AFTER DEATH**. It must be buried in the soil and crushed in order to grow and bear fruit. Of course, the first resurrection was accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ when He died on the cross, was buried, and then arose, and in so doing opened the doors to heaven and gave all mankind the liberty to

bear fruit worthy of repentance. Additionally, this resurrection from sin happens to every Christian person upon immersion in the water of baptism which corresponds to burial, then rising out as a member of the Lord's vineyard.

The mustard seed also symbolizes **THE PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES**, in which case the fruit would be the church. According to St. Jerome, "The preaching of the Gospel is the least of all teachings. In the very beginning it seems improbable: It preaches man and God, a God Who dies, and the scandal of the Cross. Compare this teaching with the tenets of the philosophers, with their books and brilliant oratory, with the composition of their speeches, and you shall see how the seed of the Gospel is the least of all these seeds. But this [the teaching of the philosophers], while penetrating deeply at first, does not give life; on the contrary it grows weak...and dries up like grass. But the good tidings, while seemingly small, upon being sown in the soul of the believer or in the whole world, take root like a powerful tree." This passage intricately describes the growth of the mustard seed – the preaching of the apostles – to the whole world. Its fruit is the church that welcomes people from the four corners of the earth to enter into Christianity, just as the tree that grows from the mustard seed extends its branches for the birds of the air to come and nest therein.

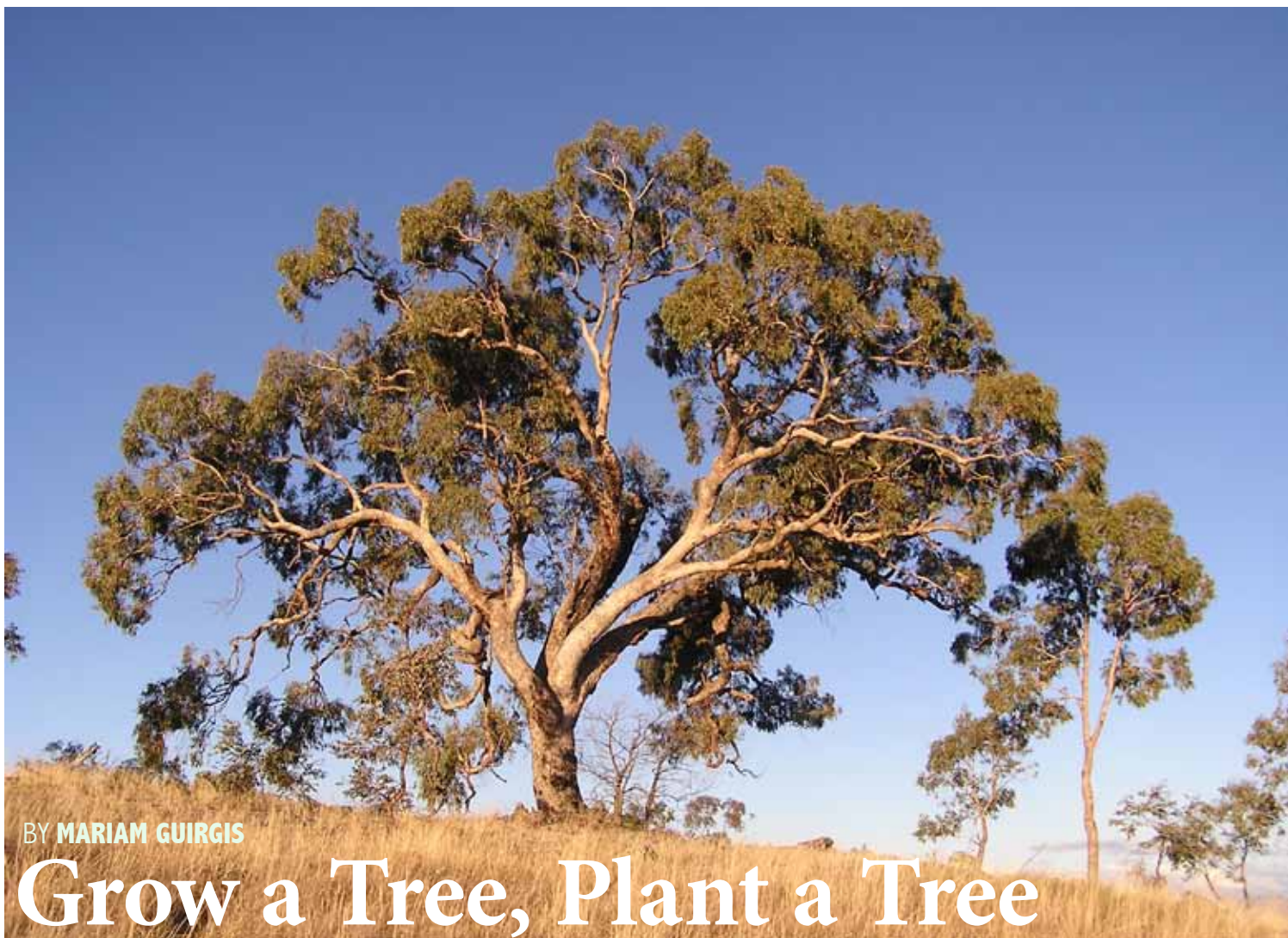
Furthermore, the mustard seed can represent **THE PRESENCE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD INSIDE EVERY INDIVIDUAL**. Just as the mustard seed starts off as a small entity and flourishes into a towering tree, so virtues begin as seeds in one's soul and grow little by little. As the parable of the sower states, "*He who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*"¹

In summary, the kingdom of heaven is likened to the mustard seed which represents the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, to each person's resurrection from sin, to the preaching of the apostles which gave rise to the church, and to the gradual growth of virtues. The parable of the mustard seed actually points to the fruit growing out of the seed, which is what makes it so unique.

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BY MARIAM GUIRGIS

Grow a Tree, Plant a Tree

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life”¹

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO SOUTH CAROLINA, GEORGIA, OR TENNESSEE? AUSTRIA OR SWITZERLAND? They are some of the most beautiful places in the world with amazing natural landscapes: mountains and caves, waterfalls and lakes, fall colors and spring flowers, scenic drives and sightseeing, hiking and white-water rafting, plus a whole lot of other outdoor recreational activities. I love the array of colors of leaves we see in the fall. Oak tree leaves turn to orange and scarlet. Maple leaves turn yellow and crimson red. Dogwood leaves turn a reddish purple. Fresh green leaves and beautiful flowering trees display themselves. As a friend of mine puts it, it is God’s amazing

paint-brush. It is God’s garden.

Having been won over, I decided to plant my own colorful trees in my backyard. With no experience in gardening, let alone shopping for appropriate trees in our hardiness zone, I turned to a friend for help. He suggested a good site, Arbor Day Foundation (check it out). After spending some time reading, learning, and planning, I ordered some tree seedlings and waited till they were shipped at the right time of the year. You see, you cannot plant trees just any time. They are shipped when they are dormant in the spring and fall seasons. So I was waiting in anticipation for this new experience of mine. I did not know how the trees would look like when they arrived, or how exactly I

was supposed to plant them.

When they arrived, I read the instructions leaflet. I learned that they were bare-root trees that had been dipped in a hydrating gel to keep them moist during shipping. The instructions advised to plant them immediately or, if more time is needed, keeping them in the hydrating gel for few days. To store them even for longer time before planting, they needed to be heeled in. That meant laying the roots of the trees in an angled trench in the ground and covering them up with soil.

As I was praying for and thinking of this edition of *Mighty Arrows*, I thought about my planting experience, and God’s. God plants trees—us. His paintbrush is not

only in coloring tree leaves, flowers and nature, but it is also in giving all of us distinctive colors. Some are apostles, some are prophets and some are teachers.² Also, some are lawyers, some are engineers, some are caregivers and some are housekeepers. God's paintbrush is as infinite as He is.

Unlike me, God knows about gardening. He has been doing it even before we were created. Was not He the Creator of the first garden ever? He knows when to plant *trees* and where. He knows if a tree needs to be planted immediately, or if it should be kept in a *hydrating gel* or be *healed-in* until the right time. He may plant you immediately in the place where you will most be effective (aka fruitful) just like the Samaritan woman among her people, or He may *store* you because either it is not the right time for you to flourish, like David before becoming king of Israel, or you are not in the right *hardiness zone* yet, like Joseph before arriving to Egypt. During this storage time, He will be keeping an eye on you. When it is time to plant you, you will have the most appropriate soil, nutrients, and environment to grow and be fruitful.

Going back to my gardening experience, my bare-root trees came in a very small size. When I first saw them I was disappointed. I was expecting *grown-up* trees that will give me results quickly. But when I read the leaflet it said, "You will see a big difference in a short time," so I relaxed. I learned that the small sizes now should not fool me as these kinds of trees grow to 50' tall on average. The amazing nature of the trees is not just in their types and kinds, but also in their growth rate despite their small size.

God is not fooled by our *size* either. He brought a mighty king and a passionate psalmist out of the youngest of Jesse's children. Moses, who was "*slow of speech and slow of tongue*,"³ became the one and only

prophet who spoke to God face-to-face, as a man speaking to his friend. Samuel, the young servant, was chosen to bring a serious and dreadful message to Eli, the High Priest.

The pure young girl was chosen to be the *Mother of God* (that is still an amazing mystery to this date). It did not take long to change the Samaritan woman from a well-water seeker to an evangelist witnessing to the Fountain of Life (she must have been fed *Miracle Grol*!). A simple act of pouring an expensive perfume on the Lord Jesus' head turned an unknown woman to prominence and recognition that survives to this day.

Bethlehem, the small city, became the place of birth of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Sunday School started as one class in a church in Egypt by Archdeacon Habib Girgis.⁴ Now every Coptic Orthodox Church, anywhere in the world, has several Sunday School classes. Hegumen Salib Sorial started with a small idea of providing shelter to female students who left their hometowns to continue their education in colleges. This, and other ideas he had, grew and became wonderful projects serving the Coptic community.⁵

Whether it is a small place, a small idea, or seemingly an unfit person, God is able to work successfully with and in all things, in any situation, and any kind of people. So do not despise anything small. Focus on growing so that your tree bears fruits, which in turn become other trees, for "*the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life*"* in God's beautiful garden.

¹ Proverbs 11:30.

² Ephesians 4:11.

³ Exodus 4:10.

⁴ <http://habibgirgis.org/us/node/1>

⁵ <http://elta7ona.own0.com/t5719-topic>

⁶ Proverbs 11:30.





IN not OF The World



Special Featured Article
BY **HIS GRACE BISHOP YOUSSEF**



“ Though they are in the world—not isolated, not cloaked in monastic apparel, nor governed by a stringent regimen, they are not of the world. ”

Look. Listen. Taste. All around us are sprouting fruit from seeds planted before we took our first steps. Some are beautiful and some are horrid, some are pleasant sounding and some are screeching howls, some are sweet and some are bitter. When God created all shrubberies, He made every seed and tree after its own kind *“And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.”*¹ This is also the paradigm of the mortal mien. Faith and skepticism, peace and violence, virtue and vice, love and hate—all these dichotomies flourish from seeds in the like manner and pattern after their own kind. *“Someone who bears a grudge while he prays is like a person who sows in the sea and expects to reap a harvest.”*²

The mustard seed³—an insignificant grain, we are told, has the potential to overwhelm all other foliage in strength and stature. Search your soul. Faith is not only in believing, but also in living out that faith to the fullest of its meaning. To what avail is it if one has faith, casts out demons, and fluently recites biblical verses verbatim, but has no mercy? Is mercy not an attribute of faith? Does your faith not beckon you to do that which is good unto others? Rather, does it not demand that you prefer the other moreover than yourself? *“But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”*⁴ We are quick to scorn the Pharisees for their arrogance and self-righteousness, but search deeper and inspect if there is any such character lingering in you. Evaluate your own substance and see if among the seeds sown in your heart, there are seeds of criticism, envy, entitlement, or anything that would interfere with the majestic blossom of faith dowsed with genuine good will, serenity, tolerance, and all that can bring good to a

darkened world full of void and devastation.

Do not blame any whose faith dictates hatred and aggression. Their seeds have been deeply rooted in some perversion of faith that nurtures and prunes havoc and destruction. They do not know that there is a better way—a more superior life here on earth and thereafter in the kingdom of God. Your faith in Christ and endurance of obstinate struggles—assiduously pressing through the narrow gate are the apparatuses that can uproot demonic challenges, enmities, and even assassins. Though you are in the world, you are not of the world. Peter the saint, disciple, apostle, and martyr asserted on behalf of the others, that they have indeed left all and followed the Lord Jesus, who in turn assured them of their reward.⁵ Though they did not retreat to the deserts, they remained as a light in the world.⁶ Their hearts were absorbed in the Lord Jesus Christ, first and foremost. Everyone whose faith is truly like the mustard seed can experience this great love for Christ and have no other distractions in their hearts. Though they are in the world—not isolated, not cloaked in monastic apparel, nor governed by a stringent regimen,



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they are not of the world.

The Lord Jesus Christ prayed on behalf of the arduous Church in the world—youth, parents, families, servants, teachers, and all laymen and women who with vigilant faith are daily on bended knees in toils, struggles, prayers, and supplications. *“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”*⁷ This strong affirmation comes from the Lord Jesus. Though they are in the world, they are not of the world, but must remain in the world. This is the great mustard seed—tiny in comparison to the other seeds, but has enormous potential to spread its branches wide and with forte and gallantry cradle infants, uphold adults, instruct kings, show compassion on the less fortunate, support the downtrodden, and bestow kindness and charity on all who wish to find rest and consolation.

St. Symeon the New Theologian instructs us with these words of wisdom. *“You may find yourself hampered by someone who sows tares of despondency. He tries to prevent you from climbing to such heights of holiness by discouraging you with various thoughts. For instance, he will tell you that it is impossible for you to be saved and to keep every single one of God’s commandments while you live in this world. When this happens you should sit down in a solitary place by yourself, collect yourself, concentrate your thoughts and give good counsel to your soul, saying: ‘Why, my soul, are you dejected, and why do you trouble me? Put your hope in God, for I will give thanks to Him; for my salvation lies not in my actions but in God.’⁸ Who will be vindicated by actions done according to the law?⁹ No living person will be vindicated before God.¹⁰ Yet by virtue of my faith in God I hope that in His ineffable mercy He will give me salvation. Get behind me, Satan.¹¹ I worship the Lord my God¹² and serve Him from my youth; for He is able to save me simply through His mercy. Go away from me. The God who created me in His image and likeness will reduce you to impotence.”*¹³

This is our faith—the mustard seed upon which the Church sprouted from the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless*

*a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”*¹⁴ Thus, our faith must be beyond mere knowledge and moral constraints imposed by social rubrics, but wholesome in truth encompassing all of Christ’s commandments, virtue, mercy, and model of life.

To God be the glory, forever,
Amen.

¹ Genesis 1:12.

² Miller, Dana, trans. The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian. Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984, 244.

³ Matthew 13:31-32.

⁴ Luke 11:42.

⁵ Mark 10:28-31; Matthew 19:27-28; Luke 18:28-29.

⁶ Matthew 5:14.

⁷ John 17:14-16.

⁸ Cf. Psalm 42:5.

⁹ Cf. Galatians 2:16.

¹⁰ Cf. Psalm 143:2.

¹¹ Cf. Matthew 16:23.

¹² Cf. Matthew 4:10.

¹³ Corinith, St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of, ed. The Philokalia: The Complete Text. Translated by G.E.H Palmer, P Sherrard and K. Ware. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1979-95. Vol. IV, 33-34.

¹⁴ John 12:24.

Third-century scholar and a seed of faith

A prominent scholar comments on faith as small as a mustard seed.

BY DAVID W. T. BRATTSTON



The early church fathers were dedicated students of the Bible. They drew many lessons from it that they shared with other Christians, both in their own times and for us today. In this article, we will consider various passages from Origen, a prominent scholar of that time.

Origen was a native Egyptian living in the first half of the third century AD. Raised in a Christian home, at an early age he became principal or dean of the world's foremost Christian religious school in Alexandria, Egypt. He also traveled extensively throughout the eastern Mediterranean at the request of local bishops, who valued his great knowledge of the Scriptures and other aspects of our faith.

In his *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Origen discussed Matthew 17:14-21. In that passage, the father of an epileptic asked the apostles to cure his son, but they were unable. When the matter was taken to Jesus personally, He scolded, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.”¹ After Jesus healed him, the disciples asked why He succeeded where they had failed. Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain,

*‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”*²

Origen taught that the word “perverse” in Matthew 17:17 indicates “contrary to human nature” and the means by which sin enters our lives. The “mountain” in verse 20 represents the great amount of sin in the souls of some people. Whenever a Christian has faith that is so strong that he believes everything in the Holy Scriptures, and this faith is as strong as that of the patriarch Abraham, he has faith as a grain of mustard seed. With such faith, wrote Origen, the apostles could have cured even epilepsy. But it was necessary, however, to first strengthen their ordinary belief by fasting and prayers into such a staunch faith. We are not to ask questions or chant spells, but to pray and fast as indeed the Coptic Orthodox Church teaches in our own day.

A seed of faith may not seem much, but in good soil (a soul), and with the diligent care of a farmer (God), it becomes a tree so large that birds could nest in it. From small beginnings, the soul of a believer can rise through prayer, fasting, and other spiritual exercises to a power that can move a mountain of sin.

In his interpretation of the passage, Origen wrote that epilepsy stood for sinful impulses. Starting from small beginnings, Christians must grow their faith so that it can overcome these, and grow further to surmount greater threats to our spiritual welfare.

In regards to the mountains of sin in the souls of some people, Saint Paul the Apostle wrote, “I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains.”³ Faith as a mustard seed conquers not only one mountain, but many mountains of evil. Sinful impulses can be overcome only by such strong faith, which could have started only as the smallest of seeds in a conscientious believer.

Sources:

Origen *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 10.19, 13.5, and 13.7

Origen *Homilies on Exodus* 1.1

Origen *Homilies on Jeremiah* 12.12

¹ Matthew 17:17.

² Matthew 17:20-21.

³ 1 Corinthians 13:2.



Relationship with One's Self - I¹

"Be contemptible in your own eyes, and you will see the glory of God in yourself."²

BY THE THRICE HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA III

We want to speak today, God willing, about a person's relationship with the self. The worst you can do is to be your own enemy. It is not having demons oppose you, or others oppose you, but rather destroying yourself by yourself. Self-importance is self-destructive. As the Lord Jesus Christ said, "*He who finds his life will lose it.*"³ One who finds desires, lusts, personal will, world pleasures, the lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, or pride of life, is losing the self. I think, among the important prayers people should say is: "God, deliver me from myself." We say, "Deliver me from evil... save us from wicked men, hidden and manifest";⁴ it is good for a person to pray for God to save from the self: from the desires, the thoughts, and the personality. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "*Whoever does not hate his father and mother for*

my sake," then He added, "*And hates his own self.*" This one stands up against this troublemaking self.

Be certain that no one can harm you from the outside as much as you might cause yourself self-harm. There is an article by St. John Chrysostom titled: *No one can harm the man who does not injure himself.*⁵ Perhaps many wars rise against you from outside, but if your self is with you, not against you, you will conquer all external wars. But if your self internally betrays you, you will surely be lost, unless grace carries you. Each one needs to monitor your self, to see if it is for you or against you. Search and see if your thoughts are for you or against you. Are your desires for you or against you? Is your time running in your favor or against you? Perhaps your self (your ego) wants to grow, and

so it destroys you; or your self wants to show off and be praised, and so it ruins you; or your self wants to be justified before others, and so it destroys you. What ruins many people is their self.

Wretched is the soul whose demise does not need external warfare, because the self is already fallen from within. The devil does not need to exert effort on this soul, because it is self-destructive. Many people are of this type. We need, occasionally, to sit with ourselves, examine ourselves, and judge ourselves. If you judge yourself, you have saved yourself. So many justify themselves, and approve of themselves, while they really need to rebuke themselves.

St. Anthony said concerning remembering our sins: "If we judge ourselves, the judge will approve of

us.”⁶ “If we remember our sins, God will forget them, if we forget our sins, God will remember them.”⁷ How beautiful is the saying of St. Macarius the Great, “Judge yourself, before you are judged.”⁸ Or of that anchorite who was asked by Pope Theophilus concerning the greatest virtue gained on Mount Nitria and answered, “Believe me, father, there is nothing better than for a person to return with the blame onto himself in everything.”⁹ We need to blame ourselves, judge ourselves, condemn ourselves, and, stand before God as sinners, before people as sinners, and before ourselves as sinners.

This is why I said we need to sit with ourselves and judge ourselves. There is a person who sits with the self, with the purpose of vainglory, boasting, self-approval, or self-acceptance; this person is self-destructive. Sit with yourself and say, “I am wrong!” Sit with yourself in order to make yourself sit with God. Sometimes, we are unable to sit with our selves because we are preoccupied with others, all our time is spent on others –judging others, condemning others, being angry with others. One of the saints said a beautiful word: “God placed anger in humans, for them to be angry at the self.”¹⁰ This is the natural condition. It is not being angry at others, since anger towards others is departure from the nature of divine anger. Be angry toward the sin itself, whether in yourself or in others. As the *Bustan*¹¹ mentions, “A monk ought to ask himself every night and every morning, ‘What have we done that is as God wills and what have we left undone of that which He does not will?’”¹² What have we done?

People love themselves an erroneous love. If you want to love yourself a true spiritual love, think of your eternity, think of preparing yourself for this eternity, think of uniting yourself with God, and of coming closer to God. This is for the

person who wants to consider the self. As for the person who wants to think of the self, to indulge the self, this is harmful. Do not try to please yourself in anything. One of the virtues is self-abnegation, self-conquest. Solomon the Wise says, “*He who rules his spirit [is better] than he who takes a city.*”¹³ To try to please your self is absolutely unacceptable! Conquer yourself. Try to search for your weaknesses, to remedy them, and not search for the beautiful points in your life, to boast in them.

A ship surrounded by waves is not in danger, except if a hole is found in the ship letting in water. The external waters cannot harm you, but if they enter into your soul, then they can harm you. Examine yourself; are there holes inside you that allow in sin? Are there unguarded places in your soul, penetrable by the enemy? Stop up your holes so that the waves do not overcome you, and build up your walls so the enemy cannot attack and harm you, and so you would be able to say, “*Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your children within you. He makes peace in your borders.*”¹⁴

There is a person with an exposed self, all the doors are open, any idea can come in, any desire can come in; the ears are open, any words can come in, and can nestle inside, and fight against the self from the inside. As one eastern expression says, “You cannot prevent the birds from hovering overhead, but you can prevent them from nesting in your hair.”

To be continued...

Glory be to God forever, Amen.

¹ Monastic sermons delivered by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III during his detainment (1983-1985) at St. Pishoy's Monastery in the Natrun Valley, Egypt.

² Miller, Dana, trans. The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian. Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984, 50.

³ Mathew 10:39.

⁴ Cf. Thanksgiving Prayer.

⁵ Saint John Chrysostom. NPNF (V1-14). American. Edited by Philip Schaff. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing company, 1889, Vol IX, 435.

⁶ Beni-Suef Publication Committee. Bustan-El-Ruhban. 2nd Edition. Vol. Arabic. Beni-Suef: Generation Publishing House, 1977, 138.

⁷ Cf. Ibid (Saint John Chrysostom, 1889), On the Epistle to the Hebrews 12: 14, Homily XXXI, 508.

⁸ Cf. Budge, E A Wallis, trans. The Paradise of the Holy Fathers. Revised Edition. II vols. Putty: St. Shenouda Monastery, 2008, II 106 {400}.

⁹ Cf. Ward, Benedicta, trans. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection. Revised Edition. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984, 80-81 {1}.

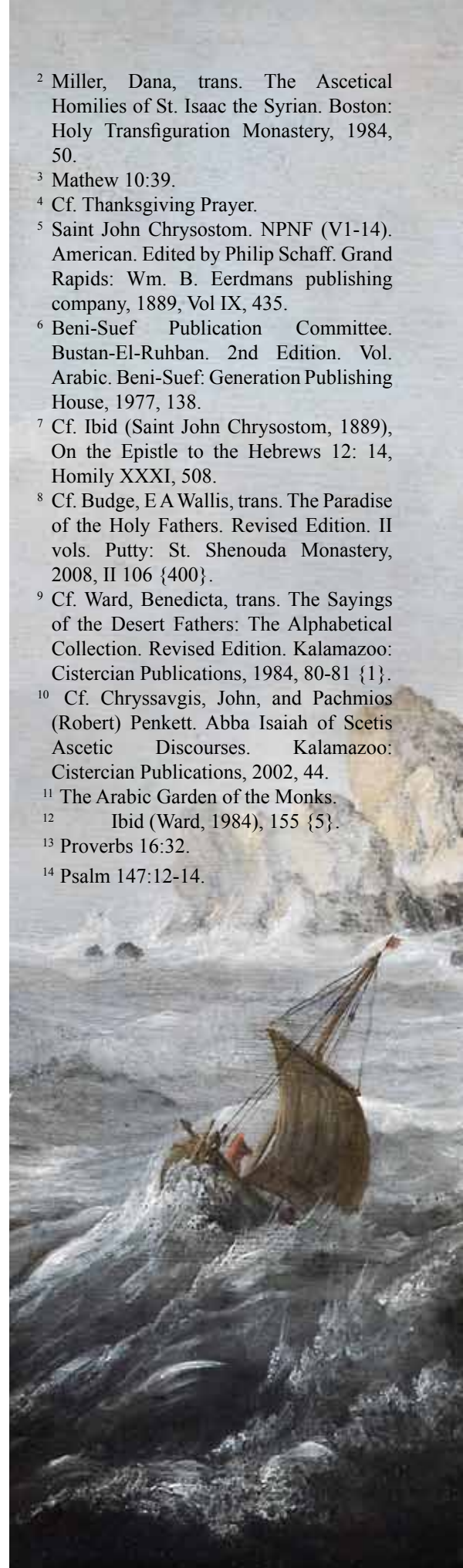
¹⁰ Cf. Chrysavgis, John, and Pachmios (Robert) Penkett. Abba Isaiah of Scetis Ascetic Discourses. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2002, 44.

¹¹ The Arabic Garden of the Monks.

¹² Ibid (Ward, 1984), 155 {5}.

¹³ Proverbs 16:32.

¹⁴ Psalm 147:12-14.



Amen

Alleluia

Kyrie Eleison

Triplets of Advice

BY HIS HOLINESS POPE TAWADROS II¹

As we are praising, we should ask ourselves how our lives can be spiritual, ecclesiastic, and upright before our Savior while in the embrace of the church. I want you to take a glimpse at our beautiful church, as she draws before each one of us a guide for our lives. We are all young women and young men wanting to live for our Lord. We want to keep our heart right before our Savior.

Notice three words that are often repeated in our praises and our hymns: *Kyrie Eleison*, *Alleluia*, and *Amen*. In the Midnight Praises, as we move from one canticle (*Hoos*) to the next, the church says, “*Amen, Alleluia, Kyrie Eleison*,” to which we respond, “*Kyrie Eleison, Kyrie Eleison*.” These are five stations. Do not assume that this is simply a response or a transition point from one canticle to the next. Not at all! The church places before us a roadmap to righteousness.

This map consists of these five steps. Imagine with me a five-step pyramid with *Kyrie Eleison* on the bottom step. Go up one step and you find another *Kyrie Eleison*. The next step is *Kyrie Eleison* again. Next comes *Alleluia*, and finally *Amen*. What does this mean? Allow me to explain.

The base of the pyramid is the first *Kyrie Eleison*. Do not think that the three *Kyrie Eleison* are the same. Each one has a purpose. In the first one, the base of the pyramid, we are telling Him, “Lord, *Kyrie Eleison*, have mercy on me, help me repent.” The basis of spiritual life with Christ begins with repentance.

What is repentance? “Lord, please keep my heart pure.” You all know the beautiful verse that says, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*.”¹ The first *Kyrie Eleison* means, “Help me repent. Help my heart be pure. Please give me strength and grace to overcome sin. Help me!” Let me ask you a question right now. If, as you are leaving church today, you find the Lord Christ standing there, what is the first word you will tell Him? If you think about it, you are not exactly going to say, “Welcome!” The first word you will say is, “Have mercy on me. Help me repent. Help me have a pure heart. The world contains much evil, and during adolescence especially, we are susceptible to many sins. Please help my heart be beautiful before You. Help me purge my heart daily, to evict sin from within me every day. Help me go confess. Help me practice the mystery of repentance in the church, and when the priest places the cross over my head

and lifts off my sins through Your cross, You please remit them, because I know that “*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*.”² This is the first step.

We take the next step, *Kyrie Eleison*. What is the difference? After I have repented, I tell Him, “I need something important from You. I need You to give me a merciful heart.” The second *Lord have mercy* means asking for a merciful heart because sin hardens the heart, making a person harsh, with a judgmental unforgiving perspective. That person would be not satisfied at home, at church, with the country, with adolescence, or with life altogether. In the second step, we ask the Lord to make our hearts malleable.

You have all heard this parable: here is some wax, and here is some mud. When the sun comes up, what happens to the wax? It melts. God’s love makes the heart pure and malleable, a heart full of mercy. What about the mud? The sun hardens it. The heart containing sin, when God’s love comes to it, hardens because sin is making this person insensitive. As we were just saying in the first canticle about Pharaoh, God kept giving him chances, but his heart only grew harder, because it is a callous heart, full of sins, which does not know



what repentance is. In this second step in your life, you tell Him, “Lord, make my heart merciful. Give me merciful eyes. Help me know how to be compassionate towards each person. Give my life the purity and pliability of wax. Your mercy O Lord would make my heart merciful.”

Let us go up one more step, *Kyrie Eleison*. The third *Lord have mercy* means, “Lord, teach me to be merciful. Did You create me just because? What then does it mean to be a human being? Help me offer mercy.” You are youth, in the best stage in your lives and love for God. Most of you are studying or have completed studies, or are now working. During these beautiful times of life, do you know how to offer mercy? Are you able to open up to others, or are you living in self-centeredness? I want to tell you something important: the time we are living in now, unfortunately, thrives on self-centeredness.

What about people who need works of mercy or works of love from me, how do I treat them? I wonder, are there works of mercy in your life? Do you know how to be merciful? Among the beautiful features we find abroad is the volunteer culture. There are many homes: special need homes, elderly homes, homes for those who are marginalized, distanced, or voiceless. I wonder if you know how to be merciful like that. Or does God provide for you food, drink, and clothing, parents and family, and that’s it? That is the question Christ will ask in the Last Day.

He will say, “*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in...*”³ But when did we do all these things, Lord? “When you do them to a person who needs them, then it is as if you did it to Me,” He will say. You will have accrued an account of merciful works. This is why I ask you, the youth, if you have opened up an account with your Christ? Are you adding to this account by works of mercy? Blessed is the youth who serves and offers works of mercy, storing up an account in heaven and opening up to everyone, and loving every person, serving all by any means of service. You can serve with a nice word, with a smile, with your time, effort, experience,

service—it is important to serve. Do not live for yourself alone. Do not fall into the trap of egoism. Be smart!

The first *Kyrie Eleison* is “Lord help me repent.” The second *Kyrie Eleison* is “Make my heart merciful.” The third *Kyrie Eleison* is “Make me merciful to others.” The fourth step is *Alleluia*. If you do the previous three, you will find yourself an *Alleluia*—full of jubilation. If you have reached this stage, then you are a joyful person. My dear youth, do you know what joy is? This joy that people run after? Where do we get this joy? Do you think we can get it from work? Nope! High salaries? Nope! Status? Nope! By simply getting married and having children? Nope! Happiness, joy, and true jubilation do not come except through the first three steps we just mentioned. After you have climbed these three steps, only then would you feel joy and jubilation, and as the Holy Bible says, “*rejoice with joy inexpressible.*”⁴ This is how you feel inside you. Whatever is in your hand becomes very valuable in your eyes. Many youth are given much by God; they are very capable of many things, but they do not feel joy. They might be studying at a good university, but do not feel joy. They might have capabilities, talents, skills, but feel no joy. Joy, my beloved, does not come except through repentance, compassion, and merciful works.

Now we have reached the pinnacle of the pyramid, *Amen. Amen* here means a life of integrity. None of the previous steps would occur unless you are a trustworthy person. You all know the beautiful verse from the Revelation, “*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*”⁵ The beautiful thing about this verse is that half of it is on earth, but the other half is in heaven. Notice that He is talking about “being” in a personal sense. You as a person, have one soul, if you lose it, you lose all. *Be* is an open-ended term. What is your occupation, your age, your service, your gender, your place, your time? All these are measures of *being*. *Be* faithful in your studies, your job, your home, your service, your community, your country, your personal life. *Be* faithful until death.

Let me ask you a question: When we go to our Savior, and He comes to ask

us, with what will He test us? Simple. He will test our integrity. The eyes of the Lord see all. They see you, and they preserve you. I wonder if are you faithful, trustworthy with your senses, trustworthy in what your eyes see, in what you write in chats, on the internet, over email. Are you trustworthy in your speech, in your relationships, in your glances, with your hands, with your feet that can lead you to the place that the Lord accepts? What does your integrity look like? “*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*”⁶ This is the apex of the pyramid—the crown of life.

What I have said is a glimpse into our church and her beauty as she draws before us a very clear framework for our lives through which you cannot get lost:

- 1) Repentance.
- 2) Having a merciful heart through my prayers and readings and the divine mysteries, communion, and my spiritual relationship.
- 3) Being merciful in service by various means.
- 4) Living joy, owning joy and conveying it to everyone. Christianity is the joyful religion!
- 5) Having integrity throughout your life.

As we pray and as we praise, while our thoughts are in heaven, the whole church is moved, lifted up by our beautiful voices, prayers, and praises. All of this gives us but a glance of eternal praises. What will we do in eternity but praise, and praises always keep us joyful. While we are in heaven, and our lives are an entire praise, this gives us a glimpse into the awesome scenes in heaven. God protect you and bless your lives.

¹ From His Holiness’ sermon during his Kyahk Psalmody with the youth on 12/18/04. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcCgkRdCxqc>.

² Matthew 5:8.

³ 1 John 1:7.

⁴ Matthew 25:34-35.

⁵ 1 Peter 1:8.

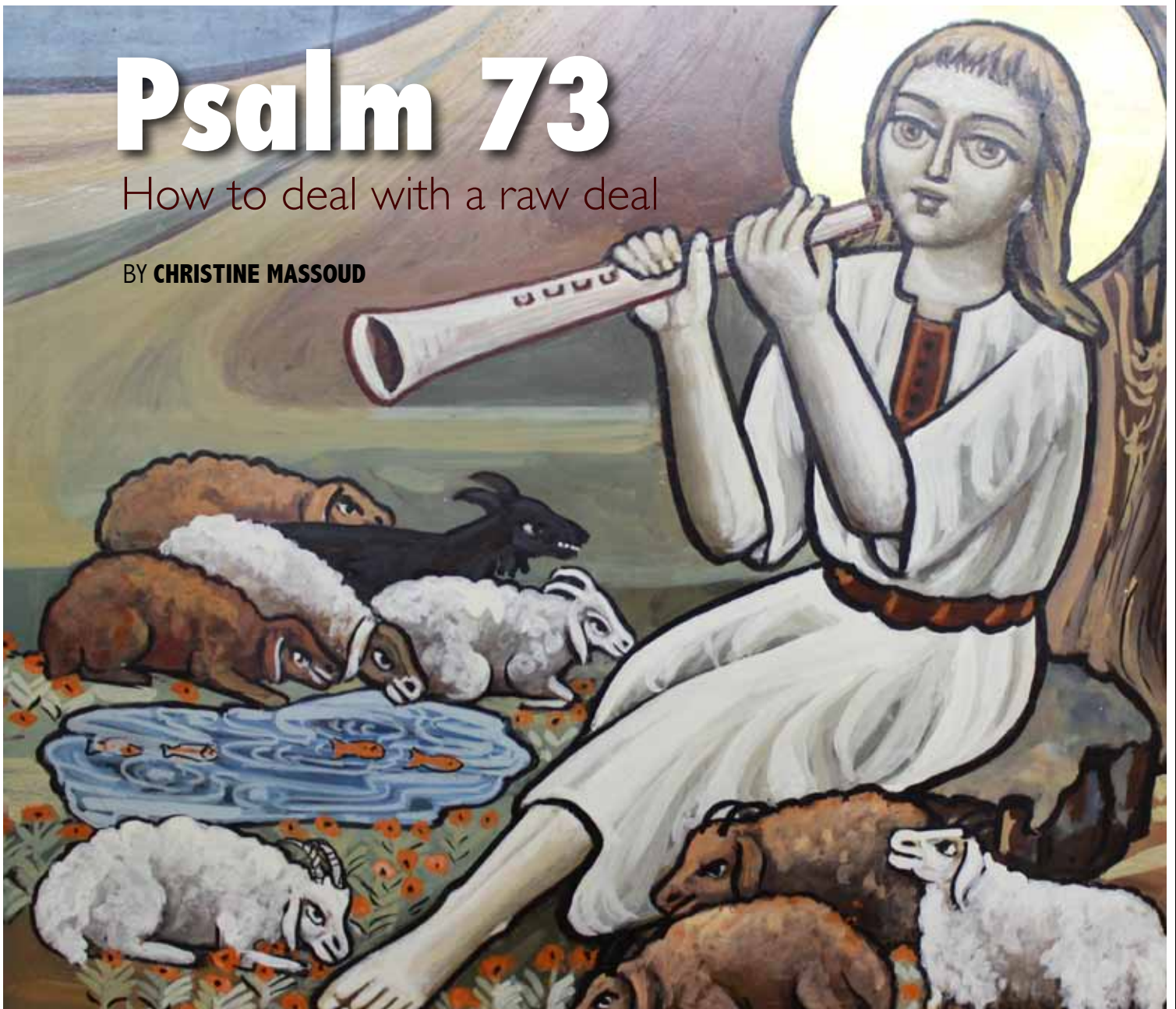
⁶ Revelation 2:10.

⁷ Ibid.

Psalm 73

How to deal with a raw deal

BY CHRISTINE MASSOUD



This article is based on a study on *Finding God When You Need Him Most* by Chip Ingram, which is a reflection of various Psalms and their application in our lives today. This book came into my possession at a very crucial time. It was not a surprise to God, of course, but it was actually evidence of His pursuit and comforting that I needed at the time. I looked over the table of contents, without much interest, but at a second glance, I found the chapter titles were extremely intriguing. The one I would like to share with you

is well named: “When you get a raw deal.” Truthfully, I felt that way too many times, but that particular time was probably the most I felt like I had been handed a raw deal. So I read on.

Getting a *raw deal* is not common jargon in my vocabulary, but I did not need Urban Dictionary to tell me what it meant. I knew. Getting a raw deal is being treated unfairly, getting worse or not at all what one deserves, maybe even having more taken out of you than you can give. I have felt that for sure. I am sure you have too. We all have. The author said that to some it can be likened to betrayal, gnawing

injustice, etc.

There are numerous ways we could respond to such emotions. I would be lying if I said that I lifted my hands up in prayer in that moment. But the reality is I did not. When I exhausted all *earthly* comforts, I was finally on my knees. *Earthly comforts* could take on many forms, from gossiping to others, slander and lying, to emotional eating, to impulsive buying or shopping, to excessive drinking, to addictions of all kinds, to sex, drugs, or money. No matter how many times we have heard said *Vanity*, we still feel the need and desire to make sure for

ourselves.

Solomon asked for wisdom and after utilizing all the wisdom he was

were written by real people who didn't hold back their emotions. These people dared to bring their desperate needs

have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued,



given in achievements and wealth, his pride filled up. He tried it all. Then, he understood: *"Vanity of vanities."*¹ These words were written by him in the Book of Ecclesiastes. He called himself Preacher, literally one teaching from experience and warning those to come not to do the same. He also wrote the preceding book, Proverbs, where he counsels his son. He is referring not only to his biological son, but also to the young men of his congregation or the young of the people of Israel when he says, *"My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother."*²

He, himself, was a son to one who possessed a lot of wisdom too. David also wrote numerous *lessons* in the Bible. Much like this book, it was written to encourage us to run to God whenever we get a raw deal and life just is not fair, when we are going through a crisis or a major life transition, when we feel like a nobody going nowhere, when we are troubled and depressed, when we are gripped by fear, when we have blown it big time. I have experienced each and every one of these, in the exact same order in fact. So to my shock, the God of the universe was guiding me to a new comfort—His.

In each article, I hope to reflect on one of the emotions and a specific Psalm ("The songbook of God's people") that speaks to this specific need. Why the Psalms? "They

to God."³ Though going to God was not my first instinct; He was my last. Last because I first ran out of places and people to run to, and also because I needed to look no further than Him.

So, let's jump in. The author reached a moment that he titled "Okay, God, Speak to Me or I'm Outta Here," and the answer came to him in Psalm 73. It goes like this:

Truly God is good to [his children], to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth. Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches. Surely I

and chastened every morning.⁴

For myself and the author, reading that was like reading our own personal biographies. It is what we truly felt—trying to live godly lives and receiving *plagues* while others live in *riches*, knowing in my heart that I'm following the way but for what? And to what end? Our difficult and tiresome obedience gave us nothing in turn than a raw deal! So we'd ask, "Why? Why God?"

You see, God wants us to come to Him with our whys. He is frankly the only One who can answer. "He can handle our angry accusations, our overwhelming fears, and even our blazing anger and indignation."⁵ But as long as you come from a humble place, you would be open to understanding. It is scary letting these thoughts of unfairness and injustice out, I know. Looking sideways, horizontally, at others, proved to show us exactly what the Psalmist wrote: the ungodly prosper yet we suffer now. But in the same breath, *"If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of [believers]. When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me—"*⁶ Like the verses say, if I had stopped at verse 14 by looking only horizontally, I would have concluded what is visible and untrue.

"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end. Surely

*You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction.*⁷ Now everything changes. Here, we look at God, we look up, vertically, to the Most High. Coming into God's presence changes everything. Our hearts begin to soften as we see *the deal* from God's perspective. Our focus is also not on our own pain but on genuinely seeking to understand why we feel like we got the raw deal. Let's glimpse at God's view of the situation. Please pull out your Bible or your Bible app. My writing, I hope, is to encourage you to open up God's words and read them, study them, pray them and obey them. So go ahead and follow this short outline and our takeaway:

Verses 18-20: There's more to life than what is going on right now. What looks like a great deal: money, fame, power, excess is usually followed by disappointment and/or destruction.

Verses 21-22: Being angry is understandable. In fact, God knew that our response would be like that and He is perfectly capable of calming and comforting us.

Verses 23-24: Here is the answer. You guide me with Your counsel and afterwards You will take me into glory. No commentary needed, just faith!

Verses 25-26: We have God and He is for us. "God alone is our security and that security is not dependent on how I may feel at any particular moment."⁸

Focus on these words "God is the strength of my heart." Emotional strength is security, control, wisdom and much more. But here we see that this strength is not found in us, its source is God. "My portion forever," he says, where portion is like an

inheritance, something given but not earned, "my slice" of the pie as the author writes. I didn't quite feel that these verses were my words to say, so I prayed them, "Lord, remind me that You are the strength of my heart, You are my portion, my inheritance. Show me that nothing on earth can satisfy me and that You are all I need."

Verses 27-28: We cannot speak to each other's lives or journeys. We cannot point at the splinter in others. But we can look at ourselves and say, "But as for me, it is good to draw near God."⁹ So focus on your walk and "declare of all [His good] works."¹⁰

Hopefully by now, your heart has done a 180 from when you started. If not, please reread the psalm as a whole and ask God to speak. Here are some applications, or *Life Lessons* as the book refers to them.

Life Lesson 1: Pour out your heart to God. Remember, "*The Lord is near to ALL who call upon him, to ALL who call on Him in TRUTH.*"¹¹ Emphasis mine.

Life Lesson 2: Consider your choices carefully. Look at the impact of choices and of others (be careful not to judge) to learn. Do not distance yourself from God, come to Him with your raw deal and let Him help you handle it.

Life Lesson 3: See the big picture. Remember in verse two, "*My feet had almost slipped.*" No matter how ready you are to quit, remember that "God will use your raw deal to build your character, to change your life, to give you a testimony, and to fulfill His greater purpose."¹² This lesson is about trust and faith. Start by reminding yourself of "when God came through"

moments in your life and others (the Bible is full, read Romans 11) and put your trust in Him. Pray for faith and endure in your walk and He will help you not *slip*.

Life Lesson 4: Reaffirm Your relationship with God. Remember God's eternal perspective, a relationship and walk with Him on this earth, full of joy and crosses, and a never-ending celebration in heaven afterwards, full of praise. Realize that God is the Sovereign Lord, "who reigns from heaven, [who] has everything under control; the wicked will pay for their wrongdoing, and God will ultimately work everything out for [mine and your] good."¹³

Prayer: Lord of all, how gracious You are that You open Your arms to us, with pierced hands You have reached out to us, with a soft fatherly smile You have spoken comfort to us, and with ever present anticipation You will guide us to Your presence! Remind us Lord of Your love, provision, control and comfort, and that to You alone we should look for these. On earth are mere expressions and reflections of Your love to us and with You we are able to find it all and be satisfied in it all. Amen.

¹ Ecclesiastes 1:1.

² Proverbs 1:8.

³ Ingram, Chip. Finding God When You Need Him Most. 2014 ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007, 77 E-book.

⁴ Psalm 73:1-14.

⁵ Ibid Ingram, 290 E-book.

⁶ Psalm 73:15-16.

⁷ Psalm 73:17-18.

⁸ Ibid Ingram, 240.

⁹ Cf. Psalm 73:28.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Psalm 145:18.

¹² Ibid Ingram, 356.

¹³ Ibid Ingram, 401.





Like a Grain of Mustard Seed

An allegory for the preaching of the Word

BY BOULIS IBRAHIM

Some have found the symbolism of his parable difficult to interpret. For instance, the birds are understood by some as symbolising ungodly elements, preachers, hypocrisies or heresies entering the Church (based on other biblical references of birds, such as the parable of the sower). Another example is the reference to the mustard seed as the smallest of all seeds and the plant as a ‘tree’ to be an intended exaggeration, since neither the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds (even those known in Palestine at Jesus’ time) nor does it grow into a tree.¹ However, it is now understood that the parable is an allegory intended to depict a specific characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is the incredible speed of its growth. Saint Cyril provides a potent commentary, and the remainder of this article is attributed to his 96-98 sermons.²

*“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.”*³ The comparison is an excellent one, and most fit to set before us what took place in the divine and sacred preaching of the Gospel, to which He here gives the name of the kingdom of heaven, because it is through it that we gain the right of sharing Christ’s kingdom. At first, it was addressed to few persons, and within a narrow range, but afterwards, it widened its influence and spread abroad unto all nations. For at first it was spoken in Judea only, where also the blessed disciples were very few in number, but when Israel disobeyed, the commandment was given to the holy apostles to *“make disciples of all the nations.”*⁴

A grain of mustard seed is far inferior in size to the seeds of other plants, but shoots up to a great height far beyond what is usual among herbs, large enough for it even to become the lodging of many sparrows. Likewise, the kingdom of heaven, the new and sacred preaching of salvation by which we are guided into every good work and into the knowledge of Him Who both by nature and verily is God, was at first addressed to but few persons, yet shot up afterwards into rapid growth and became the refuge of those who fled to it for shelter. These people may be compared to sparrows, because human things are but of small measure in comparison with God.

The law of Moses was given to the Israelites and has appeared to us as an enigma, for it runs thus: *“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps.’”*⁵ There were then two trumpets made of beaten silver, in which the silver signifies splendor, for every word of God is glorious, having in it none of the darkness of the world. The hammering out of the metal showed that the sacred and divine trumpet, that is, both the old and new preaching, would advance and grow onward; for that which is hammered out advances as it were continually onward, and extends in breadth and length. At Christ’s rising for the inhabitants of earth, the ancient law advanced to its spiritual interpretation. So we preach it to those

who have attained spiritual illumination in Christ. The message of the Gospel was to spread until it embraced the whole world.

Moreover, to the priests, the law gave the use of the trumpets to command the people, but Christ gave the ministers of the new proclamations, the holy apostles, the command to preach Him and His precepts. They proclaim His mystery, using as it were two trumpets, both preaching Him, as having been *“from the beginning eyewitnesses and ministers of the word,”*⁶ and adding, in confirmation of their words, the true testimonies of the law and the prophets.

It is not difficult to see that the message of the Gospel preaching, being small at first, was soon to leap forth unto great increase, inasmuch as God foretold of it by the voice of Isaiah: *“That the whole earth has been filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”*⁷ The preaching of salvation is poured forth everywhere, like a sea, and its onward course is irresistible. This too the God of all clearly told us by the voice of the prophet: *“But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”*⁸ He gives the names of judgment and righteousness to the gospel message, and grants us the assurance that it shall roll over the world like waters and as a flood, against whose violently rushing streams no man can stay.⁹

¹ Mulberry seeds can be smaller, and the mustard plant is a seasonal shrub that grows over three or four months to a maximum full height of only 8-12 feet. Christ intended to impart the speed of growth, since the black mustard shrub can visibly grow by around 3 cm a day.

² The end of St. Cyril’s 96th Exposition, the whole of the 97th, and the commencement of the 98th, have perished. Their place is supplied from Mai’s Nov. Bib. Pat. vol. ii. pp. 315-321; and Cramer, ii. 107, where some of the following extract is given anonymously; and from the Aurea Catena, p. 201. ed. Venet. 1775.

³ Matthew 13:31.

⁴ Matthew 28:19.

⁵ Numbers 10:1-2.

⁶ Luke 1:2.

⁷ Isaiah 11:9.

⁸ Amos 5:24.

⁹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Luke, Sermon 98.

Accessible at http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cyril_on_luke_09_sermons_89_98.htm#Sermon98.

Small Seed, Big Faith



Great fruit can
grow even in
hard soil

BY JOSEPH GHEBRIAL

The mustard seed is small—only 1 to 2 millimeters or 1/64th of an inch—but it grows into a large, tough plant. Faith is like that; it starts small and grows. What did Jesus mean when He said if you have faith as a mustard seed? Does this mean that we only need a small amount of faith? Can tiny amounts of faith really move mountains?

Actual mustard trees have been found in various locations throughout the world. Even though their seeds are some of the smallest in the world, the trees can grow up to 20 feet tall and 20 feet wide. The tree can grow in arid, dry climates and thrive even in clay or sandy soil. It can grow in hot, dry weather or cool, wet climates. I see the mustard seed as being symbolic in that our faith can be tested in the *dry times* or the most difficult of circumstances.

Additionally, even if the tree is cut down to the trunk it can grow back again, so even during times of pruning, the Christian can overcome and come back stronger than ever if only a tiny bit of faith remains.

Biblically, however, having the faith of a mustard seed refers to two different sayings of Jesus. In the Gospel according to St. Matthew 17:20, the disciples had failed to cast out a demon. When they asked Jesus why they had failed, He replied that it was because of their unbelief for they only needed faith the size of a mustard seed. In the Gospel according to St. Luke 17:6, Jesus had just finished talking about forgiveness when the disciples asked Him to increase their faith. Jesus replied to them again that they only really needed faith the size of a mustard seed.

Before we look at the faith

of a mustard seed, we need to understand the meaning of faith. Fortunately, the Bible itself gives us the definition of faith, “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*”¹ But note that there is a difference between hope and faith. Today when we say we “hope” something is going to happen, we mean it is our desire but often we do not think it is very likely. Biblical hope is entirely different. Biblical hope means you know with complete confidence that something is going to happen.

To give an illustration, my 4 year-old son asks me to take him to McDonalds for lunch. He hopes [modern definition] that I will fulfill his desire, but he has nothing really on which to base his hope. Now let us suppose that I promise my son that if he cleans his room I will take him to McDonalds for lunch.

Now he can have hope [biblical definition]—a conditional promise. As long as he does his part, he can have complete confidence that he will be able to go to McDonalds for lunch. It still has not happened and he still has no physical evidence that it will happen, yet he has my word and the knowledge that I am trustworthy and that is enough.

In the same way, our hope is built on the sure foundation of the Word of God. Many things may not yet have happened or they happened in the past (e.g. the Cross and the Resurrection) but we have absolute confidence that they will happen or that when they did happen they accomplished what the Word of God said they accomplished. That is Biblical hope.

Now faith takes that hope and acts as if it already is true. An excellent Biblical example is Peter the disciple walking on water in Matthew 14. St. Peter was promised by Jesus that he could walk on water. While still in the boat he had biblical hope, the firm word of God that it would happen. Faith made him step out of that boat as if he was stepping onto solid ground. Faith took the hope and acted as if it was true, only to discover that it was true!

My humanity is too often pushing this knowledge out because I tend to only believe what I see. I must believe with the eyes of faith. My eyes may not see Him, but they must succumb to my head and heart that know that He is there nonetheless. In fact, when I show a lack of faith, I miss out on many blessings. Even though I have never seen Jesus, I know that He exists and He is there for me, for all of us. We will see Him some day.

Jesus said to doubting Thomas,

*"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*² I admit it is hard to believe when we cannot see something, but I must believe in Him even though my eyes do not see Him. That is what faith is all about. It only takes a tiny amount of faith to "move mountains." My faith is only as strong as the object of my faith. The object is Jesus Christ who is God:

1. Omnipotent (all powerful)
2. Omnipresent
(present everywhere)
3. Omniscient (all knowing)

Just like the mustard tree is drought tolerant, if we have faith even the size of a tiny mustard seed, we too can tolerate the dry times in our lives, the difficult growing seasons of a Christian. When we are *planted* in poor soil we can still grow, even if we only have a small amount of faith. If you have problems with your faith, remember that you are not alone. Even the disciples who spent three years with Jesus had difficulty in believing. Many times Jesus told them, *"Why are you fearful, O you of little faith? ... If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"*³ That is why only a tiny bit of faith can go a long, long way—even if it is 1/64th of an inch.

¹ Hebrew 11:1.

² John 20:29.

³ Matthew 8:26; 6:30.



I Love You O Lord

A Poem on Mark 8

BY MAREYA NAGUIB

I love you O Lord my strength
and my redeemer

For you are the one who
protects me from the deceiver

I love you O Lord for I have
no one but You

For You are the only one who
I can come running too

I come to You when i am in
sadness, or in weakness

Or even when I am full of
gladness or in meekness

I find you always waiting for
me, ready to take me back

Even when my heart seems so
impure, and absolutely black

I love you O Lord my father
and my friend

For your love is so great that it
is so hard to comprehend

I sometimes wonder and ask
why did you die for me?

But the only true answer is
because you truly love me

You shed your blood for my
sake, I who am a sinner

Teach me then how to Love; I
who am a beginner

PILLARS OF OUR TIME

Ordinary People Serving in Extraordinary Ways

MAKING AN IMPACT

Fr. Yohanna Salama

A Precious Pearl

WRITTEN BY **SALAMA BOTROS**

Translated by **VERA SALAMA**



1878-1960

Please join us on this journey as we learn about another faithful servant of the Coptic Orthodox Church who served not only in Egypt but in Sudan as well. This is Fr. Yohanna Salama, the author of the book *The Precious Pearls in the Explanation of the Church Rites*. This literary work has enlightened many on the rites and traditions of the Coptic Orthodox Church. H.H. Pope Shenouda III praised it saying, "This book is a precious pearl that witnesses to its author, who illustrated to all the church servants the Orthodox faith and its correct teachings, which extends its roots to the depths of history."

Fr. Yohanna was born on the eve of the feast of St. Mercurius Abu Sefein (Of the Two Swords) on August 1, 1878, in the town of Gerga in Upper Egypt. He was from a righteous family. His father and grandfather were both priests as well as four of his uncles. They named him Seif (Sword) in observance of the Commemoration of Abu Seifen and he truly was a sword uprooting all that was lacking and mediocre.

He attended school in Gerga, and continued his education at the theological seminary in 1892 along with St. Habib Gerges. They were part of the first graduating class from this seminary. Upon his graduation in 1898, he was appointed a teacher at the monks' school in the Moharrak Monastery in Upper Egypt where he also took on monastic orders. He was ordained a monk by H.G. Abba Bakhomious (the abbot of the monastery), Abba Morcos of Esna, and Abba Theophilus of Manfalute and Abnoub, on the Eve of the Feast of the Epiphany in 1905. In commemoration of the feast, he was given the name Yohanna (John). He was later also ordained a priest and hegumen.

Fr. Yohanna was known for his intellect as well as for his asceticism. He preferred to live in solitude, spending much time in prayer. He was subsequently appointed as the headmaster of the monastery school where he remained for 13 years. During this time he produced a number of writings and publications.

When Evangelical missionaries started to spread their non-Orthodox teachings in Upper Egypt, Fr. Yohanna took to writing in order to combat this threat to the faith. He extended his research and produced *The Precious Pearls in the Explanation of the Church Rites* in 2 volumes in 1909. The first volume detailed the liturgy, while the second focused on the remaining church sacraments. This book was and still is considered an extremely important reference on

Coptic Church rites and traditions. The Egyptian Ministry of Education allowed the use of these texts in Egyptian schools in 1922.

In 1918, H.H. Pope Kyrollos V appointed Fr. Yohanna as the Papal Representative in Sudan where he served for 30 years. During his years of service there, he reformed the church community with much perseverance and faithfulness, upholding the true faith. These efforts allowed worship to flourish and thrive after a period of spiritual stagnation. The Sudanese Copts nourished on his rich sermons and grew in their faith.


He built and furnished the Bishop's residence which was visited by Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, as well as many dignitaries, including the Bishop of Ethiopia. The Emperor ordered that a photograph be taken with Fr. Yohanna, which he then signed. Fr. Yohanna also established several churches in Port Sudan, Halfa, Atbarrah, Obayed, Shendi, El-Dammer, and Costi. He expanded the churches in Omdurman, and Khartoum North, and he enlarged St. Mary's Church in Khartoum into a cathedral. He also established the Coptic College for Boys in 1922, where he took it upon himself to teach Coptic language and religion until 1942. He also opened other schools for boys and girls starting from Kindergarten and through High School.

Fr. Yohanna's efforts to enlighten the minds and hearts of the Coptic people did not go unnoticed. He was applauded by many Egyptian dignitaries including Prince Omar Toson, Talaat Harb who was the Economics guru of the time, as well as Prime Minister Ali Maher, and Dr. Abdel Razek El-Sanhooori the Minister of Education.

He was nominated for the patriarchy after the death of Pope Kyrollos V in 1927 as well as for the episcopate of Sudan in 1947. However, he returned to Gerga in 1947 where he continued to serve the church faithfully and diligently. During this time, he became the spiritual father of the blessed Tamav Irene, the abbess of St. Mercurius Convent in Old Cairo. He passed away on April 13, 1960.

We conclude with a remark that was made by one of the leaders of the Greek community in Sudan, "If the Greek Church had someone like Fr. Yohanna Salama, we would have made a statue of him."

Please remember us, our father, before the Throne of Grace until we meet you in the Heaven of Glory.



BY RANYA BOTROS

Reliance on God

Who has your back?

The world often tells us that people accomplish great feats by their own strengths, by their friendships or relationships, or by their wealth and power. However, the world is missing one extremely important point. Where is God in all of these accomplishments, and why is He not mentioned as the source of all good things? Do we rely on ourselves and on other people for success or accomplishments, or do we truly rely on God, knowing that He is the only one who provides for our every need?

When our Lord stood before Pontius Pilate's judgment, and the chief priests and people "cried out, saying 'Crucify Him, crucify Him.' Pilate said to them, 'You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.'"¹ Shortly afterwards, "Pilate said to Him, 'Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?' Jesus answered, 'You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.'"²

During this judgment, our Lord tells Pilate the plain and simple truth. Pilate has no power or authority over Him. This applies in our lives too, but we often forget this. God is the source of everything, including power and authority. But when we start to forget this and rely on ourselves or others, we fail miserably.

Let us look at what happened to the tribe of Judah when they relied on God during battle. They only had 550,000 men of valor, while the Ethiopian army going against them was one million men strong. Asa, King of Judah, was outnumbered by about half a million men. By the world's standards, King Asa's army would have no way of achieving victory. In fact, most people would have fallen into despair knowing they would be defeated, if they were in such a situation. But Asa did not rely on himself or other people; he cried out to the Lord in prayer and said, "Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!"³ Victory belonged to King Asa that day, as the Lord crushed his enemy under his feet.

Do we really trust God with all of our hearts to deliver us from our battles and hardships? We say we do, we pray we do, but do we really trust Him? Do we rely on people to find us jobs, friendships, power, money, etc., or do we cry

out to our Lord for help? The truth is that only God can deliver us from all our troubles. If we think people can do this for us, we are lying to ourselves.

King Asa made that mistake also, even after he had experienced the success of depending on the Lord. He relied on the King of Syria instead of God to aid him in going to battle against Baasha King of Israel and failed miserably. "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars."⁴

This is exactly what happens when we do not rely on our Lord to provide for our every need. We encounter many problems and fail in everything we do. Nothing is beyond the reach of our Lord, but we have to trust in Him. That means we have to let go and let God work His wonderful will in us. "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ... But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."⁵

Let us not fear God, but trust Him and rely on Him for our every need. "Abba Anthony said, 'I no longer fear God, but I love Him. For love casts out fear (John 4:18)'"⁶ God will never abandon us, but we should not abandon Him by relying on worldly means to get our own way. In His acceptable time, our Lord will provide for us. We do not need connections, fame, or the things of this world to succeed. We only need God. "For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'"⁷

¹ John 19:6.

² John 19:10-11.

³ 2 Chronicles 14:11.

⁴ 2 Chronicles 16:7-9.

⁵ Matthew 6:25, 33-34.

⁶ Ward, Benedicta, trans. The

Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection. Revised Edition. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984, 8.

⁷ Hebrews 13:5-6.

QUESTION & ANSWER

New SPRING 2015 Edition

GENERAL QUESTION

And its Answer

Q: “Blessed are those who believed without seeing.” Why is it a blessing to believe without seeing?

A: Those who have witnessed have had a real proof before their eyes. They cannot doubt what they have seen. However, those who believe without seeing rely totally on God’s word. The natural order of the well-known motto, “Seeing is believing” is reversed in the order of things in the kingdom of God. Those who have not seen are convinced by the testimony of the apostles, and by the conviction of the Spirit. Thus “believing is seeing” becomes the desired state of affairs. Faith, by definition is believing in things not seen; otherwise it is not faith. God blesses those who utterly rely on His word.

*Taken from <http://www.suscopts.org/resources/questions-answers/>

If you would like to ask any questions, please write to <http://www.suscopts.org/q&a/index.php>

New SPRING 2015 Edition

BIBLE QUESTION

And its Answer

FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST.
MATTHEW CHAPTER 6

Q: Why did the Lord touch the leper?

A: This man was in greater need of this touch than of the physical healing. This touch made him feel accepted and loved. He needed emotional and psychological healing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRdTfKSikIE>

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More Photos on p.26

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