

MIGHTY MAGAZINE MARROWS

Life. God. Truth. For Coptic Youth

Spring 2011 Volume 10 No.2

SEEDS OF CHANGE ...

Repentance, Truth, Grace, Change ...

"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 Youth

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The blessed spring season seems to always have a sense of freshness and newness. Over the past few months, the world has witnessed dramatic changes all over the world, from natural disasters such as in Japan, to political revolutions, especially in the Middle East, and closer to the heart, our own blessed land of Egypt. This country will forever be in the history books in every generation because of its great contributions to civilization, medicine, chemistry, engineering, art, and of course Christianity. We remain in prayer and hope that these changes will be for the good of all the land, its people, its future, and its leadership, so that all may enjoy democracy, human dignity, justice, equality, and progress.

This edition of the Mighty Arrows Magazine will hopefully empower the readers to seek positive alternative solutions through truth, grace, repentance, and change. Each person needs to look within and discover the much needed changes in one's life. Each one has a personal responsibility to be honest with one's self and acknowledge what does not work and has not worked in the past. These are the stumbling blocks that hold one back from advancing. Progress requires assessment and awareness of what works and what does not. By conscientious self-examination, one can develop a habit of ridding yourself of the internal chaos inhibiting your spiritual growth and refill your soul with goodness and virtues.

I wish that each of you takes the time to slow down and enjoy the beauty of spring and contemplate on the new life which Christ gave us in Him through the heavy price which He lovingly and willingly paid. During the Holy fifty days following the glorious Feast of the Holy Resurrection, experience Christ's triumph over evil and sin which led humanity captive for thousands of years. Through the church's adoring hymns and processions led by the raised cross robed in a glistening white sash and the banners of conquest closely following behind, lift up your hearts to God and thank Him for the new day. Christ is risen and is alive in your life. Let everyone meet Him in you.

God bless you,

Bishop Youssef

BISHOP OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

Glory be to the Holy Trinity, forever, Amen.

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FROM A

NUN'S JOURNAL

"A hermit said, 'Unless the inner self lives soberly, the outer self is beyond control.' (Desert Fathers page 127 {45})

We control our selves to control our ego and feed our spirit. This is the purpose behind fasting, it is giving up my will, my desire, my designs so that Yours are done. If this is the case, I would need to fast all year round; all year round give up my will so that Yours is done! Lord, I offer the meager material and receive from you the spiritual. What an exchange! Rather unfair, but You are willing to appear losing in order to gain a soul. How awesome You are my Lord! What is food anyway, that I would consider myself suffering loss? Take it a step further, what is my will anyway, that I would consider

myself suffering loss (if I follow my will, I make a mess of things, but if Your will is done than things are guaranteed)? Take it another step further, what is my ego anyway, that I would consider myself suffering loss? Ah, the ego! The mortal enemy! My opinion, my pride, my right, my dignity, my comfort zone, my space, my feelings, my preferences, my reputation... all these are dynamic and transitory... they adjust with time and space, so why not be voluntarily flexible in order to relieve others? So what if my opinion is not heard, so what if I am shot down, so what if I am wronged, so what if I am humiliated, so what if I'm stepped on, so what if I am hurt, so what if I am made uneasy, so what if I'm defamed! All these are outside myself. Sooner or later, all this happens to all of us anyway, how precious it is if I accept them willingly to save a soul, to lift up someone else who is weighed down or stuck in these transitory conditions. What a heavenly reward and grace – I will be helping another and building myself spiritually (and from all aspects – mentally, psychologically, socially, etc.). I'm not giving up anything of value anyway, only my ego!

Oh! how amazing are your mysteries, O our God, who can believe them!

My heart is transported at the remembrance of them and the limbs of my body come apart at their sweetness. I forgot what is mine by meditating on these things which I cannot approach, and in my desire I compel the Giver. I even forgot what is His, yet it is He whom I strive to receive. I seize Him but He is not held. I catch Him but He is not captured. When I am full, I am empty. And when I hold Him, He isn't there. Yet when I dwell in Him, He dwells in me.

When He is hidden from me, I am hidden in Him. And when I wish to see Him, I see that He is within, but from whence He comes I know not. Wherever I lead Him, He resists me: when clothed, He will not remain and when

stripped, He does not depart, but when left alone, He does not stay. When He goes with me to a place, He does not move from the place. But when I catch Him, He is full of sweetness. Then when I let Him go, He conceals Himself. When I obey Him, He speaks with me, but when I touch Him, He is not moved. When I walk with Him, as extended as He is outside of me, He dwells in me. When I inhale Him, He comes from within. And when I see Him within all, He assumes and covers all. When I see Him who carries all, I carry Him and go off.

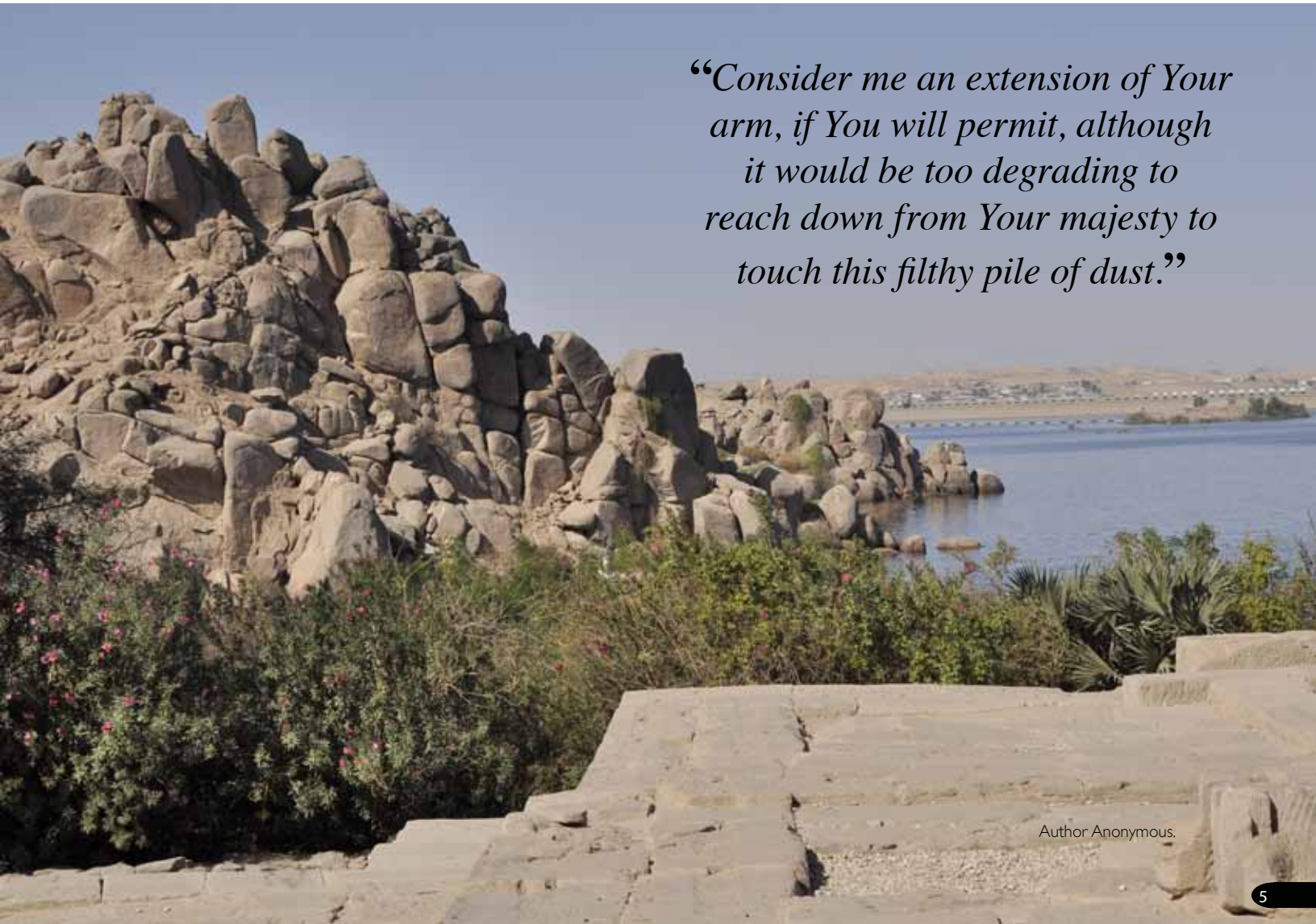
Temptation on the Mount and the Vows of Monasticism

ST. ARSENIUS SAID, “LORD HELP ME MAKE A GOOD BEGINNING.” Though I’ve walked a long way, lived many years, yet I haven’t even begun to walk, Lord. I’m so far and the way is so long. Where am I from St. Mary or St. Antony or my fathers? Where am I from living a life that pleases You? What have I possibly done in my life that could stand before You? Looking back, nothing stands before even me, how then will I please You? How and when will my life change? When will I begin to please You? When will You hold my hand and use me? When will I release myself into Your hands to use me? When will I start running towards You, like a child darting for its fa-

ther’s knees? Love, I know that I am a mere weak human, one of a zillion, and You could use any one of them. Will I ask why You would use me specifically or do I beg You to use me? Do I thank You or do I entreat You? You know that the ecstasy in my life is feeling You hold me, feeling you use me to fulfill Your will. Consider me an extension of Your arm, if You will permit, although it would be too degrading to reach down from Your majesty to touch this filthy pile of dust. But what can I say, You permitted Yourself to be a pile of dust, but God forbid, without sin, so please purify me so that You would allow to extend to

me and through me to others. You were without sin, sins had no lodging in You, they simply could not stick. You were human, but You were a feasible perfect human, to make perfection feasible to us. The Devil threw thoughts at You, but they simply bounced back onto him, desires, anger, hatred, pride, nothing, it all boomeranged back to him. Frustrated, he declared war on You out in the open (You were calm and humble, unaffected by all his darts, so what could he do? Nothing. That’s how helpless he truly is against us and against true humility). Frustrated, he warred likewise against St. Antony. He opened war against You with

the three temptations. The three temptations go parallel with the three vows of monasticism: the bread (Lk 4:3) [lust of the flesh (1 Jn 2:16)] is vanquished by celibacy; being enticed by all the kingdoms (Lk 4:6) [lust of the eyes (1 Jn 2:16)] is overcome by the vow of poverty (it is even a lack of desire for these materials); and the angels bearing you up on their arms (Lk 4:10-11) [pride of life (1 Jn 2:16)] is deflated by humility. You overcame, to teach us how to view matters and overcome their principles and roots. Please help me uproot all evil from within me so that I could be, someday, as humble and perfect as You demand of me.



“Consider me an extension of Your arm, if You will permit, although it would be too degrading to reach down from Your majesty to touch this filthy pile of dust.”



Dialogue with a Young Man: **IT'S HARD TO LIVE A PURE LIFE**

A young man who appreciated my approach to problems (because I generally confront them with the natural laws that are universal and easy to understand) came to me complaining about his inability to live a pure life. The dialogue went as follows:

Youth: In Church, servants talk about the life of purity, but I feel that this is impossible in a society that encourages sin.

Servant: Yes, you're right. Movies, soap operas, DVDs, music, and advertising agencies gain trillions of dollars annually by producing materials with attractive messages that encourage various lusts and propel us into a sinful life. Those messages are alluringly presented as means to happiness and enjoyment while in fact they eventually lead to misery and dangerous consequences to individuals and the society in general.

Youth: So, youth need to keep in mind that they are being used by advertising agencies as a mean to gain money? This is awful! What can I do to resist all these temptations?

Servant: First, we need to acknowledge that sexual attraction exists. Next, we need to understand how it works and how it affects us. Let us examine these natural laws of attraction as ex-

plained through physics. A magnet attracts a nail or any metallic item. The law of physics states that the more the metallic object approaches the magnetic field, the stronger the attractive power of the magnet. Thus, there are stages of attraction. A nail that is distant from the magnetic field is safe, since the magnetic power cannot draw it to itself as powerfully.

Youth: Are you trying to apply this law to sexual attraction because it is a natural law of attraction?

Servant: Yes, just as the magnetic attraction decreases significantly as the distance between the magnet and metallic objects increases, youth need to distance themselves from attraction. Sometimes, a person might underestimate the power of attraction, thinking that he/she can handle the situation, not knowing that at a certain point the power of attraction is irresistible, and the sin is inevitable. This rule applies to sin and to things that attract a person to sin. This is why the Bible teaches us, *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful"* (Ps 1:1).

Youth: Then the invitation is to flee from sin and anything that leads to sin.

Servant: Nature teaches us that there are consequences to every action. When Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, they felt naked for the first time and death invaded their bodies. Similarly, the Bible teaches us, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom 6:23). We need to flee from carnal attraction as we flee from death.

Servant: I have a question: why do we get sick?

Youth: We get sick when our immune system is weak.

Servant: As we have an immune system for our physical body, we also have an immune system for the spirit. We strengthen our physical immune system by eating nutritious foods, and we similarly strengthen our spiritual immune system through a life of repentance, confession, reading the Bible and spiritual books, fasting, prayer, and above all partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of the Lord in communion. Furthermore, as getting enough sleep is important to the body, daily meditation on the Word of God is necessary for spiritual edification.

Youth: In reading the biographies of the saints, I noticed both instructions you mentioned. Firstly, to flee from sin or what

can lead us to sin and secondly to also cling to spiritual practices. Is there anything else that could help us obtain a life of purity?

Servant: When God sees our faithfulness in rejecting sin, He sends His grace that fills our bodies and souls to give both victory over sin and its attraction. That grace is so powerful that a person feels as if he/she has new pure eyes, sensations, mind, will, and body. The whole person becomes holy, as the Bible says, *"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness"* (Rom 8:9-10). Finally, love the Lord from all your heart. This love will guide your thoughts and deeds. *"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"* (1 Cor 6:19).

Remember that when you feel as if you cannot offer your whole heart to the Lord, simply ask Him to assist you to surrender yourself to Him. This is His desire for you as well, so in time He will provide for you the means by which you can love Him wholeheartedly.

An Article by Victor Beshir

TIMES OF REDEMPTION

Times of tribulation, times of change, and times of isolation and challenge all bring about TIMES OF REDEMPTION. As children, times of hardships send us running back to our parents' arms for help and answers. Yet as adults, we are still children of God who need to realize that God is here with us 24/7. Our sinful origin and weak nature demands that we all make mistakes and sin, but it is what we do about these sins that drives us away from the Word of God. However, why should we wait for these hardships to occur in order for us to get closer to God or cleanse our spirits with repentance? Why must we hide behind excuses and shame? Do we realize who "Our Father" is? Now that we have established that we have a pattern of weakness and sinfulness, how then do we aim to better ourselves and free our spirit of these weaknesses? Three things come immediately to mind: guidance, prayer, and patience.

Not only is GOD so awesome that "He gave [us] His only begotten Son" (Jn 3:16) on the Mighty Cross to erase our disgraceful sins, but He also gave us so many saints, popes, priests, and servants, as aides and real-life examples. They are of all different ages, men and women, rich and poor. By their teachings and blessings, we experience how God's hands have directly influenced and blessed their lives and kept that burning desire in their hearts to become "whiter than snow" (Ps 51:7). The same could be said about those whose internal flame has already begun winding down or completely burnt out by getting lost in the world's sins and corruption. We have the same strength, power, and faith through Christ. God has never left us, but has simultaneously given us the ability to make choices. I can choose to steal but I will not because God



St. Bishoy's cell. He tied his hair to the rope above in order to keep from falling asleep so he could pray all night.

and my parents have taught me that this act is not Christ-like. Sin finds us at every corner, with every turn, as a thought and even in our sleep, and it is always so compulsively decorated with bells and whistles. So, you may think that we are playing a losing game but this is no game! The many saintly examples in the Bible and in our church history all prove that through continuous reading of the Bible, faith, and proper guidance, living within GOD is very much a reality. We cannot afford to be lazy or take God for granted.

Ultimately, we have the power of Prayer! Yes prayer, a direct phone line to God's ears and heart. If a patient would be newly diagnosed with a bad disease, wouldn't that person want

to get rid of it somehow? After consulting with many doctors, family, and friends, this patient is now back to square one after finally realizing that what he or she was taught to do first, which was to seek guidance and gather information has not yielded much fruit. Naturally, depression sets in and that patient's human nature begins to think that God doesn't exist or that He doesn't love him or her anymore, that no one cares, and life is not fair. This is very wrong and very dangerous. However, the reality is quite the opposite because, for those who live within God, truly nothing is impossible. God has perhaps placed this seemingly gigantic hurdle of illness or physical accident in your path to direct your attention back to Him and to seek Him in Prayer and

Faith. Tribulations are then like alarm clocks annoyingly ringing to awaken us from our lost ways! Prayer keeps us connected with God and keeps us on the right path of repentance and salvation.

Haven't you ever heard that 'patience is a virtue'? Just because I have wanted to be successful and someday be a rich, well-respected individual doesn't simply mean "ask and you shall receive" (Jn 16:24) It means that after hard work, education, doing the right things, and giving respect to others, only then shall I also IN TIME and by God's grace be granted the same. All this takes patience — patience in GOD and trusting in His timeline and not my "right now" attitude. There are reasons why we don't give candy and soda to our children, just as there are reasons for God to parent us in the ways that He deems best for us. We are capable of many things but we are not capable of knowing what God has planned for us.

Finally, we all need a moment of solitude and silence! Taking a personal time-out is really essential to living a Godly life, in order to search within our spirits and see how God is working within. No matter who we are (we are ALL humans created from the same sin), we are NOT perfect and our sin requires repentance in order to enter into Heaven's gate. Therefore, setting time aside from our already busy schedule to reevaluate our mind, heart, and daily conducts will surely prove much more rewarding than living blind to all the possible connections we could be having with God's bounty in our lives. Through God we can effect positive changes in our lives. Through repentance we can maintain our relationship

Resistance to Change

“God is the same
today,
yesterday,
tomorrow,
and always.

He is perfect in every
way and has no need
to change. It is us
who need to change
as we strive to come
near to Him.”

CHANGE comes like a tide washing out the old and bringing in the new. The old becomes mingled with the new and although some of the old remains, it is never really quite the same ever again. Someone may think he stands firm in the sand, however, the tide quickly rolls in and out and distorts his position without him moving a muscle, and so he finds himself on a different ground as though he had walked for miles. Change is all around us. We are created with an amazing capability to adapt and change. Sometimes, people refuse to change. Four basic reasons why people are resistant to change are **fear, comfort, pride, and ignorance**. Change demands giving up something. In order to change, one must have **trust, courage, humility, and patience**.

WHY PEOPLE ARE RESISTANT TO CHANGE

FEAR stifles growth so that disparity becomes a gap between fear and growth. When we are fearful, we stand still, unable to move, because fear inhibits any movement, even to save ourselves. Anxiety is related to fear and prevents the prospects of achievement. More and more we hear of people suffering from panic attacks – abnormal exaggerated physiological reactions to no apparent cause. Such individuals may stop attending school, work, or avoid any form of socialization, public interaction, amusement, or entertainment.

COMFORT is a subconscious decision to settle, often causing procrastination and putting off any sort of potential advancement. This individual becomes complacent and chooses to live in a bubble with the status quo, regardless of the surrounding conditions. This resistance pacifies its victim, whose comfort leads

to indifference and carelessness.

PRIDE is the foundation of a stubborn heart. These unfortunate souls refuse to admit they need to change at all. Pride is at the heart of petty disputes, divisions, collapsed marriages, and frivolous law suits.

IGNORANCE spurs violence, injustice, and wars. Ignorance holds its owner hostage, regressing rather than progressing. It is fueled by a lack of understanding and trust which are traps into a narrow-minded perspective so that this individual can only think and function within the parameters of the usual ways.



WHAT PEOPLE NEED DO TO CHANGE

HUMILITY wins the heart of God, like the woman from Sidon who humbly begged Christ for a special intention and accepted to be likened to the dogs, content to have the crumbs that fell off their master's table (Mt 21-28). Humility empowers us and allows us to forgive and move on.

COURAGE is the fruit of conviction, akin to Daniel and his three good friends who boldly chose God above all comfort and gain and withstood fire and a den of lions for their faith. Not only were their lives spared, but their oppressors changed their minds about them as well, repented of their evils, and submitted to God. The good Samaritan was not only generous but also courageous to do what is right and not leave a stranger in need despite their differences (Lk 10:25-37).

TRUST is a mirror of faith. When you trust in God more

than in yourself, worry will not be your companion. Having toiled all night to catch some fish but to no avail, Christ beckoned His disciples to cast in their nets yet once more. They gathered far in excess than their greatest expectations because they trusted Him (Lk 5:1-11). Indeed, these simple fishermen became fishers of men, and the world daily witnesses their contributions to Christianity throughout history.

PATIENCE is the key to your soul. It allows you to initiate positive change and anticipate its fruit in due season, whether in yourself or in others. It operates under the auspices of peacemakers and those who strive to make things better, beginning with themselves, and recognizing the potential in others. "By your patience possess your souls" (Lk 21:19).

God is the same today, yesterday, tomorrow, and always.

He is perfect in every way and has no need to change. It is us who need to change as we strive to come near to Him. Some people negatively accuse the Church of being reluctant to change. When it comes to the Holy Scriptures, principles, doctrine, and tradition, the Church is a confident stalwart pillar entrusted to us to protect and secure the faith and to deliver it unblemished to each generation. It is important to have a stable and grounded understanding of our belief system and religious direction. The holy sacrament of Confession is the sacrament of good change. This is the real 'metanoia.' This is the change that genuinely declares that the former ways were leading me astray and away from God and now I need to be put back on track and move forward.

From a spiritual perspective, change must be of the heart, mind, and soul. It is a

process of growth and spiritual maturity. Let us pray for wisdom and learn when to hold on and when to let go. We have the ability to change for the better and to adapt to new situations. Let us not cling to an unconstructive past which pins us down and keeps us stuck. Give the future a chance and be an active participant without ever compromising your faith or principles. Growing up is mandatory, not only in conventional ways, but in the spirit, like the Shulamite woman in the Song of Solomon whose transformation was initiated by the Beloved who inspired her to change and guided her to transform from fear, comfort, pride, and ignorance unto repentance, and furthermore, from repentance to love and grace, heading towards spiritual maturity. It is a new day and the time to throw away the old in the tide of change and renew your spirit in the love and grace of God.

There's something about children that is irresistible. Despite whatever trouble they get themselves into, just the flash of their easy, little smile makes anyone's heart melt. In fact, because of their simplicity and purity, many long to be children again. Many times throughout the Scriptures, the Lord referred to us as His "little ones," (Is 60:22; Mt 18:10,14; Lk 17:2) thus, we are still children in the eyes of God. As a child finds favor in his/her parent's eyes in spite of shortcomings, we also find favor in God's eyes. This favor can be better termed as grace. We chase after innumerable dreams, which often distract us from God's voice and His place in our lives. Some of these dreams are fulfilled while others miserably fail, but no matter how short we fall, God is willing to take us back and restore us unto Himself because of His grace. He looks to us as a mother looks to her child, with mercy, adoration, and compassion even in the worst of circumstances.

His grace, the unmerited favor of God, was displayed on the cross when He took our place willingly to rescue us from our perdition. He took the sharp nails in His palms, the spear in

UNFAILING ✠ GRACE

His side, and the crown of thorns on His head, all being the punishment, we in our sinfulness deserve. He gave up His life, so we may live. Even when we, despite the sacrifices He made for us, continue to injure Him with our sins, He accepts us willingly. With all the pain, misery, and betrayal He suffered before his crucifixion, He still chose to hang on the cross with open arms ready to accept those who will someday confess Him as the Son of God. For example, Demas, the right-hand thief on the cross felt it, accepted it, and confessed his belief in Christ, and because of God's grace he stole the kingdom of heaven. He is willing to extend it to anyone who similarly repents their sins and confesses faith in Him.

Realizing this amazing gift of grace makes us wonder if we are truly worthy to receive it. In truth, even if our life is just one day on earth, we are all sinners and guilty of the original sin. But despite our many shortcomings, God still looks at us with favor. He searches for the weak, runs after the one lost sheep, and stands with open arms to accept

the prodigal son. It is grace that touched the heart of those sinners to return to God. Because of His grace, He accepts them and restores them to Himself. All that is necessary is that His children accept this grace and respond with repentance.

Moreover, God's grace should be the source of strength in our spiritual life—the extra push towards God's embrace and the source of power that helps us keep the commandments. However, St. Paul the apostle warns us saying, "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings: for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited" (Heb 13:9). Regretfully, we often overlook God's grace and seek strength via other worldly gods such as fame, money, power, and pride. As a result, we may continually fall in despair or lose our intimate bond with God. However, do not be frightened if you are weak, nor seek strength anywhere other than God, because His grace is great enough to cover our weaknesses so long as we

struggle against the temptations of this life. In fact, be thankful for your weaknesses, because if strength could come from us, would we ever need this gift from Him? Would we ever seek out strength from Him? Remember God's promise: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

Remember the famous saying, "The will of God will not take you where the Grace of God can not protect you." May God lead us to live lives of repentance, strengthen us in our spiritual journey, and help us accept this invaluable gift.

Glory be to God forever,
Amen.

Resources:

+ Definition of grace: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/grace?view=uk>

+ St Symons the theologian quote: <http://www.balamandmonastery.org.lb/fathers/indexsayings2.htm>

+ The Gateway online bible

An Article by Maria Mansour



STRIVING FOR SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

Reflecting on the the Life of Mother Theodora

“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”
(Mt 5:48)

Striving for perfection is a commandment that Christ gave us: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Here, Christ was focusing on spiritual perfection. Living a holy life strengthens our relationship with Christ and with our neighbours. To attain perfection, we must struggle in our spiritual path through continuous repentance, which will result in a change of mind and heart. This is the type of life that Mother Theodora lived.

Mother Theodora lived in fourth century Alexandria as the only daughter of a noble Christian couple. Her parents, in their desire to see her married, provided her with expensive apparel and accessories. Theodora, however, refused to be wed, as her heart desired the worship of God and the monastic life. She sold all her parents had provided for her, gave the money to the needy, and built a church Westward outside the city of Alexandria, fulfilling the Lord’s commandment: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the

poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Mt 19:21). She went to Pope Athanasius the apostolic who shaved her head and ordained her a nun in one of the convents outside this city. From then on, Theodora devoted herself to the “ascetic life, fought the spiritual fight, and became worthy to see divine visions, to be able to distinguish angels from demons, and to read people’s thoughts.”¹ Pope Athanasius visited her often and instructed her in the Church doctrines. When he was exiled, he sent her many letters rich with precious lessons.

Mother Theodora (her name means “The gift of God”)² is renowned for many great spiritual sayings, many of which are preserved in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (Sayings of the Fathers). Some originated from the grace that was within her, while others were enhanced by discussions with the many desert fathers who visited her.³ Once, she was asked about the conversations one hears: “If one is habitually listening to secular speech, how can one yet live for God alone, as you suggest?” She said, “Just as when you are sitting at table and there are many courses, you take some but without pleasure, so when secular conversations come your way, have your heart turned towards God, and thanks to this disposition, you will hear them without pleasure, and they will not do you any harm.”⁴ She was also asked, “How can a human overcome Satan his enemy?” She answered, “With fasting, prayer, and humility.”⁵

These were her three main

swords for moving forward in her spiritual life. With fasting, prayer, and humility God favours his children, as the Holy Bible says: “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jam 4:6). Mother Theodora was steadfast in her fight until the end of her life. When she finished her life, she departed in peace at the age of one hundred on Baramouda 11.

Citation:

“Lives of Saints :: St Theodora.” CopticChurch.Net - Coptic Orthodox Church Network.Web. 24 Feb. 2011. <http://www.copticchurch.net/synaxarium/8_11.html#1>.

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1 (St. Mark and St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church, 1987), Vol III, 367.

2 (Topping, 1990), 120.

3 Cf (Swan, 2001), 84.

4 (Ward, 1984), 64.

5 Cf. Ibid, 84.

An Interview with

Archbishop John Chrysostom



"Portrait of Saint John Chrysostom of Antioch (Hagios Ioannis Chrysostomos). An early Byzantine mosaic from the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (modern Istanbul). The mosaic is approximately 1,000 years old." - wikipedia.org

INTERVIEWER: Church Father. Archbishop and Patriarch of Constantinople. Confessor. Saint. Preacher. Shepherd. Spiritual guide. What else could be possibly added to such a venerable resume of roles? Of all the names that have risen to eminence in the Church's history for greatness of life, that of St. John Chrysostom is certainly one of the closest to the hearts of all. What a rare privilege to sit and converse with such a high authority! We thank you for this great opportunity, Father, and hope that it will not be too much of a burden on your time to help offer our generation a much needed example of fortitude and piety. I have been looking forward to this exchange for quite some time now.

CHRYSOSTOM: I thank you for the honor, but naturally you should understand that it is misplaced.

INT: What do you mean, Father?

CHRYS: Well, you have the privilege of conversing with the King of Kings on a daily, even hourly, basis, yet you feel so privileged to speak for a few minutes with His mere servant on earth?

INT: Forgive me, Father, but I would not say "mere"! Let's start at the beginning; tell me about your parents.

CHRYS: My father died when I was an infant, so my mother took upon herself the raising of her son in the middle of a large, dangerous, and sin-infested city. She created for me a most pious Christian home environment. When I later informed my pagan law professor that she brought me up for 20 years without a husband, he responded, "Heavens! What women these Christians have!"

INT: Excellent—which brings me to your education. Did law school help to prepare you for your future?

CHRYS: I tell you, it was a gift from God. My mother originally planned for my entrance into the law profession because of its prestige, but God used my schooling to sharpen my analytical and communication skills for the difficult service He would assign to me in future years.

INT: I heard that Libanius, the head of the law school, when asked on his death bed who would lead the school after him, said this: "It would have been John, had the Christians not stolen him from us!"

CHRYS: Well, it was God who "stole" me. He often has higher and greater purposes for us, you see, while our aims are

but small and feeble in comparison. The essential point is to obey when He calls you.

INT: But obeying the call was not so easy for you in the beginning; because unless my sources are mistaken, I believe you humorously attempted to evade the priesthood?

CHRYS: Yes—the people had planned to ordain me and my friend Basil to the priesthood on a certain day, but I succeeded in hiding myself and Basil alone was ordained. He was quite dismayed.

INT: A clever escape artist!

CHRYS: I was not escaping God's service from fear or diffidence; I simply felt myself unworthy to enter this sacred and honorable duty of the priesthood. Of course, God would have His way, and I was eventually ordained at a later period.

INT: Tell me, how did monasticism influence your life?

CHRYS: Ah, the secluded desert! After my mother's death (God bless her soul), I retired to one of the monasteries of Antioch, the city of my birth, and there spent six of the happiest and most peaceful years of my life in prayer and study. The simplicity of life of those monks, their freedom from riches and pride, and their diligence in work and prayer made an impression on me that would endure the remainder of my life.

INT: Beautiful. I would like now to discuss what perhaps you are most known for—Scriptural interpretation and exegesis. You clarified and explained almost every book of the New Testament to your flock, sometimes taking an entire sermon to discuss just five or six verses; and your recorded homilies fill many thick books in small print. All the while, you still had to deal with the administrative details of a patriarchate, the pastoral needs of a very large flock, tending to the needs of the poor, and the political harassment of a domineering empress! How did you manage to find the time and peace of mind to prepare and deliver all that homiletic work?

CHRYS: When you find no way of doing something, God will find a way—or, I should say, He will make a way. Let me tell you, the Bible has always been the foundation of my life. In times of stress, or despair, or fear, I have always returned to that Living Book and found therein my rest. The patriarchate could not comfort me, but the Bible could. The emperor never gave me joy, but the Bible did. The law school failed to enlighten me, but the Bible has given me light.

INT: So you found time to read the Bible in the midst of a chaotic life?

CHRYS: How could I not? If I did not have God's word to support me, I would have bailed on the church and on God a long time ago. That is why the Bible formed the basis of almost all my teachings in church; the biblical illiteracy of my diocese was shocking, and I did my best to reform it. I took up one to two days of each week to teach the Bible, and sometimes five days a week during Great Lent.

INT: Wow. And the stenographers who sat jotting down your words must have been unusually talented. Unfortunately we have to come to the darker side of your story. You were violently criticized, slandered, vilified, assaulted, and eventually expelled from your ministry and exiled to a cold, distant, hostile border of the empire. What brought on such misfortunes?

CHRYS: It is a chapter of my life in which I prefer not to go into a lot of detail, but I will just say with St. Paul that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12). I felt it was my duty as archbishop to reform the priesthood of its corruptions, to reprimand the people for their worldly lifestyles, and, when needed, to tell the emperor or empress to refrain from involvement in church affairs.

INT: I am guessing that did not sit too well with some people.

CHRYS: Actually many people, all claiming to be Christian, were so disturbed and enraged at my conduct that they assembled several councils to condemn me, and they eventually succeeded. I left my city and people in great agony of mind to live in a desolate town, but I kept up a correspondence with my closest friends. Oh well, it was all for God's glory.

INT: Well, the more I learn about your life and teachings the more I admire you. You were a rock-like man for a soft, decaying society. We need more men like you!

CHRYS: They live on in every age and generation, even yours.

INT: You have finished the race well, Father, but we are still struggling on the track! Would you remember us in your prayers?

CHRYS: Yes. And I have full confidence that your generation has the potential to finish its race better than even we did.

An Article by James Helmy



Pillars of our Time: Ordinary People Serving in Extraordinary Ways

Bishop Makarios



When HG Bishop Makarios departed to be with the Lord, the heavens rejoiced in receiving one of her own

while the earth lamented for losing a saint that filled all places with humility, righteousness, and simplicity.

And perhaps it was His Grace's simplicity that enabled God to choose him to be numbered with the anchorites—His Grace was fervent in the spirit, flying and moving and praying with the anchorites.

His Grace was born on the Eve of El-Nayrouz Feast, September 10, 1923, and was ordained a monk in El-Baramous Monastery at the age of 27. He was then ordained a priest (Fr. Bolues El-Baramousy) and served as a personal secretary to HH Pope Kryllios VI. On Sep-

tember 19, 1965, at the age of 42, Fr. Bolues was ordained as Bishop Makarios by HH Pope Kryllios VI. He served as the Bishop of Qena, Dishna, Nakada, Kous, Qift, and the Red Sea.

Two virtues were evident during His Grace's service as a Bishop: he was a man of faith and a man of prayers.

His Grace served this vast diocese with all his might, faithfully visiting his congregation in their homes once a year. He would visit on average 50 to 100 homes per day. Nothing hindered him from shepherding or visiting them, even during his last days when he had become very sick. It is noteworthy to

state that this vast diocese was divided into four dioceses after his departure.

His Grace Bishop Makarios was a man of prayer and was known for using few words when speaking with people. He rarely gave sermons, as he preferred to speak directly to God rather than with people. But when His Grace did speak or give a sermon, he did so with simple but very deep words that penetrated the heart.

His Grace was so dedicated to prayer that he was often heard saying "It would be a great blessing to depart during the Divine Liturgy." And thus, God granted his heart's desire on February 3,

1991; after 26 years of serving the Diocese, His Grace departed during the holiest time of the Gregorian Liturgy, the pre-fraction prayer.

His Grace absolutely forbade the videotaping of the Divine Liturgy. The one and only time he allowed it, the amazing Liturgy of his departure, was the means by which the entire world learned of his saintly life – although he was unknown to many during the course of his life. At the moment of his departure, he was holding the Eucharist as he fell to the ground, but the Body of Christ miraculously flew from his hands back onto the paten on the altar.

Some Faithful words from the Holy Spirit on the mouth of Bishop Makarios:

⇒ "To keep your candle lit, you must hide it from the wind." (i.e. hide your virtues from the enemy of righteousness)

⇒ When asked about a problem, he would say, "As for me, I am not educated and I don't know anything, but God has given me this answer..."

⇒ "People need someone to comfort them, they come from far away seeking some comfort, and I must attend to their needs in this troublesome age and give them rest."

⇒ On many occasions, HG was heard reciting Proverbs 27:19 "As in water face reflects face, so a man's heart reveals the man."

⇒ "Successful service is a fruit of love to each other. May God make you successful in your service and be a helper to you because the yoke of service is too heavy."

⇒ "Do you know why our love for each other grows? It is because this love has one goal, which is Jesus Himself, without any other hidden goals and this love is in Jesus' fear and for His acceptance."

⇒ "Fruitful tree branches droop towards the ground but a bare tree seems to stand with pride; likewise the meek and humble soul that possesses the fruits of the Holy Spirit looks down upon itself with humility but the proud soul stands upright because it lacks the fruit of the Spirit."

⇒ "There is nothing we can do greater than praying Divine Liturgies."

⇒ "A spiritual man has to pray the psalms. I cannot sleep

under any condition without praying my psalms. If any person neglects his psalms even once, either devils devour him or he becomes spiritually cold and careless toward prayers and it becomes very difficult to go back to his warm prayers."

⇒ "The Divine Liturgy, for me, is my only consolation and extreme happiness. No one knows how happy I feel while I am standing in the altar. If this magnitude of happiness is felt here while on earth, how much more will our happiness be with Our Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven?"

⇒ "Whoever respects the altar and gives it its due holiness will see amazing spiritual scenes and God will uncover for him the hidden mysteries."

⇒ "There are too many sermons. The most important things are repentance, confession, and communion because those who can confess and partake of the Holy Eucharist have a great position with the saints in Heaven."

May the intercessions of St. Mary and the prayers of Bishop Makarios be with us all and may we recite the same prayer that Bishop Makarios used to recite during the Divine Liturgies:

"O Lord bestow Your peace on the diocese [Diocese of the Southern USA] and take charge of [our lives], forgive [our] sins through Your precious blood, strengthen [our] faith and increase the love [we] have for You. Deepen [our] fellowship with You in the Spirit and protect [us] from self-dependence."

QUESTION & ANSWER

S. A. L. T.
Serve And Love Together
Tallahassee youth missionary service group

GENERAL QUESTION

Q: What is the true Christian perspective concerning helping hardships-stricken non Christians, financially or in any other means?

A: Our Lord Jesus Christ was asked "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He answered, "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.'" And when asked "And who is my neighbor?" His answer was the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-36).

It amazes me that many Christians do know the Holy Bible very well but do not know when to apply their knowledge of the Word of God. Who does not know the parable of the Good Samaritan? Why is it that when it comes to its application; some fall short; and start giving excuses. The Good Samaritan was praised by the Lord; because he helped the Jew although at that time the Jews had neither relation nor respect for the Samaritans. The message of the Lord is clear: to love your neighbor as yourself.

St. James the apostle says, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." He did not say we should help Christians. Our love and help for others should be comprehensive and unconditional.

Our diocese is already accepting donations for the victims of the Tsunami. May the Lord move the heart of all believers to have mercy and compassion on those victims and support them in any way we can.

Winter Edition Bible Question: Did Antiochus regret all he did to the Jews? Give proof.

Answer: And I thought with myself, into what tribulation am I come, and how great a flood of misery is it, wherein now I am! for I was bountiful and beloved in my power. But now I remember the evils that I did at Jerusalem, and that I took all the vessels of gold and silver that were therein, and sent to destroy the inhabitants of Judea without a cause. I perceive therefore that for this cause these troubles are come upon me, and, behold, I perish through great grief in a strange land. (Maccabees 6:11-13)

New Spring 2011 Edition

BIBLE QUESTION

FROM THE BOOK OF 2 MACCABEES
(answer to be posted in Summer Edition)

Q: Give verses that speak about the Resurrection.

By the blessing and guidance of His Grace Bishop Youssef and Father Gerges Gerges, the Tallahassee youth formed the missionary service group S.A.L.T. (Serve and Love Together) The group is doing tremendous work right in their very backyard of Florida in serving both the poor and the orphaned of their community! And they're inspiring other youth to start the same kind of work in their church across the Southern Diocese of the United States!

January:

- The youth held 2 Sandwich Runs (every other friday) which involved making bagged lunches each containing a Bible verse and delivering them to the French Town Homeless Community Center. The youth begin every sandwich run with a prayer. On their visits, they talk and pray with our homeless brother (regarding anything specific they needed) and sang spiritual songs.

February:

- The youth also did 2 sandwich Runs (every other friday)
- The youth also collected Valentines Cards (about 60) signed with a Bible verse and love from "Our Creator" for valentines day and they were delivered to patients at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital.
- The youth also collected valentines day items and made goodie bags for the local Orphanage signed by the SALT group.

March:

- 2 Sandwich runs were held
- About 30 of the Youth from Tallahassee, Orlando, Tampa, Clearwater, and Dallas flew to NY for a SALT Service Learning Retreat with our brothers in FTFT under Abouna Yacoub Ghaly and stayed at Virgin Mary and Saint Pachomious Coptic Orthodox Church retreat center from March 5-8.

The growth of this continuing work of our Lord Jesus Christ is in need of prayers, as the unity of other Churches in the diocese such as Tampa, Clearwater, Orlando and Jacksonville are beginning the initial phases of beginning SALT in their cities.

Events & Activities

DIOCESE PROGRAMS

Archangel Raphael Ministry

(ARM) Serving Individuals with Special Needs

St. Verena Resource Ministry

(SVRM) Requesting assistance or registering to be a Volunteer Consultant

Family Ministry Program

(FMP) Fall Registration deadline: July 25, 2011

Theological Seminary Program

Fall Registration deadline: August 1, 2011

DIOCESE EVENTS

Her First Love Retreat: Jun 2-5, 2011

Pre-Marital Retreats

TN: Jun 24-26, 2011 TX: Nov 11-13, 2011

Brazil Mission Trip: Jul 3-15, 2011

Italy Trip: Jul 25 - Aug 6, 2011

Archangel Raphael Ministry Family Camp: Aug 8-11
New SUS Diocese Program Serving Individuals with Special Needs

Annual Evangelism Conference: Aug 12-13

St. Verena Resource Ministry Banquet: Sept 17

** Dates are subject to change. Please check www.suscopts.org*

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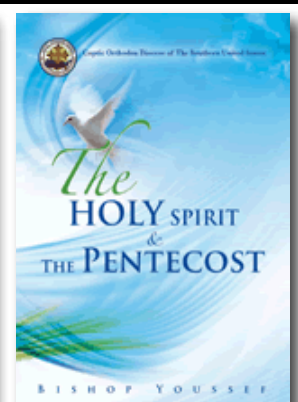
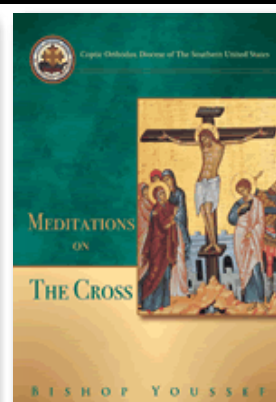
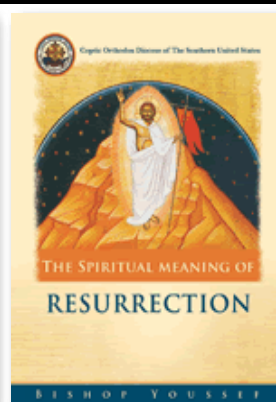
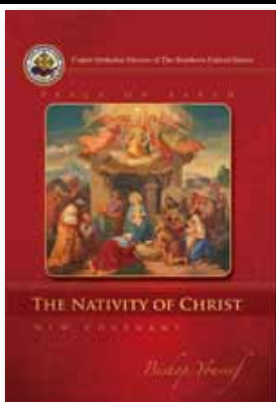
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