

# MIGHTY MAGAZINE ARROWS

Life. God. Truth. For Coptic Youth



Summer 2015 Volume 14 No.3

# In Loving Hands



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

Psalm 127:4



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

## My Beloved,

There are many occasions that demonstrate God’s loving hands through our lives. His loving hands have consistently upheld us over raging waters in many complex matters. The Holy Scripture also reiterates these same sentiments and helps us to understand how much we are loved. No one can love us as much as God. No greater mercy is there in any other than to fall into God’s loving hands that are full of mercy. Man knows no such compassion. *“And David said to God, “I am in great distress. Please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man”* (1 Chronicles 21:13).

Chastisement with love can be readily accepted if the one rebuking admonishes with love and not with revenge. Do not look for ways to hide from God even in the worst scenario or the most despicable sin. Let us learn from scriptural examples and from the articles in this edition of the Mighty Arrows Magazine that wonderfully illustrate many venues in which God’s loving hands embrace us and lead us with benevolence to abolish the desires that lead to destruction and set us right unto a blessed route that leads to life.

God bless you,

Bishop Youssef  
BISHOP, COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

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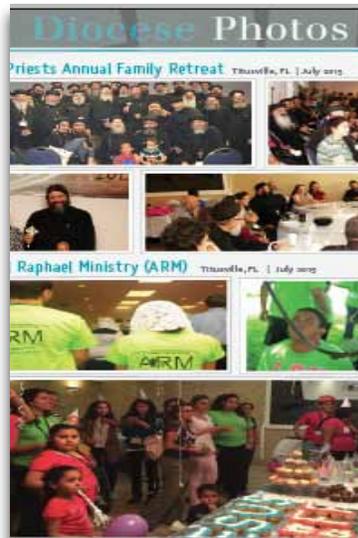
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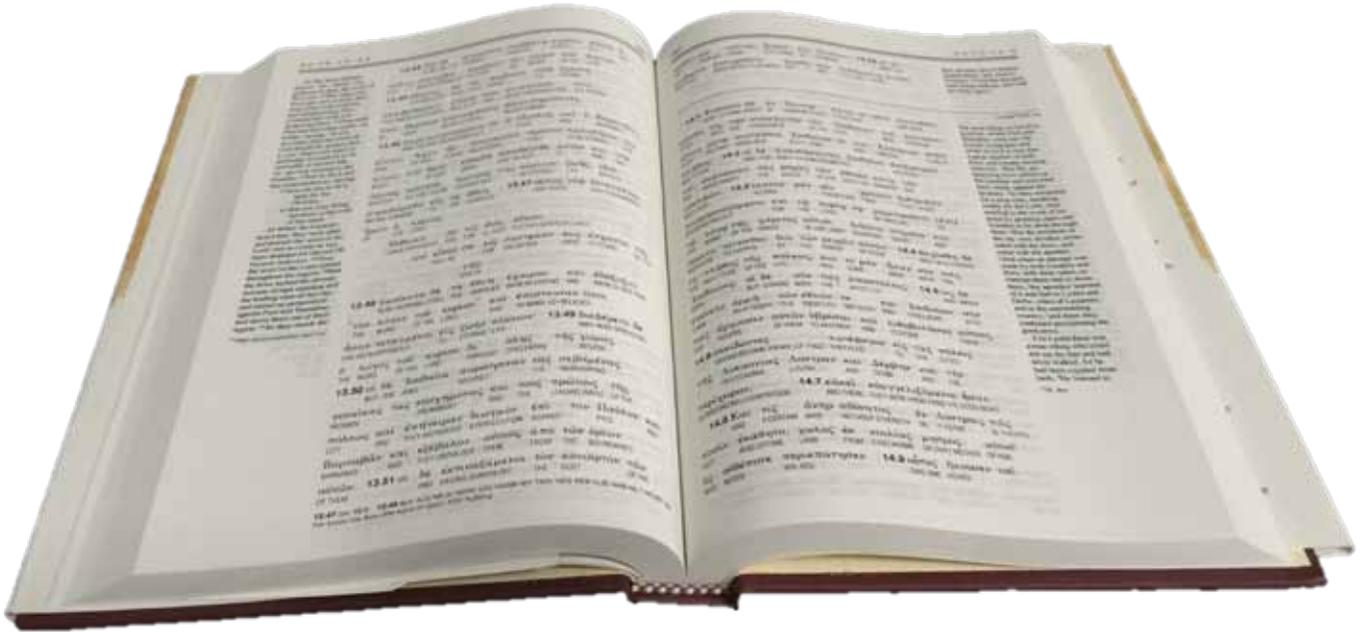
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# Keeping the Word Close

Triplets of Advice

BY HIS HOLINES POPE TAWADROS II



**T**he Holy Bible is like the water that we drink; we cannot do without it. We might eat lightly one day, but we cannot do without water. It is a daily need. This need makes you thirst to know more and more, and dive deeper and deeper into the spiritual word.

St. John Chrysostom has a beautiful saying: “The Holy Bible is a pearl mine, and a garden for souls.” For this reason, the more you read the Bible, the deeper you meditate on it. It does not reveal itself easily. Each reading of the Holy Bible is a new reading. Strive in this. Spiritual books, while also important, are born from the Holy Bible, so you are dealing with the source.

If you think you are forcing yourself to read the Holy Bible, is it because you think that you know the

Bible, that you have read it before, that it is difficult, or that it contains unimportant information?

Once I read a saying: “When you read a Biblical passage and the name of a person is mentioned, pay attention for this is an important passage. When no name is mentioned, then it is an even more important passage.” When this story is specific to a certain person, then it is limited to that person, but when you read a story or passage that is not limited by a name, then it is an open story that can apply to any person. You or I can be that person.

My advice: always keep your Holy Bible open. Do not close its pages. This will encourage you to read. This is a simple piece of advice.

# Relationship with One's Self II<sup>1</sup>

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

BY HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA III



**E**xamine yourself. God will not ask you on the Last Day about how others live, but He will ask you about yourself: if your self walked upright and how it was a blessing to others. He might not ask you about the mistakes of others, but He might ask you about your efforts to save others. See where your self is: is it weak and fallen, barely walking on two legs, or is it also lifting up others?

Consider also whether your self is diseased with contagious diseases that can contaminate others and harm them. Diseases are of two types: one type can harm a person internally, but does not affect others, and another type is not limited to harming the person, but contaminates others also. Do you have contagious diseases? Are you not content with your erroneous thoughts, but also pour them into the ears of others? Are you not content with your own weaknesses, but also lay their burden on others also? Are you not content in falling, but you are also an offense to others? Is your soul a dangerous soul? There is a person who keeps sins within the self, while another shares

them, like the sins of the tongue for example. Try to train your self in order to discipline it, to direct it.

Great is the person who can exert effort and advance. Abba Isaac, the father of the Calamon Mount, was greatly moved when he heard the young monk Misael rebuking himself (although he did not have any sins deserving of such rebuke).<sup>3</sup> Oh, that people could compile the saints' rebukes to themselves. Believe me, this is a very broad topic. Take for example, the story of St. Moses the Anchorite, and his amazing rebuke of himself. He used very stern words, saying, "Woe to you my soul for you have done... Woe to you... when you said, when you saw, when you heard..."<sup>4</sup> Would he pamper himself and lose himself, and then arrive at the Last Day to hear, "*Remember that in your lifetime you received your good things*"?<sup>5</sup> As for the one who continually rebukes the self, does not give it all its requests, deprives it of food, drink, and rest, trains it on fasting, prayer, chastity, trains it instead to purity of mind, purity of heart, purity of tongue, this one truly loves this self. One who disciplines the soul is akin to St. Paul who said, "*I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*"<sup>6</sup> He has his "*senses exercised*";<sup>7</sup> he is training himself. You need to take charge of your self—it is a talent you received from God.

Try to sieve out the self, taking out of it the tares, the mud, standing the self before God as is, rebuking it before God and before the father of confession, rather than trying to justify it in everything. A very strange word I read by one of the saints (let us take it in spirit and not literally): "He is a monk who does violence to himself in everything."<sup>8</sup> You might not do violence to yourself, but at least do not pamper yourself and justify yourself, but be very stern with yourself. One person might punish the self, lay down penalties for it, and rejoice to receive chastisements from others. If such a one receives a trial from God, he says, "This is because of my sins." This carries the self to contrition and humility. By rebuking the self, one leads it to repentance and corrects the ego. As for the person whose sins remain fixed, one whose sins increase, or one who adds new novel sins, this person is losing the soul.

Seek out your soul to see what you are doing to it. Measure yourself against the examples set forth by the Hagiography of the saints. I will not say, "*Be perfect,*"<sup>9</sup> or "*Be holy,*"<sup>10</sup> which are found in the Holy Bible. I will tell you to follow the practical example set forth by the saints in their lives. Examine yourself

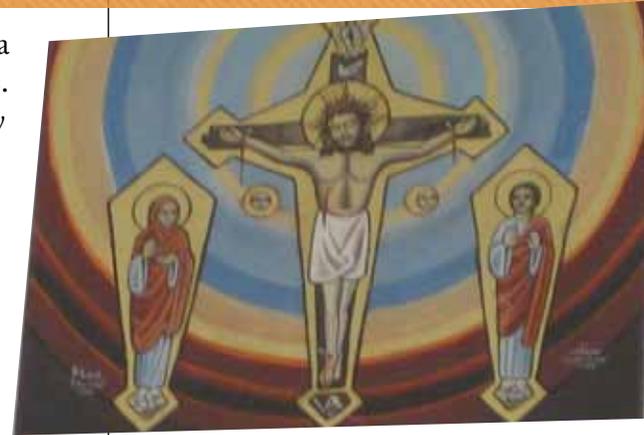
and see where you measure up. If you find yourself not measuring up, say, "When will I remedy myself? When will I begin? When will I walk according to the calling to which I have been called? When will I walk in the angelic path, when?" Rebuke yourself. *"He who loses his life for My sake will find it."*<sup>11</sup> One who is stern with the self here preserves it for eternal life; one who is firm with the self here saves it from standing in shame on the Day of the Last Judgment.

Oh, that we would be true friends to our elves, in the spiritual sense, and not in the meaning that a person enjoys vain pleasures in this life, afterwards losing eternity, finding that the days have already passed away. One person said a very wonderful saying, "Those in Hades would give anything for one moment of our life on earth." In this moment, they might change their lives and offer repentance; they can do many things. We thank God that we have many moments, perhaps hours and days, but what is important is, do we use them for our souls or not, for the salvation of our souls, for the growth of our souls, for the purity of our souls, and not for pampering our souls or indulging our souls.

This is true love. I want you to love yourself this way, to take out the pus inside you, press down on it hard, tell it, "Hang on, bear with what I do to you for the Lord's sake." Press down on the sore and squeeze out the pus. Clean out your self, even if your self screams out for help. This is true love, paternal love, love in which you do not pamper, justify, or flatter yourself; love through which

this soul reaches Golgotha and is raised up on the cross. Christ said, *"Father, glorify Me."*<sup>12</sup> When did He say this? As He was heading for Golgotha. He said, *"Now the Son of Man is glorified."*<sup>13</sup> His glory is in His cross. Is your glory in your cross? If you love yourself, search for your purity, examine yourself thoroughly.

By which standard? Beware of measuring yourself on the standard of vainglory, world glory, or earthly measures of honor. Examine yourself against the standard of holiness and perfection that is required of you, *"Be perfect... Be holy,"*<sup>14</sup> Examine yourself against the examples set forth by the great saints. Examine yourself in light of the commandment. Struggle against yourself with all might and force. The Holy Bible says in the Epistle to the Hebrews, *"You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin."*<sup>15</sup> Will your self endure bloodshed? It will. This is your true love to yourself, even to bloodshed, to be purified. If you truly love yourself, use all the energy God has given you to build yourself spiritually, to grow spiritually daily, until you reach the divine image on which God created you. This is true love for yourself. You might not accept rebuke from others: a word of rebuke upsets you, a word of correction injures you, and an honest word turns you out. But you might not be overwhelmed by your own rebuke, so rebuke your own self. If you neither want to discipline yourself, nor want people to discipline you, nor want God to discipline you, then you are losing yourself. Oh, that we would love ourselves in truth, with which to



discipline it, to be purified and cling to God.

May God grant us, when we sit with our souls, to sit in the presence of God, or to sit with our souls to make our souls sit with God, to Whom is due all glory forever. Amen.

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#### Endnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> Monastic sermons delivered by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III during his detainment (1983-1985) at St. Pishoy's Monastery in the Natrun Valley, Egypt.
- <sup>2</sup> Miller, Dana, trans. *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*. Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984, 50.
- <sup>3</sup> St. Mark and St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church. *Coptic Synaxarium*. IV vols. Illinois: St. Mark and St. Bishoy COC, 1987, Vol. II, 136-137.
- <sup>4</sup> Fr. Samaan El-Soriany. *The Hermit Fathers*. Marrickville: South Wood Press, 1993, 75-86.
- <sup>5</sup> Luke 16:25.
- <sup>6</sup> Philippians 4:12.
- <sup>7</sup> Hebrews 5:14.
- <sup>8</sup> Ward, Benedicta, trans. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*. Revised Edition. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984, 67.
- <sup>9</sup> Matthew 5:48.
- <sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 1:16.
- <sup>11</sup> Matthew 10:39.
- <sup>12</sup> John 17:5.
- <sup>13</sup> John 13:31.
- <sup>14</sup> Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:16.
- <sup>15</sup> Hebrews 12:4.

# The Power of Prayer

The power of  
communicating with God.

BY RANYA BOTROS



In an age where instant gratification reigns, we sometimes get swept away by our belief that success is when we obtain things we want immediately. Of course this is really a deception from the evil one because we start to question God when we don't get what we want *now*. We ask, "Why, Lord, didn't you give me this job promotion? Why didn't you give me this car or house I've always wanted? Why didn't you heal my friend's or family member's ailments?" The truth is that when we start to question God, we are really questioning His judgment and betraying our lack of trust in Him.

Our Lord says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."<sup>1</sup> When our Lord said this, He didn't mean that everything we ask for will be given to us effortlessly or even given to us at all because sometimes we ask for things that may harm us or place on the path of self-destruction. He also didn't mean that we would get a free ride without working hard or toiling for our requests. Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden of pleasure and were required to work for everything after disobeying God: "[T]herefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken."<sup>2</sup> If everything was easy for us, we would develop a sense of arrogance, but we are not called to be arrogant but humble, as our Lord is humble. We are told, "The Lord will destroy the house of the proud."<sup>3</sup> Our Lord also says, "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"<sup>4</sup> God knows what is best for us more than we do.

Our prayers should be from the heart: "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words."<sup>5</sup> If we don't pray from our hearts, why should our Lord listen? Heartfelt prayers with tears are prayers that reach our Lord like a shooting arrow piercing its target.

We should also be cautious that our prayers are not based on greed. If we always want more, we run the risk of losing what we already have. God wants us to be content with what we have. He doesn't want us to constantly request more and more because that is never good. God, in His own way, might teach us a lesson or two about gratitude if we go on this path of ungratefulness. There is a saying that goes, "You don't know what

you have, until you lose it."

All our requests or prayers are really a form of communication with God. Just as He communicates with us through scriptures and others, we communicate with Him through our prayers. At times we take prayers for granted, and we forget how powerful they really are when done properly. We can always ask others to pray for us, but if we don't make the effort to pray ourselves, we shouldn't expect God to respond to us. "A brother said to Abba Anthony, 'Pray for me.' The old man said to him, 'I will have no mercy upon you, nor will God have any, if you yourself do not make an effort and if you do not pray to God.'"<sup>6</sup>

In prayer, patience and perseverance without being anxious are vital. If God doesn't respond to our prayers *right now*, maybe this means it's not the right time for God to give us what we want. We just have to be patient: "To everything *there is* a season, a time for every purpose under heaven."<sup>7</sup> We should "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."<sup>8</sup>

Finally, when we pray from the depths of our hearts, when we are patient, when we request things according to His will, when we are not greedy in our requests, only then can we say as the Psalmist said, "The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:7

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:23

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 15:25

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 7:9-11

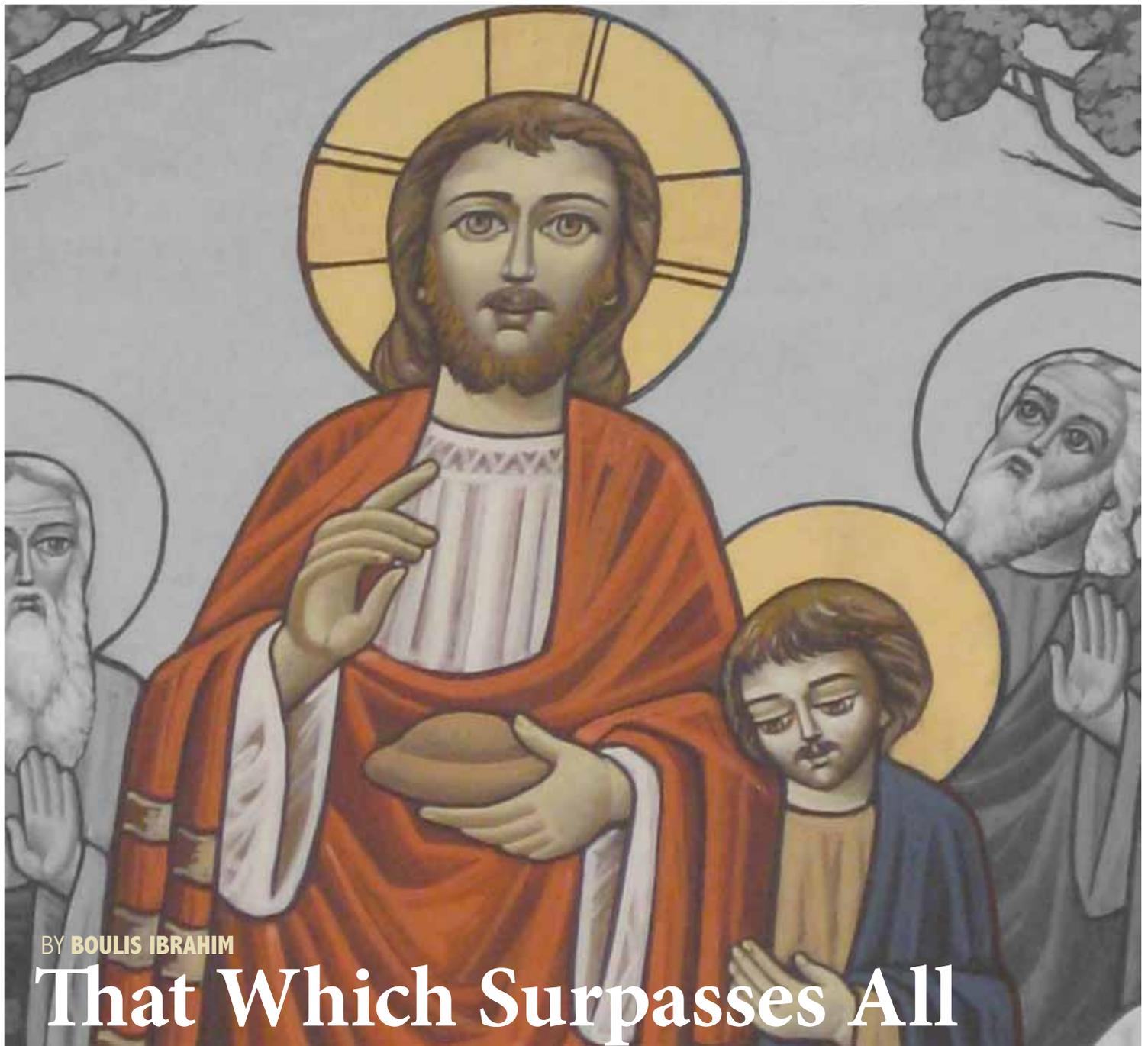
<sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:7

<sup>6</sup> Ward, Benedicta. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:1

<sup>8</sup> Philippians 4:6

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 6:9



BY BOULIS IBRAHIM

# That Which Surpasses All

God is love. Is there greater love than this?

**O**wondrous Being of marvelous love! Love is Your nature, aim, and gift. By Your loving kindness we all live, move, and be.<sup>1</sup> Everything that is You exudes love. It is everywhere You are, and radiates from the tails of glory whenever You pass by. Words fail to express, and languages are left wanting in describing Your

beauty and the depths of Your love. You define what love is and should be. The Earth and all of creation are clothed with Your beauty and exist because of Your love. Everything that You have made is so beautiful, and they are so because of You. You are the master painter, the most accomplished writer, the most eloquent speaker, the kindest heart, the greatest wisdom, the most

loving soul. You are the absolute in everything beautiful and good. You are clothed with light for You are the true Light. Photons are mere brushes with which You paint the tapestry of nature for the gift of vision. Your light surpasses that which is in nature as a maker surpasses his creation.

My heart is still, dry, empty, lifeless until the tender, loving

motion of Your voice caresses it like a lover caresses the face of his beloved. Would my tears flow like rivers, but when your love brushes my soul? “As the deer yearns for water brooks, so my soul pants for You.”<sup>2</sup> In Your loving hands I am a trembling heart of a captive bird that is there at Your command, my love.<sup>3</sup> You melt my heart, mind, soul, and being. You give life to my heart, and I can hear it speak to me. It tells me things far greater than mere words. It is painful to be away from You, and endless joy to be near You. Let not You be in me, but let me be fully dissolved in You. Let there be no trace of me, only You. O lover of my soul, my soulmate, my emotions, my tears of joy, and my wonders. I burst with reverie in Your presence. I am struck with awe. I am in a trance of pure peace that surpasses even existence. My veins pulsate with joy and my heart with songs, as in a choir of joyful angels. Your gentle kindness melts my mind, heart, and soul into a crystal fluid of love in the river of life. Do not be stirred, do not go, for I am drunk with Your wine. I am drugged with Your love. I beg You to stay, O wonderful One, for You are altogether lovely.

To what can I liken Your love? The love of a man for a woman is but a shadow of Your love for my soul. Your love is the mystery of mysteries. Truly, in it are the mysteries of all. In love You have made all, and with love You still do all that You do. You have not loved us with only words, yet even Your words “are spirit, and they are life.”<sup>4</sup> For love’s sake, You gave Yourself, bore our infirmities,

and wiped clean our iniquities. For love’s sake, You offered Your only Son so that we may be adopted as Your children. For love’s sake, You took our own to give us Yours. The waves of Your love stroke my heart like the tide against a seashore on a beautiful summer day. Your loving spring swells my ribcage to its brim, and your life-giving water laps on the sandbanks of my heart, washing, cleaning, shaping, and polishing its grains to reflect but a hair-thin ray of Your unspeakable splendour. “[Your] presence is sprouting daffodils, crocus, tulips, and hyacinths in the dawn of spring. Your countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.”<sup>5</sup> Your face far outstrips the snowy slopes in their whiteness and the glorious sun in its brightness. Your loving eyes are dew drops of sky blue, apple green. and honey brown sapphires imbued with pure crystal light. Your cheeks are a bed of spices, banks of scented herbs. “[Your] lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh.”<sup>6</sup> Your hands are powerful and kind; they raise the dead and strengthen all weaknesses. Your footsteps are flower petals dripping with honey. Your presence is colour, happiness, and life to my soul. Whenever my heart catches a waft of your garments, my soul wonders in awe, overwhelmed by waves upon waves of ecstasy and joy. My tears flow from the sheer intensity of Your gentleness and loving kindness. Nay, the love of a man for a woman pales in comparison as a dew drop lost in an endless river of liquid life.

Now I begin to understand how martyrs so willingly offer their lives



### That Which Surpasses All BY BOULIS IBRAHIM

to You, for Your love surpasses all. They did what I can only imagine. Like sheaves of corn they accepted to be gathered, threshed naked, sifted and freed from their husks, ground white, kneaded pliant, assigned to Your sacred fire, and offered as bread on the altar of Your love.<sup>7</sup> O King of Peace, there is no peace to a human soul but in You. In You I lose control, I submit willingly to Your loving hands, drink the wine of love till drunkenness, and then yearn for more. “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases.”<sup>8</sup> “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick!”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:28.

<sup>2</sup> Psalms 42:1.

<sup>3</sup> Roberta Flack (1969) from lyrics of the song ‘The first time ever I saw your face,’ written by Ewan MacColl, published by Royalty Network.

<sup>4</sup> John 6:63.

<sup>5</sup> Song of Songs 5:15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Song 5:13.

<sup>7</sup> Khalil Gibran on love. Gibran, K., 1923, *The Prophet*. A Borzoi Book, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Song 2:7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Song 5:8.



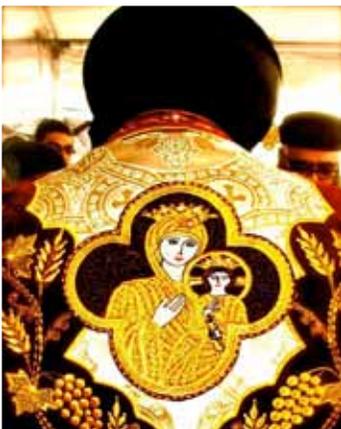
**T**o understand love is to attempt to get into the depth of God Himself, because in essence, **God is love.** In listing the three greatest virtues: faith, hope and love, St. Paul stresses the fact that of all the three, love stands the greatest. This is because while faith and hope will one day cease to be, love never will; because God who is love is infinite, with no end.

**What is faith?** In Hebrews 11:1, St. Paul defines faith as *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* So, when these things, get to be seen and fulfilled, faith ceases to exist. For example we believe in the existence of God, the saints, and eternal life, and when we see all these things faith will become functionless. What is hope? Hope by necessity deals with the future. For example our hope is to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Once we reach eternal life and inherit the kingdom of heaven, then the substance of our hope is fulfilled, and consequently there is no hope any more.

**What is Love?** The Greek language, in which the New Testament was written, provides four terms that convey the meaning of the word “love.” These terms are: **Eros** - This term refers to carnal or sexual love. This kind of love is characterized by selfishness, as it is usually demanding without thinking of giving. It seeks gratification of one’s own pleasure; ignoring the benefit of the other. An example from the Old Testament of carnal love is Samson’s. When he wanted to marry, he said about the girl he wanted to marry, *“Get her for me, for she pleases me well”* (Judges 14:3) thus exhibiting his

# LOVE

## In our Lives



Special Featured Article

BY **HIS GRACE BISHOP YOUSSEF**



“ Love protects our freedom in Christ against turning into destructive selfishness. The New Testament says that the Son sets us free. ”

desire for pleasure only. Another example is Amnon, David's son who loved his sister with an Eros love. After he had committed sin with her, this love vanished (2 Samuel 13:15). The nature of this type of love is what the youth experience in their early dating relationships. It is essentially feelings in the Eros sense; as she or he *"pleases me well."* **Philia** - This term refers to love that binds close friends together. This kind of love is mutual, conditional, and ephemeral. It is always based on a condition; if you love me, I will love you. Many times the beloved has to earn the love of the lover. It is mutual and reciprocal in nature contrary to Eros, which is only receiving. When we were in school, we had friends whom we loved and who loved us. However, now we might not even remember their names, that love and friendship were temporary, hence it ended with time. **Storge** - This is the kind of love, the blood bond love, is essentially expressive of family relationship. God planted this love in us and therefore we do not take any credit for it. It is an instinctive love whereby a father loves his son, a mother her children, and the children each other. The purpose of this love is to keep the family bond as a strong support system in the life of any individual. **Agape** - This is the highest form of love that seeks the transcendental good of others. When our Lord Jesus Christ commanded *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,"* and *'your neighbor as yourself.'*" (Luke 10:27), He used the Agape love. The same type of love was used when He instructing us to *"love your enemies"* (Matthew 5:44). In Galatians 5:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 13, St. Paul uses the same Greek term 'Agape' to describe the fruit of the Spirit. Agape is then the kind of love a person expresses towards God, others, and also his enemies. We should strive to have this the kind of love towards everybody. Thus the Storge and Philia must ultimately grow until they both reach the level of Agape.

#### What does Agape do?

**Resides in the atmosphere.** Those who have attained Agape will watch it permeate their atmosphere; and through it they will not only walk in love but will love people wholeheartedly. St. Paul says in Ephesians 5:1-2, "Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ also has loved us, and given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma." Who is responsible for creating this atmosphere of love? No one else but us. We are responsible for initiating love or otherwise. As Christians, we are expected to always walk in the

atmosphere of love that will ultimately be manifested in our actions, work, and way we serve each other. **Binds virtues together.** St. Paul correlates virtues to the garments that we put on. Those garments need a tie to hold them together in place. If the garments of virtues fall down, we will remain uncovered. What will then keep all these virtues bound together? It is the tie of love. In Colossians 3:12-14, St. Paul says, "Therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. If anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." **Becomes the pivot of our actions.** In 1 Corinthians 16:14, St. Paul says, "Let all that you do be done with love." Also in 1 Corinthians 13:3, St. Paul says, "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." No matter how much, how long or how well you serve in or outside church, if you do it without love, you will not reap any fruit out of it. **Shields our actions.** Love protects our freedom in Christ against turning into destructive selfishness. The New Testament says that the Son sets us free. Therefore it may seem that we are not under any obligation to pray or fast or go to church. However, we could easily abuse our freedom in Christ and drift away. What then protects our freedom in Christ? St. Paul in Galatians 5:13 says, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one



LOVE  
In Our Lives

HIS GRACE  
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YOUSSEF

another.” Yes, Christ has set us free, but through love we will deliberately offer ourselves to be servants of all and slaves to all. Then what makes us pray or go to church though we are not obligated? It is the love that we have received from God. Once we get to understand this principal, we will be able to apply it to any area in our relationship with others. Take submission as an example. Submission by a wife to her husband is understood by many women as being slavery. However, the church does not teach it that way. On the contrary, it is sheer love and out of total free will that a godly woman submits to her husband. **Seasons our speech.** Many people think that there is a contradiction between truth and love. God is both love and truth. So if God is the truth and God is love, then there should not be any contradiction at all. In Ephesians 4:15, St. Paul says, “...speaking the truth in love...” If we keep a balance between truth and love and the truth is said and communicated with love, truth will never be a fault in your life. When our Lord Jesus Christ wanted to confront the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26), He did that in a loving unoffending way, thus ending up winning her. If love characterizes every word we say, we will not lose anyone.

**What is the Nature of Agape? It is a willful love.** Agape is an emotion that rises in the mind and not in the heart. It is a principle, a decision, and a freely made choice. Agape is the type of love with which you love your enemy. Therefore it cannot start in the

heart. God would otherwise be unfair in asking us to love our enemies while knowing that our hearts cannot generate such demanding emotions. While Philia is a heart generated uncontrolled emotion towards the beloved, Agape is a concentrated exercise of the will. That is why training has to be established before we can exercise our will to love others. After Agape starts in the mind, it will be processed in the heart, and then emotions and feelings will develop. Who should be trusted more, the will or the emotions? In reality, it is the will that should be trusted more than the emotions because the latter could become influenced by some factors, but a decision made with your will is a trusted decision. **It is a sacrificial love.** While Eros is a selfish love that receives only and Philia is a mutual love that receives and gives, Agape is always giving and caring without expecting or receiving anything in return. It is giving to the extent of laying down one’s life for others (John 15:13). It is a readiness to go the extra mile and perhaps even shed blood for the beloved. **It is an unconditional love.** With Agape, the beloved does not have to earn their lover’s adoration, but receives it as a free gift. This may sound far-fetched, and rather impossible; but we often pose the question: How can we possibly give our enemies our love for free? The answer resides with our Lord Jesus Christ. For while we were sinners and enemies to the Father, He loved us offering Himself on the cross for us. **It is a limitless love.** Agape is inclusive, not exclusive, in the sense that it does not differentiate among people based on sex, age, social status or ethnic background. It is expressed to everybody and embraces all people.

This explicit definition of the nature of Agape may sound too difficult

to attain, thus causing some to perhaps become discouraged in their pursuit of such a kind of love. There is a lot of truth in this negative response; because God who is Love, and who is infinite at the same time, renders this kind of love seemingly infinite; unreachable, and unattainable by anyone. It follows therefore that infinite time is required to achieve this infinite love. The good news is that love has a lot in common with fire (Song 8:6,7). When we approach love we grow in it; and although we will never achieve all of the infinite love, we will be ignited by its fuel and warmed by its warmth. On the other hand, those who do not practice love will live in coldness and gradually experience emotional frost. The point here is that we all have to grow day after day in our love. Nobody can say I am done or that I have reached the infinite love with no more room for further growth. Even in eternal life we will grow in our love day after day. Growth in love becomes a target; and, whoever grows, and gets closer, will receive blessings in their life, and the coldness will melt gradually as they approach the source of the infinite love. The more you approach this love and grow in it; the more will your heart be warmed by it.

The nature and reality of Agape should not dishearten us nor make us hopeless of attaining it. On the contrary, it should help us make it our goal to attain Agape and grow in it; day after day pressing toward this goal. St. Paul in his letter to Philipians 3:12 when talking about perfection, says: “Nor that I have already attained, or I am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold on that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”

May the Lord of love fill all our hearts with His divine love.

# St. Anastasia the Nun

A life of faith, trust, and love

BY MAREYA NAGUIB



**D**o you ever take a moment in your day to stop, slow down, and meditate on God's love for you? Do you ever stop and thank God that you have good health, a roof over your head, and food on your table every day? Do you realize that your life is held in loving hands? Indeed, our beloved God cares for us so deeply; We trust and believe that we are truly taken care of no matter what storms approach us throughout our life's journey. One must have faith and trust that God is holding our lives in His hands and protecting us, and that He loves us dearly and wants to bring us closer to Him. This trust and faith in God was exemplified in a great saint known as Anastasia.<sup>1</sup>

St. Anastasia was a beautiful girl born to a noble family in the city of Constantinople. Her parents raised her to fear God and love Him with all her heart. They also taught her to glorify God in whatever she does in her life.

St. Anastasia worked in Emperor Justin's palace as his wife's attendant. Empress Theodora loved Anastasia very much and trusted her whenever she needed advice or guidance. Sadly, Emperor Justin did not love his wife and wanted to cheat on her out of his lust for Anastasia's beauty. St. Anastasia realized his scheme and told the Empress right away to warn her. The Empress was very touched by her morals and her love towards her. They went quickly to meet with the Bishop of Constantinople to see what can be done before Emperor Justin could hurt them. The bishop decided that the safest decision was for Anastasia to flee. The Empress rewarded Anastasia with money and gold for her honesty and love. St. Anastasia and the bishop then headed to Alexandria on a private ship that the Empress gave them so

that Emperor Justin would not be able to track her departure.

St. Anastasia loved the life of chastity and wanted to dedicate her life for Christ and become His bride. At that time there was no convent, so the bishop that assisted her escape from Constantinople helped her build a convent. Soon after, many girls walked her path and joined her to become nuns. All the nuns loved St. Anastasia so much that they requested from the bishop if he can promote her into becoming the abbess for the convent. They all lived in peace for a couple of years until the day the Empress of Constantinople passed away. Emperor Justin then declared a grand search for Anastasia. The bishop warned her and told her to flee as soon as she could. He sent a letter to Bishop Daniel of Scete Monastery to inform him that he will send Mother Anastasia to him so that she can hide as a disguised monk.

Bishop Daniel of Scete knew her story and he brought her to a cave and asked one of the elders to fill a water pot for her once every week, and to place the pot at the door of the cave and leave. No one in the monastery knew that a woman lived in their midst. She lived in that cave as a hermitess for 28 years and would write her thoughts on pieces of pottery and leave them at the door of her cave so that they can be delivered to Bishop Daniel to read them.

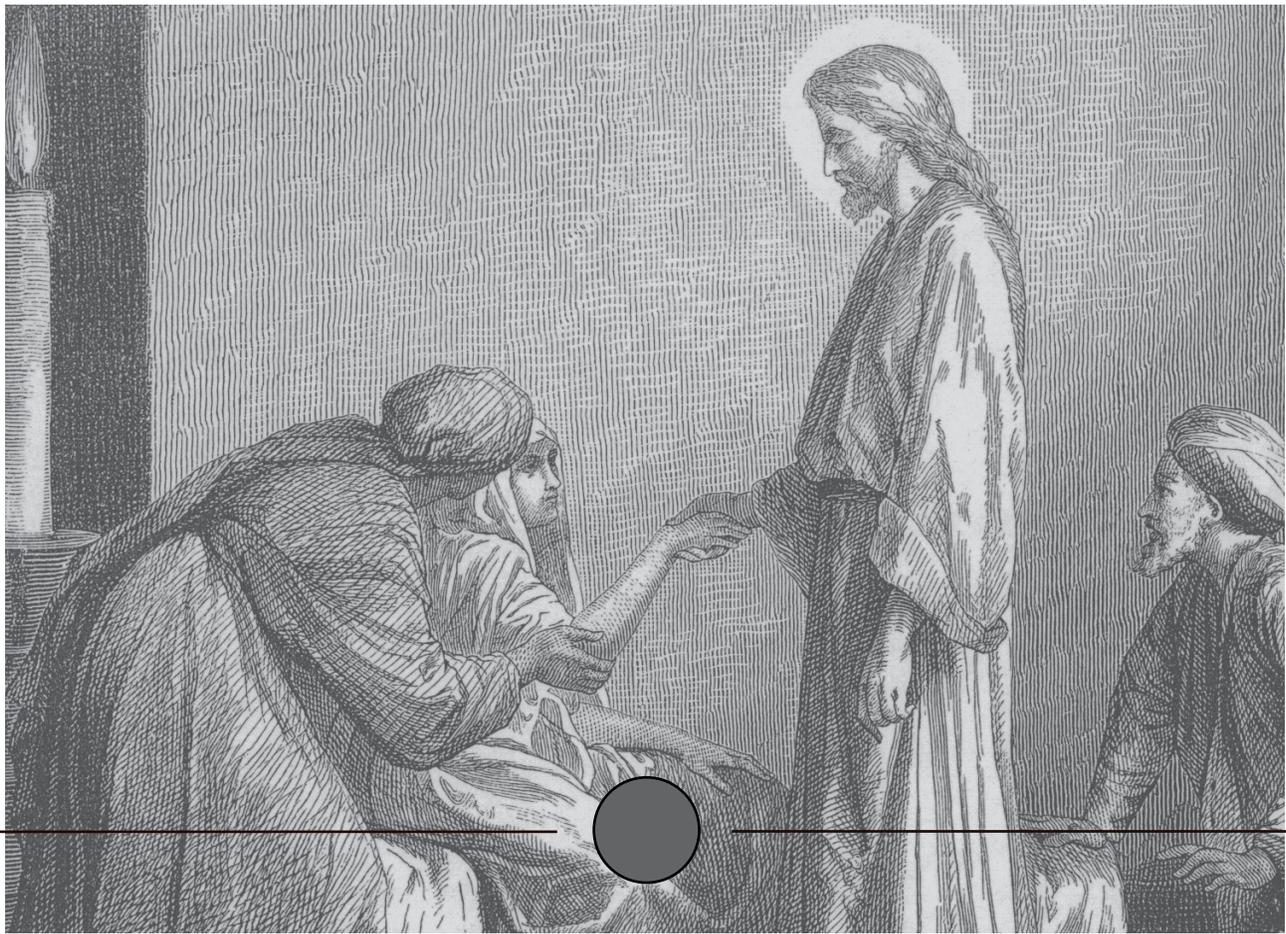
One day the piece of pottery stated that St. Anastasia was departing and asked Bishop Daniel to come see her and bring her Holy Communion. St. Daniel wept when he read it, and said to his disciple, "Come with me now to bury the body of the saint in that cave."

When they entered her cave, they received blessings from each other. St. Anastasia said to Bishop Daniel, "For the sake of God, bury me with what I have on my body." Then she prayed, bade them farewell, and departed in peace. They wept and buried her. When the disciple was caring for her burial, he discovered that she was a woman, and he marveled in silence.

After they had buried her and returned to their place, the disciple knelt before St. Daniel and said, "For the sake of God, tell me her story, for I have seen that she was a woman." The elder told him her story, that she was from one of the noble families of Constantinople, and how she surrendered herself to Christ, forsaking the vain glory of this world.

St. Anastasia knew and believed that she was in God's loving hands and that He would not forsake her no matter the hardships that approached her. She loved Christ with all her heart, mind and soul, and dedicated herself to Him as a pure bride. Because of her love for Christ and for her sacrifice, Christ did not forsake her and protected her virginity and her asceticism. May we all learn from St. Anastasia to have strong faith in God and trust that He gives us more than we ask for or understand.

<sup>1</sup> "St. Anastasia." *Lives of Saints* : Toba 26. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2015.



# God Came Near

## Part Four

WHEN GOD SUDDENLY TAKES A TURN

BY **CHRISTINE MASSOUD**

He thought he understood Abraham, the father of his faith who almost sacrificed his own son Isaac because God asked it of him. He remembered hearing the story read from the scrolls at the synagogue while growing up, studying it in depth at the foot of a Sanhedrin as a youth, and even listening to his best friend preach on the passage just weeks before. As if that wasn't enough, he himself had taught on Abraham's faith and thought he knew the great man well. He would even dare to say, "I know him on a personal level."

But as he sat on the bed anxiously waiting for Jesus to speak, holding his

unconscious daughter in his arms, he realized that it was only in this moment that he could really begin to know how Abraham felt as Isaac laid on there on that stone altar generations ago.

This understanding came about that day with an early morning knock at his chamber door. He was just days away from completing his first Septuagint Exhortation. It was his first assignment as a ruler or patron of the synagogue, and he was looking forward to its presentation to his fellow theologians. He was also looking forward to returning home to his family afterwards. He

had been in this cabin-like room for weeks, praying, writing, reading, and fasting when that knock so early one morning sparked an immediate sense of concern.

He struggled up from his desk to the door. As a parent, an older one at that, he was accustomed to such emotions before, but his worries always turned out to be false alarms. This is what he told himself as he hurried to open the door. But this time was different: his one and only daughter had fallen ill suddenly. His home was a couple days' journey so there was no telling how much worse she could have gotten since the

message was dispatched. He has to leave everything and follow his servant to the house immediately.

Not knowing what had happened and being miles away, he was overwhelmed by fear and helplessness. He started running while asking his servant about the details, "When did she first say she was ill? How did she look then? Did my wife call onto a physician?" Every thought and question was uncontrollably coming out.

The servant was trying to run after him, to catch up, to answer all these questions and somehow provide him comfort. He was a good master, an honest and upright man. "He didn't deserve this," the servant thought to himself, "God finally gave him a daughter and now, He's taking her away. Lord, give me words to say to ease his mind."

At that moment the servant remembered. Jesus of Nazareth! "Master! Master! Have you heard of Jesus of Nazareth? He's been healing all kinds of diseases. He healed the multitudes in Galilee. Even lepers and those demon-possessed! Just the other day he healed a paralytic man!" It didn't take long to hear an answer, "Take me to him at once!"

While they were fast on their way, another servant came to him. "Master! Master! She has passed. I'm so sorry master." He didn't seem to slow down. He was running even faster now, both servants trying to catch up to his speed.

"Is this the way to Jesus?" He asked hurriedly.

"Yes, master."

"He's our only hope now!" he said.

He slowed down as he saw the multitudes. Everyone was quiet, everyone listening to a voice. The voice of a man. He got there just in time to hear, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?"<sup>1</sup>

"No," the father thought, "I will not mourn her death yet. He is the bridegroom and He can awaken my daughter."

But the servant whispered, "He has not risen anyone from the dead, Master." As if not listening, the ruler made his way closer up to Jesus and knelt down at his feet.

"My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live."<sup>2</sup> Jesus, looking at him with compassion, arose and followed him, and so did His disciples.

But suddenly, Jesus turned around and asked "Who touched My clothes?"<sup>3</sup>

Jairus's heart sank. "Why are we stopping now? We should be running to save my daughter? Who touched him?! There many who surrounding Him."

Even his disciples said, "You see the multitudes thronging You!"

Then Jesus looked a certain woman. Jairus recognized her. She had an issue of blood. She should not be touching anyone! She was unclean! She had been for years! As he thought all this, Jesus said to her "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."<sup>4</sup>

Jairus' heart sank again. Jesus is now surrounded and completely overtaken by all those requiring healing. His daughter is dead. Better that Jesus would heal those alive. At that moment, others came from his house affirming his thoughts "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"<sup>5</sup> With his face down, he started to turn, fighting the tears in his eyes.

Jesus reached for him, stopped him from walking away, and said "Do not be afraid; only believe."<sup>6</sup> And with that, Jesus walked ahead of him as if knowing the way to the house. Only a few followed him from his disciples, Peter, James and John, the brother of James. The servants ran ahead to make way.

The father was full of tears of joy from the assurance that his twelve year old is about to rise. He knew it. He knew that it was only a matter of time that he would hold her in his arms again and they will celebrate with Jesus, the Healer! He smiled as he got to the house. His wife, full of tears, wailing and screaming, looking at him bewildered.

Jesus walked in, the room silenced at his sight, "Why make this commotion and weeping? Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping."<sup>7</sup>

Everyone reacted differently. The father and servants, hurrying to lead Jesus to the room where she lay. The mother and family, weeping even louder. And some people, well, some ridiculed Him.

He asked for the door to be shut. He laid next to her, took her cold, fragile hand, "Talitha, cumi,"<sup>8</sup> which translates to "Little girl, I say to you arise."

Immediately, she arose. Laughter bursts into the room. Jairus was on his knees again,

this time worshipping in gratitude, not just in hope. Jesus reached for him and asked him and all those present not to tell anyone what had happened. But despite of that, the report went out to all the surrounding land.

Lord, how very much like You: to see into our hearts, to have compassion on us, to stop everything to address our struggles, to give us assurance with just one word and to heal our hearts from long-standing pain and suffering. Lord, we praise You that even when we feel that You love us all collectively, You speak words to show Your love to us intimately and individually. Nothing is too hard for You Lord. You heal and awaken our dead souls and bodies with your presence. Lord, You showed up in the midst of darkness and misery, while we were dead in our sin. Even when we ridiculed You, You spoke "Arise!"

May we always know You, trust You, seek You, run to You, knowing full well that You alone can heal, You alone can save, and You alone, Lord, can give us life. Thank You Lord for Your words were recorded for us to learn, for great men of faith like Abraham and Jarius to remind us of Your faithfulness through the ages. And thank You Lord for sustaining our bodies to this day. May we never forget that today is a gift from You. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 9:15

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 9:18

<sup>3</sup> Luke 8:45

<sup>4</sup> Mark 5:34

<sup>5</sup> Mark 5:35

<sup>6</sup> Mark 5:36

<sup>7</sup> Mark 5:39

<sup>8</sup> Mark 5:41



# MISSING HANDS

BY DAVID W. T. BRATTSTON



Should we always take the Bible literally, even when it tells us to chop off our hands?

In Matthew 18:8-9, Christ commands:

*If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.*

How can anyone obey these injunctions literally, especially in the days before anesthetics and antiseptics, when they would result in death, by either blood loss or infection?

Solutions to the stark harshness of a literal application were provided by Origen, an Egyptian who was the foremost Christian Bible scholar and

teacher of the first half of the third century AD. People in the second century indicate that he was correct.

Origen cited Matthew 18:8-9 as a prime example of biblical injunctions that are impossible or unreasonable. He taught that the Holy Spirit placed such difficulties in the Scriptures in order to teach readers and interpreters not to confine themselves to the plain, literal wording, but to examine the passage more closely, to unveil the deeper meaning.

Origen taught that the underlying message the Holy Spirit intended readers to draw from the text was that the parts of the body represent members of a Christian's family or circle of friends:

It is possible to apply these words to our nearest kinsfolk, being considered to be our members of our bodies, because of the close relationship; whether by birth, or from habitual friendship. We must not spare them if they are injuring our soul. Let us cut off from ourselves as a hand or a foot or an eye, a father or mother who wishes

us to do that which is contrary to piety, and a son or daughter who would have us revolt from the church of Christ and the love of Him. Even if the wife of our bosom, or a friend who is kindred in soul, become stumbling-blocks to us, let us not spare them, but let us cut them out from ourselves, and cast them outside of our soul, as not being truly our kindred but enemies of our salvation; for "whosoever hates not his father, and mother," etc. (Luke 14:26). We must hate them as enemies and assailants, that we may be able to win Christ, and be worthy of the Son of God. A lame person, so to speak, is saved when he has lost a foot—say a brother—and alone obtains the inheritance of the kingdom of God; and a maimed person is saved, when his parents are not saved, but they perish, while he is separated from them, and he alone obtains the blessings.

Origen traveled throughout eastern Christendom at the request of local bishops as a theological expert. Although familiar with widespread

Christian practice and with local variations, he never indicated that believers in some geographical areas or sects actually did amputate their hands, feet, or eyes.

A common lack of body parts among Christians in ancient times could not escape notice and comment by even the most casual observer as a common feature among Christians. We possess the accounts by the pagan Pliny the Younger around AD 112, and most of the attack on Christianity half a century later by the pagan philosopher Celsus. Pliny was Roman governor in Turkey, part of whose job was to detect and persecute Christians. His letter to the Emperor (*Epistle 10.96*) described Christian faith and practices in some detail, but never mentioned self-mutilation. In his comprehensive denunciation of Christian behavior, Celsus would have jumped at the chance to ridicule voluntary destruction of body organs, or suicide by exsanguination or infection.

Justin Martyr wrote defenses of Christian beliefs and practices in the middle of the second century AD. Among other topics, he dealt with the pagan wish that Christians commit suicide rather than continue to bother the world by their presence and preaching (*2 Apology 4*). If believers of this period did indeed chop off their extremities, Justin would not have failed to mention that Christians did in fact court death, fulfilling the pagan hope.

Although we have thousands of Christian denominations, ministries, sects, cults, divisions, and church parties in our own day, not one advocates self-mutilation in obedience to Matthew 18:8. Either all historic and contemporary Christianity has been heretical, or Jesus intended that not all His sayings be applied literally.

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### H.G. Bishop Youssef's Statement on the Supreme Court Ruling on Same-Sex Marriage

The Supreme Court decision on Friday, June 26, 2015, sanctioning same-sex marriages in all fifty states is the result of years of desensitization, which has sadly now culminated in the poorest spiritual and social aberrance in the history of the American judicial system. The moral conscience of our society has gone awry.

Advocates for same-sex marriages parade their high regard for the concept of marriage, but neglect to acknowledge that in most religions, marriage is not merely a political right, but a spiritual union between one man and one woman consecrated by God. God is the Author of marital law.

It is perplexing that many leaders of various religious institutions have kept their peace regarding this matter. People have chosen to remain silent, not because they applaud this decision, but lest they are perceived to be intolerant is a risk many do not wish to take. Thus, conservative Christians are commonly attacked or ostracized for taking a stand against same-sex marriages or other deviances.

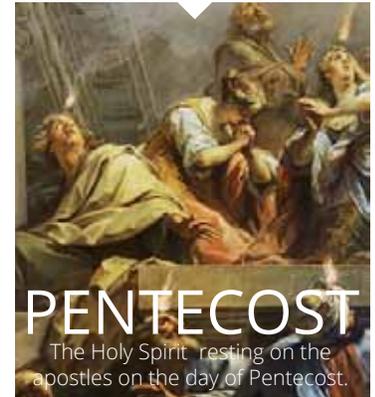
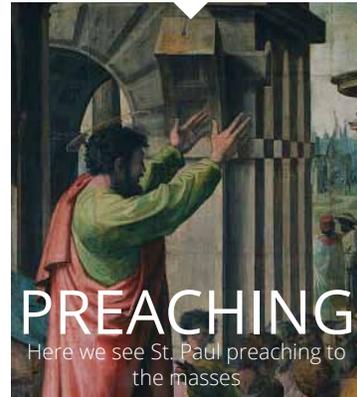
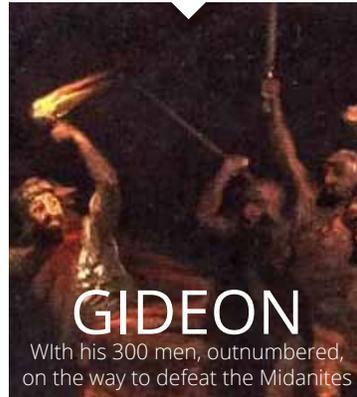
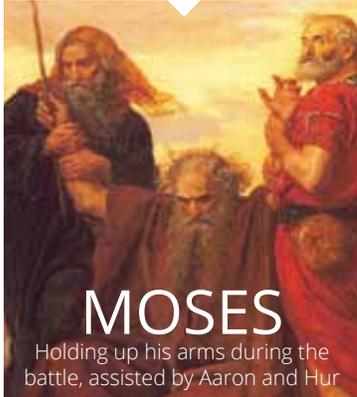
After this infamous ruling of the Supreme Court, we are praying for our country that the Lord may enlighten the eyes and hearts of our leaders to not be in opposition to God's will, but rather to return and follow the teachings of the Holy Scripture so that God may bless our country with prosperity and peace.

All Christians ought to dedicate a special fast and offer solemn prayers and supplications for all people of our nation so that God may lead all of us to repentance and the sincere desire to do what is good and pleasing in His eyes.

# THANK YOU

BY THEOPESTE  
KERELOS

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”<sup>1</sup>



**B**efore we get to the New Testament though, let's see how God looked after His people, the Israelites, in the Old Testament. There was the episode of their passage through the Red Sea, then the manna and quails, and the water from a rock. All these events took place while Moses was their leader, but after Moses' death, God certainly did not abandon His people. He employed Joshua as their guide to the Promised Land and, even when they turned aside and followed foreign gods, He sent them judges to warn them and aid them in conquering their enemies. One of those judges was Gideon, who was the least in his father's house and whose clan was the weakest in Manasseh. Regardless, God enabled him to defeat the Midianites with only three hundred men, as is told in Judges 6-7.

Despite God's care for his people, and His sending of judges to govern them, the Israelites requested a king, and God heeded their plea by appointing Saul, then David and his descendants to the throne, even though many of whom led the people astray. Nevertheless, God never gave up on His people, as prayed in the liturgy of St. Basil, "You have not abandoned us to the end, but have always visited us through Your holy prophets." Not only did God provide prophets, but also He paved the way for those prophets and ensured the success of their missions.

A profound and celebrated example of God paving the way for His people is the incident of Daniel's rescue from the

lions' den. Countless other occurrences attest to God's compassion and care for His people in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, it comes as no surprise that God's love and benevolence toward His people did not change one bit. While He was on earth as the incarnate God, He sent out His disciples, telling them to not take any material belongings. At the same time He gave them the power to heal sicknesses and cast out demons.<sup>2</sup> He also reassured His messengers that, although they would be persecuted, they would be given divine inspiration as to how they should answer their oppressors.<sup>3</sup>

Even when our Lord Christ was suffering on the cross, He demonstrated His care. Obvious evidence for this is His acceptance of the thief on His right.<sup>4</sup> Another somewhat subtle display of our Lord's kindheartedness is His care for His mother, St. Mary. Amidst His agony on the cross, He made sure that His mother, St. Mary, would be sheltered by St. John.<sup>5</sup>

After Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven, He fulfilled the words which had been promised to His disciples, saying, "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."<sup>6</sup>

He poured out the Holy Spirit on

those gathered to give them the power to preach. This enabled the disciples who were hiding in the upper room after the crucifixion to receive the strength to go out and spread the glad tidings of salvation to the whole world. Had it not been for the gift of the Holy Spirit, then in the words of the Psalmist, "Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world,"<sup>7</sup> would not have come to pass. Likewise, if God had not bestowed on us the gift of the Holy Spirit, St. Basil the Great would not have boldly proclaimed, "Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, our liberty to call God our Father, our being made partakers of the grace of Christ, our being called children of light, our sharing in eternal glory, and, in a word, our being brought into a state of all fullness of blessing, both in this world and in the world to come..."

Therefore, considering God's continuously watchful eyes, and His extended hand of mercy, it is indeed fitting that we start every prayer with the words, "We thank you." How else could we respond to all this bounty?

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 107:1

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 10:1,9

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 10:17-20

<sup>4</sup> Luke 23:42-43

<sup>5</sup> John 19:26-27

<sup>6</sup> John 14:16-18

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 19:4

# God, Church, or People: Discerning a Loving Hand

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, [...] and avoid them.”<sup>1</sup>

BY **MARIAM GUIRGIS**



There is a negative connotation associated with “church-goers” or “religious” people. It is an understanding that they are Sunday-only good people, behaving well and kindly on the day of the Lord, but quite differently at other times. Once the service is over, or as you socialize with them outside the church, you see a side that is inconsistent with or even a direct opposite to what you’ve seen before. They “(have) a form of godliness but (deny) its power.”<sup>2</sup>

That, however, is life. People are not necessarily consistent. Their actions are not always in accordance with what they believe. They fail us, and we fail them too. Wisdom mandates we realize this fact: no matter where we go in the world, no matter what cultures we are in, what church we attend, or religion we follow, we will not live up to the expectations of each other. Fully trusting in the love of

people thus requires wisdom and prudence.

God, on the other hand, is the Divine. He is perfect in everything—perfect in His wisdom, perfect in His knowledge, perfect and sincere, in His love. When you experience Him you will come to the deep and true realization that there is no one like Him, and that you can fully trust in His loving hand for He is *The Good Shepherd*.

In terms of deciding who to trust and how much, God and people are probably the most clear cases. There is a middle group, the church, which encompasses priests, servants, board members and anyone who has a role in and is a representative of the church. This is the group that requires more discernment, for it has some characteristics of each of the first two groups: humanity and spirituality. That is where we can get mixed up, and that is where the danger lies.

A few years ago, I encountered on Facebook a person who was fighting the Coptic Orthodox Church online. I, and others who loved the church, entered into debates with him, trying to explain the misconceptions he had about many church dogmas: the intercessions of the saints, the sacrament of priesthood, the church rituals...etc. I eventually found out that he was actually a Coptic Orthodox person who served in the church for a long time and had left it. He, unfortunately, had some bad experiences in the church that turned him into an opponent and a dissenter to its beliefs. Someone, or some people, who had authority in the church had caused him to stumble and he was hurting.

It is important to distinguish between the church beliefs and dogmas and between the behavior of those who serve or have authority in it. The truths are in what the church believes, not in what its servants do. As laymen and laywomen we need to make this clear cut between the two, otherwise we will slip and deviate from the Lord altogether. Likewise, if you are a servant in the church, I beg you to be careful with your dealings of others and to live a life of integrity. Be diligent in serving for the right reason—that is, God—not for self-edification. Be careful of what you portray or do as a representative of the church. For if your service goes wrong, you may be a reason for someone to stumble, and you may create an adversary to the church.

It is my prayer that our eyes are opened to see the great privilege we have when God calls us to serve Him. It is my prayer that when we do, we bring forth fruits in our church rather than driving people away. It is my prayer that, when we serve, we are not reasons for offenses. The Lord had warned us, “Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”<sup>3</sup> He placed a judgement on “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in [Him] to sin. [It] would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Romans 16:17

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 3:5

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 18:7

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 18:6

أسيبك وأروح لفين لما انت اللى شكّلت حياتى  
أسيبك وأروح لفين وفيك إنقضى شبابى  
أسيبك وأروح لفين وانت كنت الملجأ فى ضيقاتى  
أسيبك وأروح لفين لما فى أبوابك كانت نجاتى

I leave you and go where, when you are the one that shaped my life  
I leave you and go where, when in you elapsed my youth  
I leave you and go where, when you were my refuge in my distresses  
I leave you and go where, when through your doors comes rescue

أسيبك وأروح لفين لما ألحانك صارت نغماتى  
لما دفك آلة أفراحي وشموعك هى رومانسياتى  
أسيبك وأروح لفين لما بخورك كان أعطارى  
وأيقوناتك هى شركاتى لما سهراتك هى ليلاتى

I leave you and go where, when your hymns became my songs  
When your cymbal is the instrument of my happiness and your  
candles are my romance  
I leave you and go where, when your incense is my perfume  
Your icons are my companions when you are the vigil of my nightlife

أسيبك وأروح لفين لما اجتماعات صلاتك كانت ارتفاعى  
وعظاتك ارشادى وإيمانياتك هى حياتى  
أسيبك وأروح لفين لما السما بتتجسد فيك  
لما الإفاخارستيا سر أعمق ما فيك

I leave you and go where, when meeting prayers are my uplift  
Your preaching is my guidance and my believing is my life  
I leave you and go where, when the sky is manifested in you  
When the Eucharist is the deepest you

أسيبك وأروح لفين وانت فكرى العمر كله  
لما انت الحب كله، لما انت فى الحضن كله  
أسيبك وأروح لفين وانت فيك الأصل كله

I leave you and go where, when you are my thought all my life  
When you are ALL the love, when your hug is the warmest embrace  
I leave you and go where, when in you is the roots of all

أسيبك وأروح لفين لما فلك نوح انت  
لما الحق انت والنور برضه انت  
أسيبك وأروح لفين وأنا ما عرفتش غيرك  
ده أنا ما اتثبتش غير فى تعاليمك

I leave you and go where, when you are Noah's arch  
When the truth is you and the light is also you  
I leave you and go where, when I know no ONE but you  
I am strong because of your teachings

انت اللى فى القلب  
انت اللى فى العقل  
انت الروح  
فى العالم مطرح ما أروح

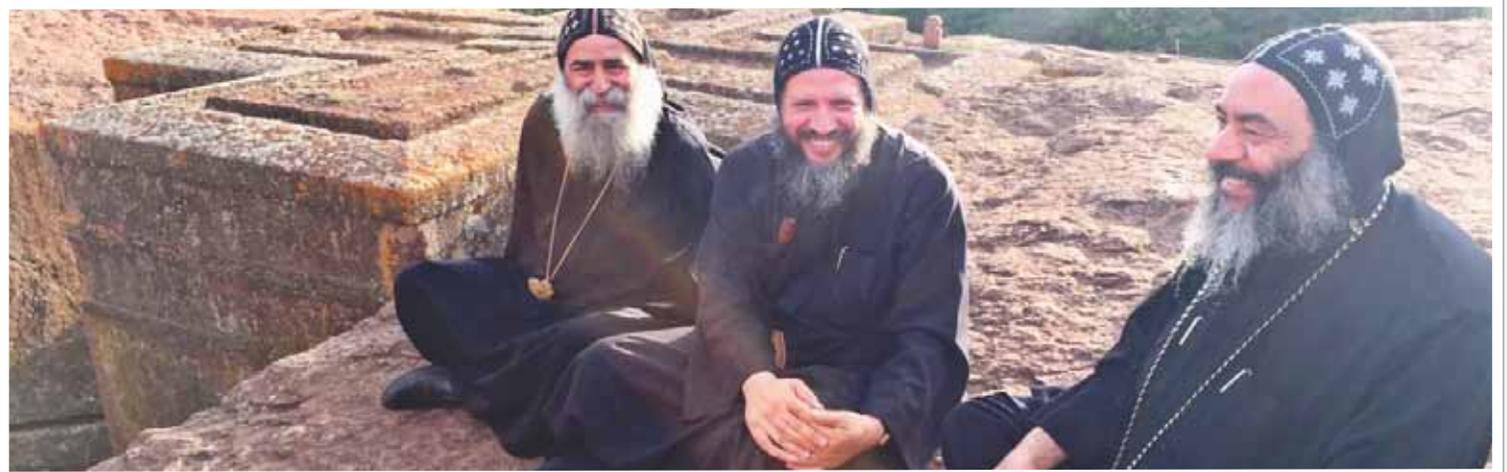
You are the ONE in my heart  
You are the ONE in my mind  
You are THE spirit  
You are in the world wherever I go

يا كنيستى يا قبطية يا أرثوذكسية  
حوطى على كل عيالك  
واللى وعدك بالنصرة  
يحطم كل أعدائك

My church the Coptic Orthodox church  
Hover over all your children  
Confident the one who promised you triumph  
Will destroy all your enemies

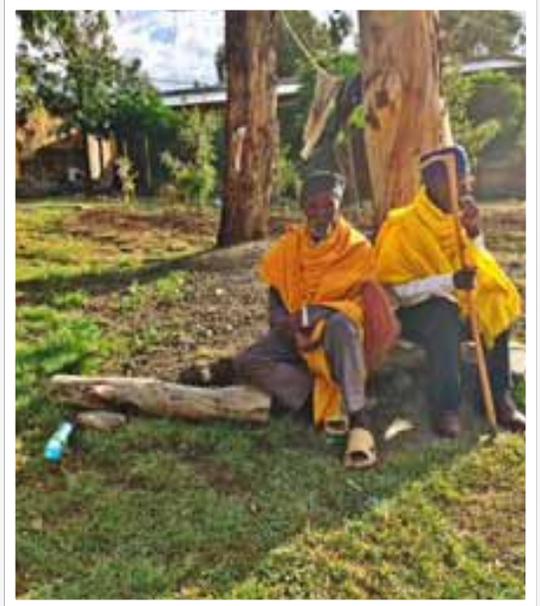
# Diocese Photos

Ethiopia Mission Experience Ethiopia | May-June 2015



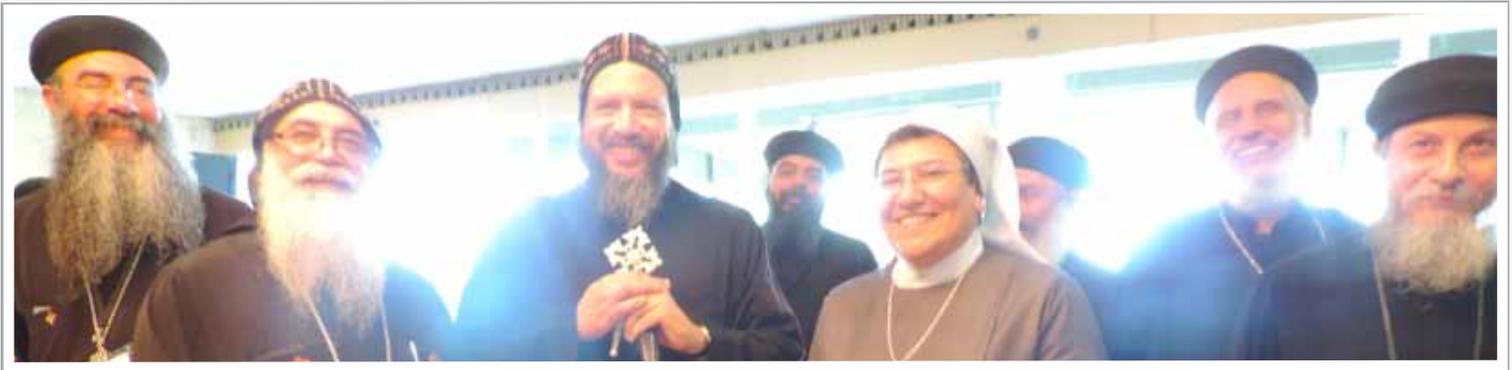
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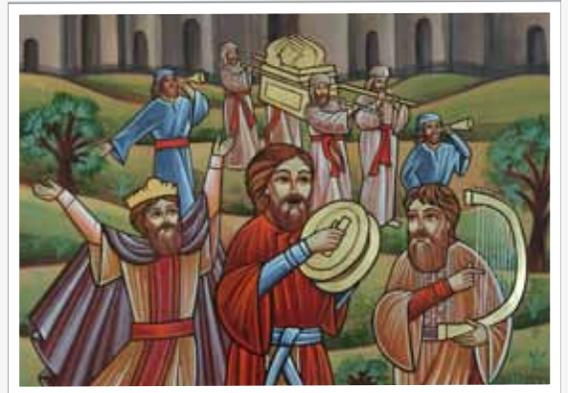
Tasony Sarah's Consecrated Sister Ordination Titusville, FL | July 28, 2015



Fr. Matthias Shehad Priest Ordination Houston, TX | June 28, 2015



Asaph Hymns Institute Annual Convention Titusville, FL | July 2015



# Diocese Photos

## Diocesan Priests Annual Family Retreat Titusville, FL | July 2015



## Archangel Raphael Ministry (ARM) Titusville, FL | July 2015 5th Annual Convention for Individuals with Special Needs



# PILLARS OF OUR TIME

## Ordinary People Serving in Extraordinary Ways

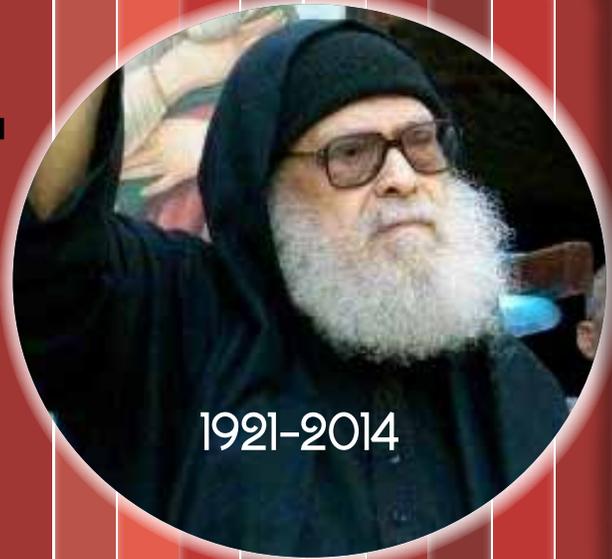
# MAKING AN IMPACT

### Abba Mikhail

The Lion of Upper Egypt

WRITTEN BY **SALAMA BOTROS**

Translated by **VERA SALAMA**



In this article, our hearts, minds, and senses are refreshed by the beautiful fragrance of one of the contemporary saints found in the Coptic Orthodox Church. On the 23rd of November, 2014, on the commemoration day of St. Mina, the saint reposed in Christ the age of 93. This flower is the thrice blessed Abba Mikhail of Assiut, whose life has been a blessing to the people of Assiut as well as to many Copts throughout the world.

Abba Mikhail spent 75 years as a monk at St. Macarius Monastery in Wadi El-Natrun, where he took on monastic orders at age 18. Seven years later on August 25th, 1946, he was ordained Metropolitan of Assiut by H.H. Pope Yousab II, the 115th Pope of the See of St. Mark, and remained in that role for 68 years. He was also chosen that same year to be the abbot of St. Macarius Monastery.

His service in Assiut consisted of building 34 churches and orphanages as well as restoring the ancient monastery of St. Mary in Mount Dronka. He made a point to visit this monastery every Wednesday as this had been the day of his ordination as monk.

He was loved and revered by the people of Assiut and was known for being extremely organized and punctual. They also considered him a spiritual giant due to his harsh ascetic lifestyle, his deeply spiritual sermons and his sound ecclesiastical teaching. He used to sleep on a small bed made of palm fronds and only a bed sheet as a cover. He was also known to have sat with great humility in the metropolitan's seat, with his back hunched feeling the great weight of his responsibilities. "God is peace" was his customary telephone greeting to the caller.

Very serious, focused, cautious, and conscientious about time, Abba Mikhail shepherded his flock with diligence and faithfulness. He cared deeply for the children, the youth, the servants, and those with special

needs such as the blind. Once, upon a request to walk in the funeral procession of one of Assiut's pashas (as was customary in those days), he kindly but firmly responded saying "I have not come to usher the dead to their graves but the living to the kingdom of heaven."

Along with other bishops, he was chosen to manage the church's affairs during the reign of H.H. Pope Yousab II. He was also one of the emissaries to the Vatican sent by H.H. Pope Kyrollos VI to return St. Mark's relics to Egypt in 1968. He accompanied H.H. Pope Shenouda III in returning the relics of St. Athanasius the Apostolic from the Vatican in 1973.

He was blessed with three heavenly Marian apparitions that were most beautiful for the Coptic faithful of Assiut to behold: The first took place at St. Mark's Cathedral, the old cathedral, which began from the Feast of the Transfiguration in 2000 and continued until 2001. The second was at St. Mary's Monastery in August 2001. The third was at Archangel Michael's Cathedral during the Great Fast on March 29, 2006.

During the apparitions in 2000, His Grace, despite his 75 years of age, used to go to the church at midnight, ascend to the rooftop from a back door, and would pray the Psalms with prostrations (metanias). Throughout all the apparitions, His Grace would remain silent and prayerful. He told an American writer in 2003 who had witnessed the apparitions, "You have witnessed like the three wise men to whom God had revealed the Star of the East. God has used you as He used them. Your testimony is more valuable than ours. We believe that we see with others' eyes and we allow those things that are visible to witness for themselves."

Our dear Abba Mikhail, may you rest in the bosom of the angels, martyrs, and saints who have welcomed you with joy. Pray on our behalf so that we may complete our journey in peace and the fear of God. Axios, Axios, Axios.

# QUESTION & ANSWER

New SUMMER 2015 Edition

## GENERAL QUESTION

And its Answer

**Q:** How do you know what God's will is for you? I prayed for God to show me a sign to lead me in the right path but I did not get a straightforward answer. Are we supposed to get a straightforward answer or what? Also, sometimes I tend to forget or doubt that God does everything for a reason that will benefit us. Maybe because sometimes I do not understand His reasoning, I just wanted to know what to do when I start doubting.

**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.suscpts.org/resources/questions-answers/>

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

New SUMMER 2015 Edition

## BIBLE QUESTION

And its Answer

FROM ST. PAUL'S EPISTLES TO THE PHILIPPIANS, CHAPTER 4

**Q:** What is the irony of St Paul saying, "Rejoice in the Lord. Again I will say rejoice."?

**A:** St. Paul wrote this epistle when he was in prison with chains around him

# Diocese Photos

Extreme Family Make-over (EFM) w/ Bishop Paul

Titusville, FL  
June 2015



# Events & Activities

## DIOCESE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

### Board of Education

#### Lead Program

A program for learning Christian leadership principles.

#### Theological Seminary Program - Nashville

An Arabic theological program located in Nashville.

#### Theological Seminary Boarding Program - Abbey

A 2-year live-in program located at St. Mary and St. Moses Abbey.

#### Asaph Hymns Institute | [www.sushymns.org/](http://www.sushymns.org/)

(AHI) is the first ever online hymnological seminary.

#### Family Ministry Program (FMP)

Spring Registration deadline: August 10, 2015

#### Theological Seminary Program

Registration deadline: March 15, 2016.

## DIOCESE PROGRAMS

#### H.O.P.E. Social Services [hope.suscopts.org](http://hope.suscopts.org)

A social services program designed to help those in need.

#### St. Mark Festival Program

This is a spiritual competition among the Coptic Churches doing the same activity world-wide.

#### Archangel Raphael Ministry (ARM) | [copticangel.org](http://copticangel.org)

A program designed specifically for individuals with special needs.

#### St. Verena Resource Ministry (SVRM)

(SVRM) Professionals networking together to make a difference and provide resources to our Coptic community. To make a request or to volunteer as a consultant. [www.suscopts.org/svrm/](http://www.suscopts.org/svrm/)

#### St. Clement Christian Academy

This is a learning community dedicated to meeting the needs of each learner within its walls.

## DIOCESE EVENTS

#### Pre-Marital Retreat

FL: Jan 22-24, 2016; TX: Nov 13-15, 2015; TN: TBA; GA: TBA

#### Diocese Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Oct 19-31, 2015

#### WTL Diocese High School Conventions

Boys: Dec 21-24, 2015 | Girls: Dec 26-29, 2015

#### 2016 Crossroads Graduate Convention

Jan 15-18, 2016

#### Grand Tour of the Holy Land and Egypt

May 2-21, 2016

**FOR MORE - See [suscopts.org](http://suscopts.org)**

*\* Dates are subject to change. Please check [www.suscopts.org](http://www.suscopts.org)*



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