

MIGHTY MAGAZINE ARROWS

LIFE. GOD. TRUTH. FOR COPTIC YOUTH



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*"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 Youth,

The message of this season is one of HOPE. Forty-three days of fasting paved the advent of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. This joyous feast in itself was only the beginning. It is quickly followed by significant milestones in our Lord's life in fulfillment of every spoken and written word by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit revealed in the Holy Scripture and the tradition of the church. The minor feasts of the Circumcision of our Lord and the First Miracle at the Wedding of Cana at Galilee rapidly followed and we were brought to the wondrous Epiphany and Theophany of our Lord, the manifestation of the Holy Trinity, with a glimpse into heaven.

Hope too is one in a trinity along with faith and love. On the same evening as Coptic Orthodox Christians celebrated the entry of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world in order to save us, six of His beloved children, our brothers in the Lord departed to be with Him. In a strange strike of violence, their young lives were abruptly cut short by the hopeless, the faithless, and the loveless. What ought these events to have done to us? We will persevere again and again. We follow Him and abide in faith, hope, and love, not only for those who are our own, but those who sadly remain in darkness and hatred, we will pray.

As the Fast of the Ninevites swiftly approached us this year, as if to remind us of the power of repentance, whether oppressed or oppressors, we also ought to prostrate before the Lord and consecrate our fasts for peace. Just as the people of Nineveh listened to a few words calling for repentance, likewise, we also need to prepare our hearts and minds with haste in order to hear the call and offer to God sincere repentance so that He will heal the wounded and soften the hearts of those who wound.

My beloved, know that there are far more in the world who would gladly strive to remove the joy in your hearts. Let it be known to all, that to sadden the hearts of the children of God will be no easy task. Temporary grief, perhaps, but the church which is filled with the spirit of joy and that joy which abides deep in the hearts of the children of God who hope in Him, will never be shaken. The apostle Paul, who once himself persecuted the church and then gladly found himself ill, beaten, humiliated, and persecuted for Christ's sake, boldly shouts with gladness "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4).

As we now approach the Holy Great Fast, which some may think it came too soon, know that it is incumbent upon us to fast for peace, justice, and mercy for the whole world. If the perpetrators repent, the Lord is good to accept their repentance; but if they don't, then who will defend them before Him. For if in quiet days in the chilly month of Kiahk, the land of Egypt was shaken with warm bright lights and incense vapors of the apparitions of His Blessed Mother, who can stand before His wrath? Hearts were softened and faith was inspired. Only His mother could comfort this broken hearted nation and our faith driven people. For whom ought we to be more saddened, the mothers of the slain or the mothers of the slayers? One taught her child to love and the other taught her child to hate. God is love. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:13).

God bless you,



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

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The HOPE Of The World

CHRIST

By: James Helmy

We are entering that beloved and luminous season known as Christmas, or in church language “Nativity” or “Kiahk.” While television advertisers try to profit from the season with the persuasion, “Make it a joyful holiday by saving the most money at our store,” we know it is about much more than gift exchanges and credit transactions. The most celebrated catchword that has adorned the season is “hope,” and for good reason. The story of Christianity is one long account of the victory of hope against near impossible odds.

The world Christ entered, on that cold Christmas night, had reached the very limits of human misery. Society had descended into the most abject and obscene pits of sin. An epidemic of theft, murder, deceit, profanity, greed, and gluttony plagued almost every corner of the civilized world, and there was no spiritual or moral vaccine to check it. The Roman government had evolved into a harsh and brutal regime. Philosophy had degenerated into a smug and haughty disdain for the mass of humanity who did not join its membership. The youth had been given over to a voluptuous corruption of life. Marriage was trodden upon, and divorce was rampant. Every moral fiber of life had been snapped, and the Dragon of the Apocalypse seemed to reign supreme.

Into this tired and injured world came our blessed Savior. The loving eyes that had often looked down from above and witnessed the self-inflicted tortures of man could no more bear the pain. He must come down to live among us and feel our hurting. He must offer the lost and wailing masses a light in the darkness – and that light was Himself. But, the offering He brought could not be bought on sale at the local store; it could be purchased only with a life of toil, suffering, and crucifixion, and it began by leaving the throne designed for a deity, to lie in a box designed for feeding cattle. On that day, Hope was born.

If the great Apostle Paul could rise from his grave and shake from his eyes the dust of twenty centuries, the spectacle that would meet him would be almost incredible. For in the hour he bore his neck for the sword, he had every reason to consider all his missions and sufferings to be for a hopeless cause. He had spent his final years in a Roman prison, weak, exhausted, and forgotten by all but a few of his most loyal friends (2 Timothy 4:16). He had founded but a handful of local churches, some of which were occupied with feuds and bickering like Corinth, while others were struggling with the insidious entry of heresy like Galatia.

It is inconceivable that Satan, that opportunistic parasite, did not use the moment to whisper in Paul’s ear, “You are doomed. And all your little congregations will soon be extinct.” But Christ was St. Paul’s support during his days of trial. At that last hour, when his sun was setting, and the fires of evangelism were to be put out, he looked to Him who was his “*hope of glory.*” (*Colossians 1:27*) In Him, he found strength to preserve, a spirit not of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

There is a wonderful little story about a boy who has four candles. The first three, named Peace, Faith, and Love, all sadly go out because no one these days cares for them. The boy enters his room and weeps, telling them they were supposed to burn to the very end. Then the fourth candle speaks gently to the little boy, “Do not be afraid, for I am Hope, and while I still burn, we can relight the other candles.” With shining eyes, the child takes the Candle of Hope and lights the other three candles.

The problem is that Satan whispers into all our ears. He has a custom-tailored argument for each of us to throw our hope to the winds and to sit down in a mood of heavy and unrelenting despair. Those of us who have been seized by the paralyzing grip of the terrible enemy called hopelessness know its evil. It follows in our footsteps during the day, hissing and exhaling its fowl breath to remind us of its presence; it haunts our home during the evening, hostile and threatening; it even finds a way into our dreams to harass and exhaust us. The young student stuck in his educational path, the girl imprisoned by a self-destructive habit, the dejected parents who have lost control over their wayward children: all these are tempted to lose faith in themselves and in God, and to submit to the enemy's ruthless control.

More powerful and more relentless than this enemy, however, is the hope and light Christ brings to the willing soul. Just as Christ was pleased to enter the world stage during its worst act to be its grand Hero, so does He yearn to penetrate the heavy soul even in its thickest gloom. No heart is too closed up for Christ, no life is too "lost," as is proven by the prodigal son, by Saul of Tarsus, by Mary of Egypt, by Moses the Black, and by all those modern saints who have risen out of the web of sin and vice to be new lights for Christ. In Jesus, the fourth candle forever burns.

My sorrowful brother, my grieving sister, take heart! The road we have traveled may be strewn with the ashes of scorched sins and the debris of emotional tornadoes; but that is all now behind us. Look before you! The road ahead is still unknown, still fresh, green, and garnished with the flowers of opportunity and hope. The Lord has come and He took up human flesh that He might have a human hand to reach out to us. The Lord will even come walking on the water to save us. But, when He reaches forth to save, take the saving hand! Even if you think all hope is gone, ask for more from Christ. It will get you through. It is the immortal virtue. It can never die, and Jesus has an abundant supply to give.

"Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!"
(Psalm 27:14)

May the hope and joy of the Nativity Feast be with you all.

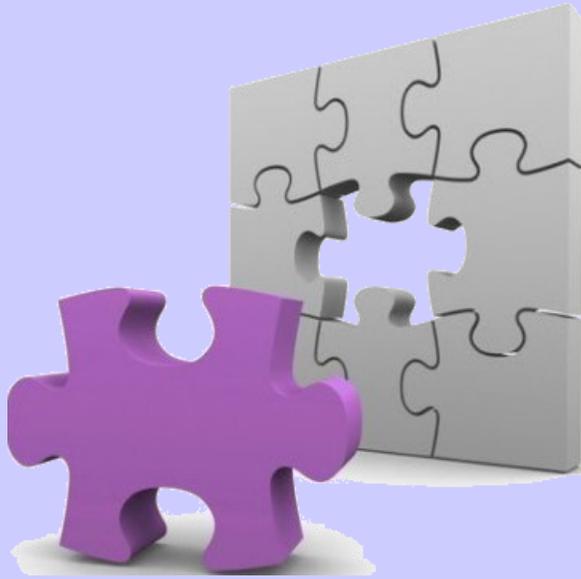
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New King James Bible



I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, "What can get through from such snares?" Then I heard a voice saying to me, "Humility."

St. Antony the Great

ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN



Sharing the Love of Christ in the Coptic Church – An Outsider’s Perspective

By Myrna Quan

To the readers, peace and greetings. I want to share with you today some reflections about how a woman I know well who was evangelized by many of you in the Coptic Church. I believe that in the history of the Coptic Church in North America, the time has come for our church to save many who live outside the church. It is in the spirit, of sharing in this mission, that I open my heart to you.

If you allow me, I will converse with you about this woman’s experience of knowing and loving Christ in the Coptic Church. Years ago, she was an outsider, and like many youth in our society, she was unconcerned about church and God. The word evangelization is usually

associated with preaching outside our home church, recruiting others to share your faith. It requires the spirit of letting go of some of your cultural traditions, to relate deeply and gain the affection of the people you want to evangelize. However, there is a silent evangelization carried out by our Lord, when you simply put yourself at His disposal in every aspect of daily life.

Today I want to tell you that you played a life-saving role in her life. You may ask yourself, “How can this be, since we are strangers to each other.” Let me start by saying that in the spirit of our Lord, we are all connected. I realized that our Lord could see through people before He met them. This woman experienced a similar feeling to the one Nathanael experienced when he asked our Lord, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered... “*Before Phillip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.*” (John 1:48). She was brought to the Coptic church by a friend, one whom she would later marry. So, this was her entry ticket into your church. It sounds kind of traditional, as it is probably the most common way of enriching the cultural makeup of the Coptic congregation, however, what is not so traditional is what came later. They

built a family as three beautiful children arrived, and both the husband and the wife were able to provide for them.

It is not my intent to bore you with the details of this woman’s personal life; I would rather share with you the wonders of His light that shine through the Coptic faith, the strength, power, and grace that spring from the sacraments and the love that binds and seals the Christian friendships in His congregation. But you may learn more about this from her personal experience, as God often teaches us His most profound lessons through the little things in life.

Her story is one of initial thrill, joy, and success. However, it all came to an end when she was struck by an illness, and her mind became so weak that doctors believed she would not recover. This was followed by a fallout in their finances, and family disintegration, as her husband dared to divorce her. With all this came a rude awakening to the possibility of not having bread on the table, and facing a world suddenly strange, culturally different, and full of people who were not accustomed, and therefore ill-prepared, to include a “fallen” person in their midst.

Why did she decide to stay in the Coptic Church when what she longed for was the acceptance, the inclusion, into a community that was familiar to her? She wanted to share her pain with others; She wanted to sob and dry her tears and restart her life. She was not accustomed to waiting and letting our Lord take the driver's seat. That was something she had to learn. In the meantime, God was telling her to stay in the Coptic family, and as she watched the joy, trust, and the happiness of her little children coming out of Sunday school, she understood only one thing; that she had lost her family, but our Lord was showing her another family, one that she could only experience through her children. When she shared this with her father of confession, he widely opened the doors of Sunday school for her. She could not believe she too could be a servant in her "fallen" state. And from that moment, many miracles started to happen. Years would go by, and her world would turn upside down, many more times. However, her main preoccupation was to become like the faithful people in the congregation that she had come to admire and love. By focusing on simple things like attending the Divine Liturgy, understanding the word of God, and letting go of her weekly outings with friends in order to attend sermons and church meetings, she was becoming transformed. This transformation was being felt by many in her family and by her friends. As she re-

flects on what has happened in her life, this verse comes to my mind: *"And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all."* (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all." (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7).

It is important for you to know that this process of transformation was very difficult. Do not be mistaken, for a person with a totally different cultural background, it is not an easy journey to navigate in the midst of a congregation that is very much entrenched culturally and dogmatically. The devil awaits every opportunity to bring you back into submission. This woman's journey included falls, transgression and then repentance, and a renewed commitment every time. Perhaps the most devastating feeling was the one of social isolation, which contrasted with the incredible trust and confidence that she gained from seeing how

other servants were loving her and praying for her. This was another important element in the evangelization: the words of hope, the encouragement to keep striving, and the love and humbleness that she saw among those who serve in the church were determinant factors in her perseverance. As the bee is attracted to the flower, she was attracted to the Coptic way. Initially it had nothing to do with intellect or dogma, but it only had to do with the love of God piercing through the eyes and hearts of other servants, by showing their devotion and their trust in His power and His glory.

It has been almost thirty years since she joined the Coptic family. She is so grateful for all the opportunities she was given to live, love, and learn. Every child, young person, and adult who came in contact with her gave her something invaluable. You all reflected the light of Christ, which is the light and love that binds our church. She thanks you dearly, and prays may God bless and protect the Coptic church all around the world.

the Views of the Coptic Orthodox Church on the treatment of infertility, assisted reproduction, and Cloning

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Coptic Orthodox Church in the Twentieth Century

The twentieth century has seen a revival of the Coptic Church. The main revival came through the Sunday School Movement and the resurgence of Coptic Monasticism. Coptic Orthodox Christianity has been preached on all the continents during the past four decades by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. His Holiness ordained more than one hundred bishops in Egypt and

several Bishops for the United States in the 1990s. His Grace Bishop Youssef, a beloved and delightful head of the Southern Diocese of the United States kindly revised this manuscript. As he was originally an ENT surgeon he was familiar with medical technology and scientific advances. He worked tirelessly for fifteen years to develop the diocese with grace and in the process built a significant number of churches in Florida and Texas (Figure 73.10). The First Book on the Christian Opinion on

In Vitro Fertilization

The first book on the opinion of the Coptic Orthodox Church on in vitro Fertilization and transfer of embryos was published by His Grace, the late Bishop Gregorios (Figures 73.11 and 73.12), the bishop of theological studies, Coptic culture, and scientific research (13). His book was based on a lecture that he had delivered the year before at the 10th Annual Conference of the College of Medicine, at Ain Shams University in Cairo in March 1987. The author could personally testify that His Grace Bishop Gregorios was a scholar in different fields of theology and science and represented the ultimate in dedication and purity that could ever be achieved. His book was given to more than fifteen years ago by Professor Mohamed Aboulghar who started in vitro fertilization in Egypt and sought the opinion of the

Coptic Orthodox community as well as the Islamic community. The introduction of his lecture and book starts by ascertaining that the success of in vitro fertilization represents a great success for science by allevi-

ating a great obstacle for married couples wishing to conceive a child. Although having children is not the only reason for marriage, it represents nature's first goal of marriage in all beings including humans. He fully acknowledges that motherhood is the strongest instinct that a woman could have and that having children is the first wish for any mother and certainly infertile women are among the unhappiest people even if they were married to the richest, wealthiest, and most famous. He also acknowledges that the success of in vitro fertilization has

brought happiness to thousands of married couples and settled lives among many families. He quoted examples from the Old Testament, painting a picture of how such tragedy could affect family life such as Sara who asked Abraham to marry her maidservant and Rachel and Jacob. He cited Rachel's statement asking Jacob to give her children or she would rather die.

The second chapter focuses on the pitfalls of in vitro fertilization and assisted conception. He emphasized that a key issue is the fertilization of a woman's oocyte by her husband's sperm, and extreme accuracy should be exercised in this important issue. He stresses the role of the treating physician in honesty so that there is no question that fertilization has occurred between the husband and wife and not any third party. He acknowledges that in certain situations fertilization might not occur but does not accept that fertilization should be attempted between the wife's oocyte and any other man's spermatozoa, whether it is from a known or an unknown donor. His Grace Bishop Gregorios calls this fertilization incomplete ethically or legally from all aspects because the fruit of the relation between a man and a woman should be from a holy relation.

Another issue that he does not accept is the establishment of embryo banks and the buying and selling of gametes with money. This is fully unacceptable because it brings down the relation of the value of marriage and conception and having children to a low level.

His grace then discusses the difficult issue of surrogate pregnancy and believes that this is an area that has serious consequences. One of those consequences is that the infant may inherit some different psychological or physiological traits of the carrier. He acknowledges that in the past, a mother who died had her child nursed by another woman who could do so and that was a legitimate option in the absence of facilities for feeding. In a later discussion, His Grace Bishop Gregorios denounces surrogacy (14).

In summary, His Grace Bishop Gregorios welcomes and accepts in vitro fertilization only under the circumstances where the oocyte and sperm are taken from the husband and wife and fertilization occurred in vitro with no doubt about gamete mixing. Embryo transfer must be performed to the mother who is the source of the oocytes. All the steps of in vitro fertilization should occur with the approval of the husband and wife, and the treating physician should be alert to the fact that no mixing of gametes should occur and there should be no doubt in anyone's mind regarding the source of the gametes. He accepted in this lecture that surrogacy is an option when the sperm and oocyte are obtained from the married couple when the wife has lost or does not have the ability to carry a pregnancy as in the case of a woman who has had her uterus removed because of bleeding or cancer. In a later communication, he closed the door on surrogacy even under those rare circumstances (14). In the details of his lecture, he goes through the clinical indications for in vitro fertilization and the steps that should be adhered to from the retrieval of the oocytes until the embryos are transferred to ensure the extreme caution that should be exercised by the couple and the treating physician.

In 1998, His Grace Bishop Serapion of Los Angeles published a series of articles in the El Kiraza journal of which His Holiness Pope Shenouda III is the editor-in-chief (15). His Grace Bishop Serapion (Figure 73.10) who is also a physician by background acknowledges that in vitro fertilization is a legitimate option for couples who cannot achieve a pregnancy by normal means including medical and surgical options. In vitro fertilization is acceptable only if the gametes are from husband and wife. No donor oocyte or spermatozoa should ever be used under any circumstances. Surrogacy is fully unacceptable.

In 1997 His Grace Bishop Moussa, also a medical doctor, published a small book on contraception, in vitro fertilization and cloning, he supported the ethical use of in vitro fertilization using the gametes of the husband and wife. He raised the difficult issue of the fate of the extraembryos and how to handle them (16).

In 2000, His Grace Bishop Moussa published another book on the challenges of the new century, particularly technology, reproduction and organ transplantation. He supported the use of IVF but not donor gametes or third party and condemned cloning. Most importantly, he emphasized the need for honest scientists and clinicians within the church to advise the church on the advances in technology (17).

Sex Selection

Ethicists are divided in two camps: those who feel that sex selection is a choice of couples and those who believe that this would be a biased intervention with negative consequences (16,18). His Grace Bishop Moussa did not support sex selection (17).

Cloning or Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer

Somatic cell nuclear transfer or cloning is an issue that has divided more ethicists in the Western world (19,20). Cloning could be performed for reproductive reasons. This type of cloning is known as reproductive cloning. To our knowledge, no human being has been successfully cloned. Although it is not impossible, it is extremely difficult to do so. Most medical societies including the American Society for Reproductive Medicine does not accept cloning from an ethical point of view even if it becomes technically possible.

Cloning for the production of stem cells is known as therapeutic cloning which is acceptable to some medical societies (19,20). The Coptic Church Los Angeles Diocese has discussed this issue in its Web site. It acknowledges that the goal of stem cell therapy is a noble goal for millions of peoples. However, it emphasizes that noble goals should have also noble means to achieve them. The use of other source of stem cells is therefore advised rather than the use of embryonic stem cells resulting in the destruction of the embryos.



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The Martyrdom of St. Victor

By: Mareya Naguib

What is the true meaning of hope? To some, hope is the conviction that there are better things that have yet to come. The saints, such as St. Victor, equated hope with a strong faith in Christ and the heavenly kingdom that will inevitably come.

On Khiak 5, St. Victor (Boctor) was martyred. He was born in a town, in the province of Assiut, east of the Nile. He was appointed a soldier in the city of Shaw. During that time the Edict of Diocletian was issued to worship and raise incense to the idols. When St. Victor refused to worship the idols, the Governor of Shaw called him and tried to befriend him, but when he failed to persuade him, the Governor finally cast him into prison. His parents came and encouraged him to face martyrdom.

Once again the Governor brought him from prison and ordered him to worship the idols, but St. Victor refused. When the Governor of Shaw failed to make him renounce his faith in the Lord Christ, he was enraged. He sent him to the Governor of the province of Assiut, along with some soldiers, and a message informing him of what had happened. When the Governor of Assiut read the message, he summoned Victor. When Victor came before him, the Governor asked him, "Why did you disobey me? If you listen to me, I shall place you in a high honor, and I shall write to the Emperor to appoint you as governor over one of the kingdoms of the world." The saint shouted with a loud voice, saying, "The gold perishes, the cloth wears out, the beauty of the body will corrupt and be eaten by worms and will disappear in graves, therefore I would not forsake my Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of Heaven and Earth, and the Provider for everyone, to worship idols made of stone which are inhabited by devils."

The Governor was enraged and ordered him to be tied to the tails of horses and be dragged to the village of Ibsidya. There, they asked him again to worship the idols, but he refused. The Governor ordered him to be killed by throwing him in boiling water in the village of Monshah, east of Ibsidya. When they took him there, Victor asked the soldiers to wait in order that he might pray first. He extended his arms and prayed to the Lord. The Angel of the Lord appeared to him and promised him with many promises and the everlasting blessings in the kingdom of heaven. Then St. Victor looked to the soldiers and told them, "Finish what you have been ordered to do." They bound him and cast him into the boiling water. He endured to the end, completed his good strife, and received the crown of the Heavenly kingdom.

St. Victor had greatly hoped in the Lord, and he had strong faith that following Christ was the only right thing that he could have done in this temporary world. St. Victor was not tempted into accepting the governor's bribes because he always kept his eyes on the heaven that awaited him. He endured his sufferings until his martyrdom because God continually strengthened his faith, reminding him that He always carried him through his trials and tribulations. Whenever we are discouraged or filled with grief, we should always turn to God, as Psalm 43:5 beautifully expresses: "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God."

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LISTENING: ROOT & FRUIT

By: His Grace Bishop Youssef

Introduction

We hear the Word of God more often than not. However, we might go unmoved by it; or perhaps do exactly what is contrary to it. The problem is then not in the Word nor in the hearing but in the listener's heart. King David the prophet and psalmist defined a good listener in the first verses of his first psalm saying, *"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; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper."* (Psalm 1:1-3). In these few verses, David defines a godly person as someone who is blessed by God because:

- He delights in the law of God. Such a person cannot find delight except through attentive listening and hearkening to the word and will of God.
- He meditates day and night on God's commandments and teachings. Such a person has no spare time to waste on any futile activities that would avail no good to him nor serve the purpose for which God has brought him into this world.

He has fixed his eye upon the Lord and eternity. Such a person will ultimately blossom and prosper and be like a strong tree that has its roots seated deep in the ground, its branches shot high in the sky and its plentiful fruits scattered in love and service.

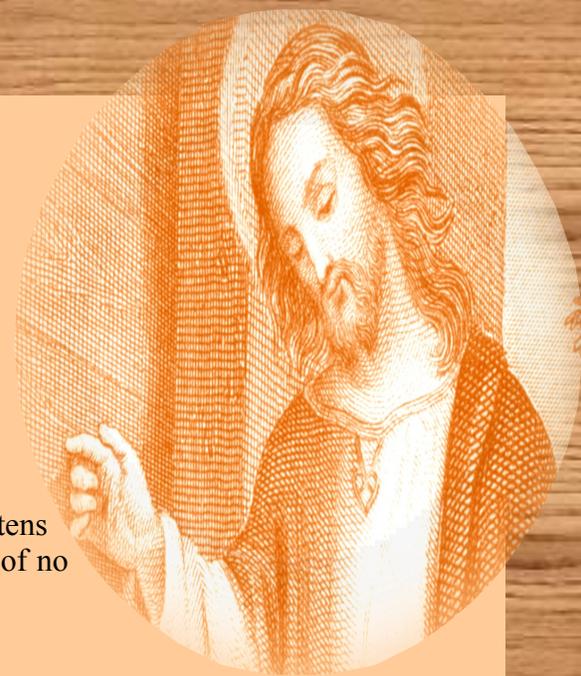
Such is a good listener. Who is a bad listener then? He is one of two types:

1. The First Type: The Slow of Hearing:

The slow of hearing are those whose ears have become slow in picking up messages. *"of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing."* (Heb 5:11). So, instead of being good listeners and doers working fruitfully and diligently in the Kingdom of the Lord, they themselves have become in dire need of hearing the message over and over again. A good analogy of the situation is that of a deaf student who will not benefit from explanation of even a simple lesson or a basic mathematical problem not because there is something wrong with the teaching or the mathematical theory. The problem resides mainly in the heart of the listener..

The spiritual implication of the slowness of hearing

Our Lord Jesus Christ diagnosed this type of spiritual ailment in His parable of the Sewer (*Mat. 13:13*). He purposefully spoke to the multitude in parables in order for those who have the right heart to understand what He wanted to say. *"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him"* (Matthew 13: 11, 12). And those who do not, because of their hardened heart, will see Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled in them *"Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them."* (Matthew 13: 14, 15). The harder the heart, the slower the hearing. The Lord spoke to the Scribes and the Pharisees with the parable of the Bad Stewards (*Lk 20: 9-19*). So, they knew that they were the ones the parable applies to. Instead of repenting and offering a genuine contrition over their sin, they did not benefit from the lesson they had heard and connived to kill the Christ.



Outcomes of The slowness of Hearing

Hardness of Heart

Comes from four sources::

1. Living a Sinful Life.
2. Love of Materialism.
3. Hatred and its ramifications (jealousy, envy, and love of retaliation).

Spiritual sluggishness

These four sources make one deaf to God's word and even if he listens whenever he listens, he will bear no fruit and the Word of God will be of no results.

Examples of Hardness of heart:

1. **Cain:** presented an offering to God (*Jen 4:5-7*). But it was not accepted because it was not done according to the will of God who stipulated a blood offering.
 - Cain overtly opposed God's instructions "**5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.**"
 - God started dialoguing with Cain in love and sympathy, "**6 So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"**
 - Obviously, God the Almighty was still interested in helping Cain walk down the correct path. So, He offered to help him "**7 If you do well, will you not be accepted?"**
 - He also warned him not to rebel or go against God's will. "**And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door.**"
 - God also drew Cain's attention to what was awaiting him if he disobeyed further. **And its desire is for you,** God went even further down the road of love and gave Cain the solution and the way out of the danger he was about to be trapped in "**but you should rule over it.**"

However, in spite of all God's efforts to bring Cain back, the latter would not listen nor heed to God's words. He revolted against his brother and killed him. Is it God to blame for not accepting the offering; or is it Cain for his hard heart full of jealousy, hatred, anger, envy and retaliation and dull ears which refused to listen to God's direct messages to him?

Judas Iscariot: decided to betray Jesus and hand him over to the Jews because of his hard heartedness and love for money. "*(Matthew 15,16)*

He negotiated before hand with the authorities for the price he would give them Christ for "**What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him**".

The Lord Jesus Christ had hinted to him that woe to that man who would betray the son of man, yet Judas would not listen and went and did as he had planned to "**24 The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.**"

Again during the last supper, the Lord wanted to alert Judas, "**23 He answered and said, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me."**" One would assume that there is no more overt warning than what Christ had offered to Judas. However, the latter's heart was full of the love for money that he could not hear properly. Even to the end, our Lord's rebuking words were enough to make him change his mind "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22: 48) Unlike Peter whose soft heart was moved by a glance from the Lord; and he turned and cried bitterly for denouncing his Master before the maid

The angel of the church of the Laodiceans. He is an example of people who are not moved by any teachings at all. They have reached a stage of lukewarmness that going to and staying away from church are of equal effect on them; and the Gospel's words and the Church teachings are sources of either derision or agitation or both. To such people God has given His verdict, *'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:14, 15).*

4. Samson is another example of a spiritually deaf person who could not hear not even from the person closest to his heart and emotions.

- Delilah literally disclosed to him the intention of her people to hurt him. However, he would not listen. *So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and with what you may be bound to afflict you." (Judges 16:6)*

- He would get so annoyed with her pestering him to know his secret of his power. *"And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death." (Judges 16:16)*

Would he heed? His ears remained deaf unable to hear God's voice. In the end the Palestinians overcame him, plucked his eyes degrading and torturing him.

What is the Solution?

The solution lies in a remedy that the prophet Isaiah provides, *"The Lord God has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away." (Isaiah 50:5)*

- Opening the ear requires removing any obstacle in the way of hearing. These obstacles that have their seat and residence in the heart need to be removed. St. Stephen in his sermon to the Israelites, knew exactly what their problem was: hard hearts and deaf ears," *51 "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you." (Acts 7:51)*

Examples of people who did not go against God's words are: the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, *"Nor did I turn away"* and St Antony the Great who did not hear directly from God but from a simple deacon reading the Word of God *"Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Luke 18: 22).*

2. The Second Type: with Itching Ears

St. Paul mentioned this second type in his second epistle to Timothy, *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2Tim 4: 3, 4).* What does it mean to "have itching ears"?

- It means to be allergic to God's teachings and His true Word. According to St. Paul, there will come a time (and is already here) when people will not tolerate listening to spiritual teaching and will just want to run away and escape from it.
- People would then be looking for whoever is willing to tell them what they want to hear not what they need and should listen to. *"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many." (Matthew 24:11)*
- Moving from one Spiritual Father to the next looking for the easier and the softer becomes a prominent feature in the church these days.
- Rejecting parents' advice and following those of strangers, wrong teachings, new thoughts and theories.
- Moving from one denomination to the next in search for the one that is ready to twist the original traditional apostolic teachings in order to suit their purposes of divorce and living a lost life.

• Finding it difficult to accept and consequently repent for their sins and hence try to find all excuses to evade repentance and confession. A good example is Herod who wanted to take his brother's wife to himself. When John the Baptist said "no" to him, Herod wanted to get rid of the voice of truth. So, he did not hesitate to take John's life at the mere demand of that harlot. ***"For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee. 22 And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you." 23 He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom." So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!" Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to."*** (Mark 6: 17 -29)

Every time we do not lend our ears and respond to a word of truth or rebuke, we kill John the Baptist in our hearts.

Another example of itching ears are the Jewish people who left the Lord Jesus Christ and walked no more with Him because they did not accept the true teaching regarding the Communion, that this is indeed His body and His Blood (John 6: 41-69).

What is the Solution?

Listen with a Spirit of Attentiveness and Awe

After every liturgy, ask yourself:

What were the readings about?

How has it touched you?

How have you benefited from it spiritually?

These three questions will act as an attention and concentration detector regarding your ears and heart during the prayers. It is not arbitrary that the Church prays the litany of the gospel "that we may hear and act according to the holy gospels." Also the Church has with the direction of the Holy Spirit organized the prayer prayed inaudibly by the priest during the reading of the Pauline letter and which says "You also now, O Good One and Lover of Mankind, we ask You, grant us and all Your people a mind free from wandering and a clear understanding that we may know and understand how profitable are Your holy teachings which are now read to us through him.

Listen with a Spirit of Prayer

Pray to God in a spirit of and lawlessness and humbleness that He may open your heart, remove the stony one and grant you flesh one that feels and responds, ***" Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. 21 but as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations; I will recompense their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God.***" (Ezekiel 11:19- 21)

It is God who opens the heart to heed His words as He did with Lydia ***"Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul"*** (Acts 16: 14).

Listen with a Spirit of Faith

It is very important that we believe what we hear from the Word of God. Faith will change our life. Let us not follow the footsteps of Jonah and take God lightly. God gave Jonah the Prophet a specific message with a specific time limit and a specific action plan. However, he took all of them in a spirit of doubt. The people of Nineveh city proved more proactive than him and hearkened to God's admonishment. ***“And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown! So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them” (Jonah 3:4, 5).*** When we hear it said, read or quoted, that liars will be thrown in the lake of fire, ***“But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Revelation 22:15),*** let us believe those words will come true. Let us take them seriously and act in repentance of our sins, reformation of our conduct and restoration of God's image in us before it becomes too late and we find the door shut before our face.

Listen with a Spirit of Proactivity

Listening to God's Word has to be translated into readiness on our side to act on it. Otherwise it becomes worse than not having listened at all.

Listen to God describing to Ezekiel the prophet people's attitude towards His Word, ***“As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, ‘Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.’ So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them, and when this comes to pass—surely it will come— then they will know that a prophet has been among them” (Ezekiel 33: 33-30).*** What God the Almighty implies here is that people come and listen to His commandments, teachings and admonishment and admire them the way they admire a song and uplift the prophet and teacher as they would a singer. But how far have their lives been affected by the Word and the prophet, and how much change has occurred in their lives? That is what God is wondering about in His words to Ezekiel.

Conclusion

Sinning lies not so much in sinning but in not listening to the Holy Spirit while it rebukes us for our sins and urges us to return to God in repentance, obedience and readiness to listen following the footsteps of St. Paul when he submitted himself totally and willfully with no resistance to the Will of God, ***“And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 9:5).*** King David is a classic example of someone whose soft heart and attentive ears helped him work out his salvation. Like Herod, he did top his first sin with a second one. However, unlike Herod, when the voice of rebuke came to him through Nathan, ***“Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun” (2 Samuel 11: 12),*** he did not resist but hearkened, admitted and repented thus becoming legend in tearful heart-felt repentance as revealed in his famous psalm 50.

The Holy Spirit constantly rebukes the world for every sin. Rebuke means irritate or cause restlessness in a manner leading to repentance and change.



Faith Questions

How do we know whether our happiness is born out of a strong relationship with God or out of positive circumstances? Is it reasonable to be upset with God when circumstances aren't going well, although we're told to be thankful to him under all circumstances? Should we call out for help?

Excerpts from Psalm 30, NKJV: "Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Ps 30:4,5). "Now in my prosperity I said, 'I shall never be moved.' Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain stand strong; You hid Your face, and I was troubled" (Ps 30:6,7). "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever" (Ps 30:11,12).

These two questions combine one thought: What determines my inner contentment? If it is I or my circumstances, then it is unreasonable to be upset with God when things go wrong. On the other hand, if I find joy in my relationship with God, then calamity will not dampen my hope in Him, for my relationship with God is my prosperity. In either case, God's presence in my life completes my joy and gives me hope. The mere thought of His absence in my life is disturbing. Contentment is better than "happiness". Most people are not "happy" to be poor or sick; but can still experience contentment and gratitude with however little or much they possess.

If you have a question about our faith, send it

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HOPES & STRUGGLES

By: Maria Mansour

As today's youth, we are threatened by an unpredictable future, economic chaos, nuclear wars, natural disasters, diseases, and more. You turn on the news and you hear about how the world is going from bad to worse. People all around us are complaining from hunger, anxiety, health problems, and a general franticness that never ends. You stop to wonder and ask yourself, "Why am I in this circle of stress? Is this what God has created me for? Can something good really come out of this? Is there hope in those dark days?"

Many of us are struggling daily in our lives, forgetting that we are God's precious children. We came to this earth because we have a purpose to fulfill through the strength of God. So, let us be strengthened and have hope in our victorious God, for hope is simply the desire for something to happen, with great assurance and confident of its fulfillment, even if it cannot be seen (Cf. Romans 8:24-25).

Saint Paul guides us through this journey of hope, saying, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13) Holding tight onto God's promises, even in the most difficult of situations, was the key to success for many persevering saints during their lives. Job the righteous found his hope and gave us such an inspiring example, as he said, "For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its tender shoots will not cease." (Job 14:7) A tree may fall when its branches become weak. Nonetheless, when it grows again, its branches become stronger. This tree can represent our falling dreams that sometimes

stagnate; but when our hope resides in God, our dreams flourish again, strengthened in His promises and trusting His will. As Scripture describes, "*The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.*" (Isaiah 58:11)

Our generation is different from all others, and so are our problems. Wall Street has not been in such condition, since the great depression. Schools do not care anymore about education; they just want their money. People are dying from cancer and many other diseases for which there is no cure. Many of us start to shout and complain about all the above and feel so frustrated that we forget that, even though the world is different, we still have the same God our fathers had! We all share the same hope of being united in Him. The amazing blessing is that we have already witnessed the glory and the blessing of trusting and hoping in God. We celebrate that sacrifice daily on the altar, where it becomes our source of strength and joy. Yes, Wall Street is falling apart. Yes, schools are getting harder. People may not be trustworthy anymore, and politics are everywhere, but above all God is still there for us, as He has been there all those years. So, why do we lose hope? Let us all pray and ask God to strengthen our weak faith, and trust in His promise, as he has reassured us, "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:20)

"I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)



So how can we prepare ourselves, as the children of God, to deal with such worries and tribulations? Saint Paul directs our attention to the solution saying, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:6-7) Saint Paul gives us a comforting message about the power of prayers, assuring that even when our worries become great burdens that we cannot carry, God will provide us with peace of heart and mind. These constant prayers bring us closer to Christ and we become one in Him, and He in us. Thereby, this great unity becomes not only our source of peace or hope, but also of everlasting joy. How magnificent are these great gifts! Consequently, when we are joyful, our lives themselves become the source of hope to others. This is ultimately what Christianity is all about: offering hope, love, and peace to those who are away from that ultimate source — God.

Finally, my brethren, begin your day with prayers. Have hope and do not be discouraged. Share goodness. Be thankful, no matter what happens. Inspire someone with your hope and trust in God, and never forget that God is with you all the time. After all, we are His children, carrying His image, and God indeed knows how to take care of what belongs to him!

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 29:11- 14)

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, when I lose hope because my plans have come to nothing, help me remember that Your love is always greater than my disappointments and that Your plans for my life are always better than my dreams.

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Come To Me

By: Fr. Raphael Kerelos
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“Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Mat. 11:28)

Everyone in this world has certain troubles, regardless if these troubles are known to others or hidden within oneself, whether they are spiritual, psychological, physical, social, or family troubles.

The Lord Christ came for those who are facing difficulties. From the beginning, God declared to Moses:

I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey... Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyp-

tians oppress them. (Ex 3:7-9)

Hearken to the prophet Isaiah who proclaimed, saying, ***“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” (Isa.53:4)*** Let us go to Him for He is able to carry our sorrows and grant us rest. It is both a call and a promise. He calls upon those who are heavy laden and cry out to Him. His is a call to a troubled world, heavy laden with problems of all kinds: problems of disruption and wars, problems of housing and supplies, problems of marriage and divorce, problems of extremism and terrorism, problems of corruption and addiction, etc. But, in all these problems the Lord invites us, saying, ***“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Mat. 11:28)***

When you are burdened by troubles and weighed down by pain and

words of the Psalm: ***“Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you” (Ps. 55:22)***. God also said: ***“Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” (Ps. 50:15)*** Come, then, and tell the Lord frankly about your troubles, whether caused by other’s pressures, their oppression or cruelty, or by suspicions, thoughts, sins, or habits prevailing against you. Trust that the Lord knows your troubles more than you know them, and that He desires to save you from all of them. So, call Him with hope and trust, for ***“the Lord answers you in the day of trouble, the name of the God of Jacob defend you.” (Cf. Ps. 20:1)***

Be sure that there are many prayers offered up in the church on your behalf, such as when the priest prays, saying, “All envy, all temptation, all the work of Satan, and the rising up of enemies, hidden and mani-

that are distressed or bound that God may give them mercy, rest, refreshment, grace, help, salvation, and that He may grant them the forgiveness of their sins and their iniquities.

If someone is afflicted, this person is not forsaken, for God allowed his apostles to be persecuted, yet He did not forsake them. On the contrary, they were rejoicing in all their afflictions for they were counted worthy to be reviled for His name’s sake. God stood beside them, he sent His angels even to the prisons to loosen their chains. That is why St. Paul said about himself and his companions in ministry, ***“We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken.” (2 Cor. 4:8, 9)***

Why do you seek someone else other than God? Why do keep the Lord to the

“My people ... have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jer. 2:13)

grief, do not let your mind be troubled and do not fall into despair, but resort to God and put before you the

fest, take away from us and all your people.” In addition, the priest in every liturgy prays for all the souls Lord blames us, saying,

Indeed, many are people's troubles, but Christ is ready to comfort everyone. One suffers from people around him and the other is defeated from his lust, his weak nature, his bad habits, or his bad thoughts which press on him. To all these people the Lord says, *"Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* (Mat. 11:28) I will give you rest from the guilt of sin by justification, and from the power of sin by sanctification. The offer is not from a mere man, but from the Divine Savior.

On another occasion, the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman whom they claimed to have caught in the act of adultery (we must assume there was a guilty man, but he was absent). The Pharisees brought this woman to Jesus, to see what He would do. The law said that such a person should be stoned. These men wanted to tempt and accuse Jesus by asking Him about this woman. Jesus replied, *"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."* One by one, everybody left the scene. When Jesus and the

Humans cannot save their fellow humans, but rather, it is God who saves. Therefore, lift up your eyes to God and say to Him, "I will cast my burden on You and will think of it no more. It is You who will find a solution for my problems, since whenever I seek anyone other than You, my problems increase and become even more complicated."

Alas, some people try to solve their problems by sinning; they lie, behave deceitfully and cunningly, or even use violence. Some may escape from fac-

*Through faith and prayers
*Carrying His yoke
*Through the Holy Spirit through whose fruits you will find rest.

(Serapion and Youssef 2001), 5.

Jesus is a friend of repentant and remorseful sinners.

Jesus is a friend of repentant and remorseful sinners. At the house of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus was approached by a sinful woman. She brought an alabaster box of ointment, stood at His feet behind Him, weeping, washing his feet with tears, wiping them with her hair, kissing His feet and anointing them with the ointment. Simon watched and wondered how Jesus could let a sinful woman touch Him. Jesus answered Simon's thoughts and illustrated the sinful woman's situation; He rebuked Simon for his own lack of hospitality and common courtesy. Then, He ultimately demonstrated that He was a friend of sinners, by saying to the woman, *"Your sins are forgiven."* (Lk. 7:36-50)

woman were left alone, He asked her, *"Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no man condemned you?"* She replied, *"No one, Lord."* He said, *"Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more."* (John 8:1-11) Jesus – more than anyone – cares about those who labor and are heavy laden under the dreadful burden of sin. He pardons the guilty and provides purity to the unholy. Furthermore, He is willing – even eager – to nourish the needy and to lift our burden from us, namely, the burden of sin. The people He approaches are people who feel a load on their life – whoever they may be. These are people who know their anxiety, acknowledge their remorse, and recognize their dire need for rest.

ing their problems by drinking, smoking, or using drugs, sedatives, and narcotics. In reality, none of these solve the problem, but they add to it.

Others try to solve their problems by imagining a better situation or drifting into daydreams. Nevertheless, those people wake up to reality only to find their problems still unsolved, while the only truly effective solution is with God who calls to us, saying, *"Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Mat. 11:28).

Therefore, draw close to the Lord:

*With a contrite heart
*Repenting in order to reconcile with Him

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From Fear To Worship

By: Christine Massoud

To recap from the last issue: Habakkuk was a prophet of God who had a burden on his heart as he looked around him and he saw all the violence, injustice, oppression, and strife going on among God's people. He saw God's people bluntly violating His Law, and people who were supposed to be in charge not doing anything about it. Then Habakkuk looked up and he said, "God, it doesn't even look like You are doing anything about what's going on." He asked God some earnest, honest questions. "God, why are You letting these things go on among Your people? How long will I pray to You and You won't do anything?" Well, after Habakkuk had poured his heart out to God in the first paragraph of chapter one, God answers Habakkuk, and says: "*Look among the nations, and watch...For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you.*" (Habakkuk 1:5) In other words, God is saying, "Open your eyes. Broaden your perspective. You've been too tied up just looking at what's going on right at your own feet. Look out and see what I am doing among the nations." God challenges Habakkuk, as if saying, "Look at what I am doing. I am not asleep, I am not passive, and I am not indifferent to your plight. I am concerned. I am at work."

God continues saying, "*For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans [Babylonians], a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs.*" (Habakkuk 1:6) Now, look at the picture here. Habakkuk is in Judah pouring out his heart to God about the condition of God's people, grieved over the corruption of the injustice going on among them. At the same time, more than 900 miles away in Babylon, God is orchestrating events to answer Habakkuk's prayer—but in a way that Habakkuk would never have dreamed. Now, at that point, the Assyrians were the dominant world power, but the Babylonians were just beginning to come to power. They were corrupt, aggressive, cruel, vicious, fierce, forceful, and brutal; they were invincible—or at least they thought they were. They were bent on world domination. Furthermore, they were arrogant and proud; they worshiped their own strength: "*Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; he commits offense, ascribing this power to his god.*" (Habakkuk 1:11) This arrogant, ruthless, cruel world power was **the instrument** God had chosen and intended to use to fulfill His purposes in the world. God says, "I'm at work in your day, and here's what I'm doing. I'm raising up this ruthless, arrogant, violent group of terrorists to **fulfill my purposes** and to answer your prayers. I will deal with the sin and injustice in Judah."

It is incomprehensible to Habakkuk that God would use people as wicked as the Chaldeans to deal with the sins among God's people. So, God's response to Habakkuk's questions has in fact raised more problems than it solved. **Habakkuk** means "**wrestler**"; he is wrestling with these questions, and he is wrestling with God, trying to comprehend His inscrutable wisdom.

"God, I know You. You are everlasting, immutable, and faithful. You keep Your promises. You are the sovereign Lord"

So what does Habakkuk do? He goes back to the things he knows to be true when his whole world is shaken, and God gives him this astounding answer. Habakkuk responds to God saying, "God, I know You. You are everlasting, immutable, and faithful. You keep Your promises. You are the sovereign Lord," as if he is rehearsing to himself, coaching himself: "This is what I know as true about God."

Habakkuk, the Prophet— Part 2

When your head is spinning and you're in confusion about what's going on around you, take this example from Habakkuk and go back to the things that you know are true, such as the character of God. What do you know about God's character? Rehearse it, and tell God what you know. Habakkuk says, "You are my God. We have a covenant-relationship and You are a covenant-keeping God."

That is why he says, "We shall not die. God, You may discipline us. You may chasten us, but You are not going to destroy us. There will be no cataclysmic judgment, or final judgment, against those who are truly Your people. We shall not die; of this I am sure. We are children of the covenant, those who believe in You."

Then be reminded that God chooses the means and the method of discipline that He knows is best. You need to leave that choice to God. Habakkuk would not have chosen for God to use the Chaldeans to chasten the Jews. Oh, maybe to chasten all the other pagan nations. Habakkuk says, "Lord, I know we need chastening, but I would have chosen a different instrument." God said, "Let Me choose the instrument." So Habak-

kuk says, "Lord, I don't understand this, but I believe it. I see it, that You've ordained the Chaldeans as a judgment and You have established them for reproof. This is not an accident. It is not out of Your control." Now, at the end of chapter one, Habakkuk was puzzled over how God could use the Chaldeans, and he gave this graphic description of it. It's like we're all just fish in the sea, and the Chaldeans have come with their hooks and have pulled us out. They are slaughtering people mercilessly. Is this going to go on forever? Habakkuk has been a little bit on the rampage in describing his concerns to God.



In fact, that is the last verse of chapter one: "*Shall they therefore empty their net, and continue to slay nations without pity?*" (Habakkuk 1:17) Again, I sense as I meditate on this passage that it's like there's this big pause, and no answer. So, what is Habakkuk going to do next? What does he do in the silence? Habakkuk says, "*I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what he [God] will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected*" (Habakkuk 2:1).

Now, I believe this verse is the turning point of the book as far as Habakkuk's story is concerned. Habakkuk goes up to his watchtower, picturing an attitude of expectation. Habakkuk is viewing himself as a lookout, as a sentinel

on a watchtower. He wants to get the high view. He doesn't want to just see what's happening down here on the ground. He wants to be able to look out to the horizon and see what's happening and what's in the big picture. Let me just tell you, it's in that watchpost position where we find hope. It's where we find perspective. That's where we look to the Lord, where we wait for Him, and where we listen to Him. It's where we stop talking, finally, so that we can let God talk. But you have to get your heart to a place where you are quiet and still, listening and waiting for God to speak. That's the attitude we

need as we go toward the Word of God. No more of me telling God how to run the universe. No more of me even asking God

all my questions. Now I will just be quiet and look out and try to see this thing from God's point of view and listen for God, listen for what He is going to say. Many times we have issues and questions in our lives; we need direction from the Lord on many different things. We need God's perspective, but the problem is that we stay so busy working, striving and playing 100 mph lifestyles that we never stop and listen to the Lord. Then we wonder why we do not have answers. Some of us need to turn off the TV, turn off the computer, and turn off the radio and take the time to say, "God, what is Your heart for me? What do I need to be doing? What do I need to be seeing in other people's lives? Lord, how do You want me dealing with this situation?"

Well, what Habakkuk saw on that watchtower was life-changing. When he came down from that post, he was not the same man he was when he went up. What he saw transformed his life, which has been the case with so many others throughout the Holy Scripture. I think of the prophet Isaiah. In chapter five, we see Isaiah uttering woes against the nation, and he is condemning and judging the people for things that should be taken seriously. But in chapter six, Isaiah saw the Lord in His Holy Temple and came out of that experience transformed. He

had a whole new perspective of God and of what was going on in the world. In the first thirty-seven chapters, Job is struggling to understand his suffering. He is striving with God; he is pleading his innocence, and he comes to the point of saying, "I do not deserve this!" Well, from his human perspective, he did not deserve this. Then, in chapter thirty-eight following, Job sees God. Job hears God. Job gets quiet, long enough to let God speak and, in the process, he gets God's perspective on his suffering. When he emerges, he is not the same man. Everything

looks different. Everything *is* different. He has hope; he has faith; he has grace; he has all that he needs to go on; he is not just as a survivor, but a victor, because he has seen the Lord. He says, "*I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You*" (Job 42:5). He has a whole new perspective, not only of God, but also of himself. He no longer sees himself as an innocent victim. He sees himself as a sinner in need of God's mercy and grace, because he went to his watchpost and took the time to listen to God.

Lord, would You show us what it means for us to take our stand at our watchpost, to station ourselves on a tower, to look out and see what You will say to us? Show us how to do that in the clamor and the busyness and the noisiness of our daily lives. Help us to do whatever it takes to get up there, to meet with You, to listen to You. Thank You for revealing Yourself and Your ways to us when we are in that position. Change us. Change our perspective. Change our lives as we look out to see what You will say. Amen.

BIBLE STUDY

HOLY BOOK OF GENESIS

CHAPTER 8

1. What was the first thing Noah did after he came out of the Ark?
2. Give a verse that shows God renewing the blessing of the Creation.

CHAPTER 9

1. What change in man's diet did God make after the flood?
2. What reason did God give for men not to shed man's blood?
3. What curse did Noah apply to Canaan?

CHAPTER 10

1. From which sons are the Gentiles descended?
2. Why was Peleg called that name?

CHAPTER 11

1. How did God stop the building of the Tower of Babel?
2. Which line of descent from Noah is most fully

described, and why?

CHAPTER 12

1. List the blessings God promised Abram when he left his country.
2. Was Sarai lying when she said that Abram was her brother?
3. Abram left Egypt as a rich or poor man? Give proof.

CHAPTER 13

1. Where did Lot choose to dwell after leaving Abram? Why?
2. What promise did God make to Abram after he separated from Lot?

CHAPTER 14

1. Why did Abram give the king of Salem a tenth of everything?
2. Why did Abram's allies take spoils when he wouldn't?

On the first day of the blessed Coptic month of Kiahk, in December 2009, reports of miraculous apparitions of the Holy Virgin Saint Mary spread throughout Egypt and around the world. The apparitions took place in El Warraq, a small island on the Nile River that is part of Greater Cairo and the Giza governate.

Here is the official statement of His Grace Bishop Theodosius, General Bishop of Giza:

In the era of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and Anba Dumadius, Archbishop of Giza,

The Bishopric of Giza announces that the Holy Virgin has appeared in a transfiguration at the Church named after her in Warraq al-Hadar, Giza, in the early hours of Friday 11 December 2009 at 1:00am. The Holy Virgin appeared in her full height in luminous robes, above the middle dome of the church, in pure white dress and a royal blue belt. She had a crown on her head, above which appeared the cross on top of the dome. The crosses on top of the church's domes and towers glowed brightly with light. The Holy Virgin moved between the domes and on to the top of the church gate between its two twin towers. The local residents all saw her. The apparition lasted from 1:00am till 4:00am on Friday, and was registered by cameras and cell phones. Some 3,000 people from the neighbourhood, surrounding areas, and passers-by gathered in the street in front of the church to see the apparition.

Since Friday, the huge crowds gathered in the vicinity of the church have been seeing luminous white pigeons soaring above the church during various times of the night, as well as a star which emerges suddenly in the heaven, travels some 200 metres across, then disappears. The huge crowds gathered around the church do not cease singing hymns and praises for the Holy Virgin.

This is a great blessing for the Church and for all the people of Egypt.
May her blessing and intercession benefit us all.

Signed
Anba Theodosius
Bishop-General of Giza

Announcements

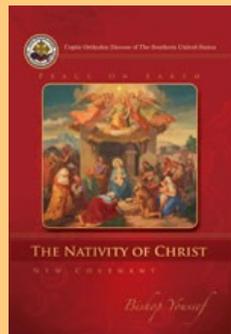
Congratulations to Fr. Tadros Hermina, his family, and the congregation of St. Peter the Seal of Martyrs, West Palm Beach, FL, on his ordination into the priesthood. May the Lord bless his service.



In attendance on this blessed day were H.G. Bishop Youssef, H.G. Bishop Serapion, & H.G. Bishop Maximos, along with the Diocese Priest:s Fr. Luka Wassif, Fr. Kyrillos Makar, Fr. Daoud Tawadrous, and Fr. Philemon Hanna.

The Nativity of Christ New Covenant

by H.G. Bishop Youssef
Youth & Adult's Book - English



The Sacrament of Church Holy Matrimony

by Bishop Mettaous,
Bishop of St. Mary Monastery, El Sorian
Youth & Adult's Book - English
ISBN: 977-5005-36-1

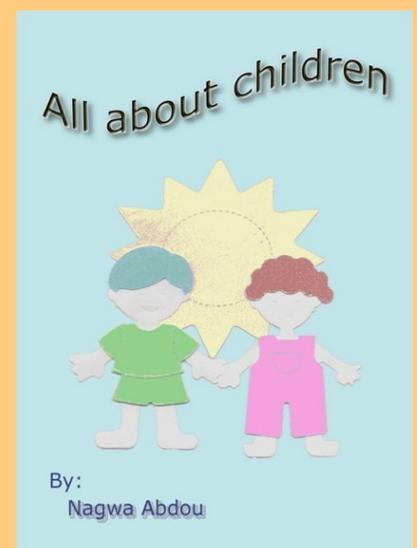


All about Children covers the development of a child from their infancy all the way through their teenage years, and is a valuable resource in helping us understand the various stages of a child's development.

All the profits from this book will be directed to the construction efforts at St. Philopateer Coptic Orthodox Church in Dallas.

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"The Orthodox Divine Liturgy, An Invitation to a Heavenly Journey"

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and the Seven Churches of Holy Book of Revelation

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July 31st - Aug. 10th

Under the auspices of
His Grace Bishop Youssef

For more information on the upcoming
trip, please contact Irene Bakheet
(480) 206-7740 or turkeygreece2010@yahoo.com

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese
of the Southern United States

South Africa

2010 Mission Trip

May 1st - May 18th

“The Joy of the LORD is your strength”

For more information on the upcoming
trip, please contact Irene Bakheet:
(850) 499-4878 or ibakheet1@yahoo.com

“Do the work of an evangelist.”

Under the auspices of
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The Coptic Orthodox Diocese
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