

MIGHTY MAGAZINE MARROWS

Life. God. Truth. For Coptic Youth

Visits of GRACE

Χοῦραβ Χοῦραβ Χοῦραβ

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

Psalm 127:4

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

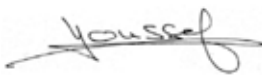
My Beloved,

Grace is a distinctive feature that can only be found in Christianity. Visits of grace are defining moments in our lives, though they often go unrecognized. When you reach crossroads, have exhausted your own plans of achieving effective goals, are ready to give up the fight against hardships and tribulations, are consumed by bad habits and sins, or are just looking for some kind of guidance, you ought to pay close attention as grace enlightens a blurred path with vivid indicators of opportunities for a turning point or deep-seeded change. It is during these times that Christ’s grace abounds and embraces us when we have weakened under culminating demands and pressures or are just absorbed in the contemplation on life and in need of direction. By grace, we are redirected unto the path of salvation. By grace, we are given unmerited sufficiency. By grace, we can meet new horizons.

The articles in this edition of the Mighty Arrows Magazine examine the different kindnesses and mercies of grace. Undeserving are we for such compassion, yet visits of grace are inevitable. You are the only one who can decide whether to accept or reject this immeasurable love. At the door of your heart stands your Lord knocking and waiting for your answer and invitation for Him to enter into your life—to fix your broken heart, shattered dreams, and wounded soul.

“O Lord, sprinkle on my heart the dew of Thy grace.”
Meditations of St. John Chrysostom

God bless you,



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

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MIGHTY ARROWS
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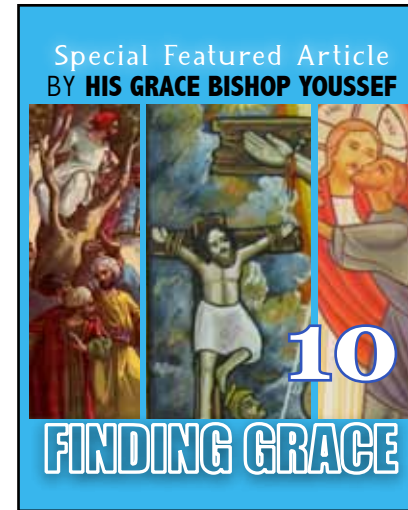
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Love 105

Love's Permanence

A Slightly Unnecessary
Defense of Marriage

BY JAMES HELMY



I was recently sitting with an elderly couple from the old city of El-Minya in Upper Egypt, and the conversation that transpired between us gave me much food for thought. They were recounting tales of the hard life they were forced to lead because of recent breakouts of religious fanaticism and violence. Their church was besieged by certain youth who were drunk on the fury of dogmatic hate. They vandalized it, bombarded it with Molotov bottles, and almost completely torched the church to a crisp. The congregation escaped with their lives, but afterwards the couple was barely able to walk the streets in front of their own home without the threat of attack by these savages. This elderly couple also spoke of their lives in Iraq, and the vicissitudes and fortunes that country had brought upon them. All the while, I contemplated the scene of these two elderly, simple souls, united in a common life and a common struggle, sharing the hopes and fears life presents to them, molding an existence together like a right and left hand working together to fashion a pot of clay. Their souls seemed so honest and down-to-earth, and their basic love seemed like a type of love that is a relic of a bygone era. I knew instinctively that they could each rely on the other to always be there, for better or for worse.

But there is a new type of “love” raising its ugly head in our days. A few years ago, I was reading a celebrated national magazine when I came upon an article with the provocative title, “I Don’t”: *The Case Against Marriage*. I thought it worthwhile to take a peek into this little piece of sophisticated writing once I could find the time, so I placed it under a pile of other un-

necessary literary debris and forgot all about it. When recently I was informed by a friend that an association of noisy atheists had petitioned the government to “abolish marriage,” I saw it advantageous to pull out the old manuscript and finally peer into its contents. What I found was that two intelligent female authors had penned an article that was extremely fluent, extremely lucid, and felt to me to be so wrong. Seldom do I come across public articles that are written with such questionable logic, but I was happy to see it as an opportunity, possibly a *sign*, for me to sit and explain in writing why marriage is a good thing.

The authors’ basic premise was simply a summary of the modern *scientific* or *reductionist* view of marriage: that, in the course of evolution, the animal kingdom has strived to find ways to protect and preserve offspring for the prolongation of each species. Humans, being so weak and so vulnerable as babies, are in need of special care by their parents. The authors stated that *social* evolution took over from *biological* evolution once our species became intelligent enough to invent customs and culture. It was their belief that marriage was the ultimate product of that social evolution, because it guaranteed the male’s attachment to the female for as long as she needed his protection and support for the safe rearing of the children. In other words, marriage and the family were invented by Nature to bind the male in the service of the female, because Nature had bound the female in the service of the child.

Then came the industrial revolution (the argument continues),

women’s rights, contraception, long working hours and over time, and all social aspects have changed. The woman no longer relies on her husband for monetary support but earns more. She no longer needs to bear a litter of seven children to run the farm. She is no longer expected to *save herself* for marriage because she has been emancipated. Marriage will only increase her daily toil by the domestic duties of cooking and cleaning. Marriage is in every way a liability on her happiness instead of an aid to it. No wonder, then (say our authors), divorce has risen 1000% in the last hundred

years. It would really be more rational and timesaving to commit to an unofficial relationship, since “The two of us are educated, young, urban professionals...” The authors actually found an anthropologist who could utter the chilling lie that humans are really meant for “short-term, monogamous relationships of three to four years.”

All these artificial ideas and moralities that are contrived, willy-nilly, out of the heads of our modern thinkers go far to show how exquisitely logic can be bent and twisted to make bad ideas seem good. How is it, I wonder, not without a tinge of astonishment, that modern philosophers can so brazenly tear down the world’s ancient codes of morality

and supplant them with a *new ethic* that obviously does not promote human happiness? Why so much contempt for the heart, and for that precious indispensable unit called the family? How can these people with such cold indifference (shall I say malice?) gleefully mock and disparage an *institution* that has brought health and healing and happiness to so much of humanity?

All these artificial ideas and moralities that are contrived, willy-nilly, out of the heads of our modern thinkers go far to show how exquisitely logic can be bent and twisted to make bad ideas seem good.

conceit of individuals who make up those things. It is rather like condemning education because the local schools have bad teachers, or condemning dentistry because the local dentist pulled out the wrong tooth. The current dissolution of marriage is a failure of *our* generation. To call previous generations hypocritical or false (Bernard Shaw) because couples stuck together through tough times, unlike what we do, betrays a mean contempt for that simple, unpretentious virtue of our ancestors, and a blind preference for the highly dubious and shifty *virtue* of today’s world. Back then, they knew in their bones that marriage and family were ideals worthy of risking one’s neck. It was heretical to abandon one’s

“But married couples,” they retort, “are not happy, and the modern family is a dysfunctional mishap.” But this is just an egotistical excuse. It is not marital love or the family that are failing, but the stubborn



mate and children just because one was no longer *in the mood*. Today, the heresy is to *stay* when one’s mood bids him to flee or to *endure* when one’s whims beg him to abandon. To commit to love when one no longer feels it tingling in the limbs makes one a modern apostate. Science, after all, decrees that we are inveterate polygamists. So let us eat, drink, and be merry and promiscuous!

But the last word, after all is said and done, must be for that quiet and steady love which is the fruit and joy of a life-long marriage. It has always seemed to me that 25-year couples know something that 5-year couples do not, and 50-year couples know something that the 25-year ones do not. There is a secret wealth, a hidden happiness, that awaits those who have the patience and emotional stability to encounter life’s changing scenes together without fear to the very end. Through all the changing fortunes of life, through the storms and the sunshine, through famine and prosperity, the two souls that march resolutely forward hand-in-hand down this unpredictable avenue of existence, gradually meld together into a single mind, a single vision, a single purpose. Why would some authors wish to deprive us of that inimitable joy just because they themselves cannot attain it? “*Love never fails*” (1 Corinthians 13:8).



Amma PELAGIA

A journey of repentance through
God's grace.

BY MAREYA NAGUIB

in beauty and adornment of the body... why do we not adorn ourselves and wash the dust from our unhappy souls; why do we let ourselves be neglected?²³ The following day, Pelagia actually came to the cathedral and heard Bishop Nonnos preaching about salvation. His voice piqued her curiosity as she stood listening from a distance. His words moved her heart and she believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and desired to live a life of repentance. Bishop Nonnos baptized her and she received the grace of the Holy Spirit. He encouraged her and taught her to fight the good fight without falling into despair because of her old sins. She led a penitent life with a firm heart so that she would not go back to her old ways. She sought a life of purity and worked hard while asking for God's grace to support her in her journey.

Amma Pelagia dressed herself in men's clothing, went on a journey to Jerusalem, and worshiped in the sanctuaries there. She met Abba Alexander, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who sent her to one of the monasteries outside Jerusalem. She dwelt in the monastery for forty years battling against the wars of Satan and growing in Christ. She departed in peace on Babah 11 (October 21).

Let us remember Amma Pelagia and her wonderful redemption. The story of this marvelous saint gives each one of us joy and hope, and shows us the power of repentance. May the grace of God help us live a life of repentance, and may we learn to depend on Christ alone for all our needs so that we may receive the gift of eternal life.

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¹ John 14:26.

² Ward, 67.

³ Ibid, 67-68.

When one says the phrase *Through God's grace, have you ever wondered what this truly means?* How does the *grace* of God work through our lives and how do we attain it? The word *grace* means the unmerited work of the Holy Spirit; all of us have received grace during Chrismation, which accompanies baptism. It is a gift from God, not given to us due to our works, but rather because of God's love towards His handmade creation. Therefore, since grace is defined to be the Holy Spirit's work, we pray in the gospel of the third hour of the Agpeya the passage, "*The Helper, the Holy Spirit...*" indicating that the Holy Spirit is a helper in our spiritual journey. He is not meant to do our job; He is to help us through our struggles to reach Christ. That is why contemplating on the lives of the saints gives us hope and joy as we witness how the grace of God has worked through their lives and allowed them to gain entrance into heaven. This is seen in a great saint known by the name of Amma Pelagia.

Amma Pelagia was born in the city of Antioch to pagan parents who did not know Christ. She grew up in a corrupt house, and therefore, did not learn about God or His commandments. She led a sinful life with no shame or regret. One day, she passed by a group of bishops who were holding a conference in the open air. She was scantily dressed and bedecked with jewels, pearls, and adornments. The bishops were abashed and looked away, but Bishop Nonnos surprised everyone by staring after her for a long time and saying, "Were you not delighted by her great beauty?"² He continued, "What do you think, beloved brothers, how many hours does this woman spend in her chamber giving all her mind and attention to adorning herself for the play in order to lack nothing

Homeless in the Health System

Dedication and love.

BY MARIAN ADLY

Let's start with basic numbers: 24/7, three hospitals, two nursing homes, and after a 10-month grueling journey, my father and I made it home together.

It was January 2009 and my father had a fall and hit his head. Suffering stroke-like bleeds, my father barely held onto life in an ICU following an emergency craniotomy. On the second day into his recovery, he was responsive to me and I had hope that he was going to get through it. I gently reassured him that I was by his side and that we would get through this together. It was then I made the decision to stay by my father's side around the clock until we made it home together. Little did I know what that journey would entail.

The very next morning, my father suffered another bleed and he slipped into a coma where his vitals were unstable and constantly fluctuating. The drastic ups and downs on the monitors were relentless, leaving me emotionally and physically exhausted. Each stable minute seemed to be accompanied with 10 minutes of sheer panic, especially among the nurses who struggled with administrating IV titrations. I desperately needed to find order in the chaos. I needed clarity with each time I made critical medical decisions for my father, asking the right questions, at the right time, based on the right information. In some instances, some of the doctors, nurses, and managers were angels and at other times, they opposed me. Serving in the role of a fearless caregiver means that opposition is not a battle for power and control,

but rather doing what is best for your loved one. Despite the struggles, I stayed focused on my father, doing nothing more than supporting his simple need to survive. If my father had given up, it would have been evident. It was obvious he was fighting, and I was going to fight with him.

After four months of hospitalizations, several critical surgeries, and a short stay in a nursing home, I was informed that my father could no longer stay in the hospital. In the same breath, I was told that I could not take my father home. I questioned where I would take my father and I was told to find a nursing home. I didn't know where to begin. Again, I needed to arrange yet another transition while buffering my father from all that comes with such a change. He was so fragile.

After weeks of researching and numerous site visits, I finally found the right nursing home. Then began a six-month stay where I stayed and cared for him around the clock. It was in the middle of our stay that I realized that on our journey we have literally been homeless in the health system, moving from place to place, floor to floor, room to room. It was in that moment I realized that home was my father.

I am a fierce caregiver because I...

- ✦ Informed myself with knowledge to distill good from bad in making the right decisions for my father;
- ✦ Had confidence to make tough decisions. I had refused surgeries, medications, treatments, and hospital admissions when I knew it was not appropriate for my father;
- ✦ Persisted to work through caring for my father, even when things seemed too difficult to bear;
- ✦ Stayed optimistic when everyone around us was pessimistic;
- ✦ Spoke up and advocated for my father.

There were many times when the care demands were so overwhelming that no matter how much of myself I gave, I never felt successful. I am a fierce caregiver to my dear father, because he and my mother were for me as their child.

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God's Voice and Us

Are my senses trained?

BY BOULIS IBRAHIM

Visits of grace are particular movements or actions of the Holy Spirit in an individual's life. They may have various aims and objectives and can take on many forms. Most often, they aim to lead to repentance, but can also be calls for a particular service or to support and strengthen faith and spiritual resolve. Visits of grace can occur by an apparition, a dream, a person saying a specific word or message, by the work of God, a special feeling, a test of faith, a test of health, or a particular difficulty in private or working life. They are all calls and awakenings to correct one's path and enlighten one's ways, to align them with God's and with the path of righteousness, or to comfort, strengthen, or build the inner spiritual character of man.

St. Anthony had many visits

of grace, of which three were most prominent; they helped shape his life, and consequently the world. The first was a conceptual reckoning at the deathbed of his rich and powerful father. "Where is your power, glory, and wealth?" he exclaimed. "You left the world unwillingly, but I will leave it willfully."¹ This visit of grace was God's way of elevating St. Anthony's mind to realize the fleeting nature of earthly life with all its wealth and power.

The second visit came when he entered a church and heard the Holy Bible being read: "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."² This had a special effect on St. Anthony, who sold his inheritance, gave it away in alms, and left to worship in solitude at the edge of the village

beside the Nile bank.

The third visit came through the voice of a woman, "who started to remove her clothing for a bath near where he stayed. Upon relaying his surprise of such an action beside the dwelling of a solitary worshipper, she replied, 'You should live in the inner wilderness as this place is not suitable for monks.'³ He took this as a specific message from the Lord, upon which he immediately ventured into the desert, which led him to the current area of St. Anthony's monastery in Mount Qalzam near the Red Sea. St. Anthony's responses to these visits of grace led to the beginnings of worldwide monasticism.

The Lord has many different ways to visit each person with grace. The Holy Spirit seeks to lead every human to the knowledge of Christ, and every person, whether a believer

or not, experiences at least one such visit of grace during his or her lifetime. Believers experience these visits with higher frequency and strength because the Holy Spirit dwells in them. But with all people, the extent to which these visits achieve their aim depends more often than not on the nature and depth of the response of the recipient. A deep positive response will be met with great action from the Holy Spirit, as the synergy between God and human becomes more intertwined. At the other extreme, if the visit of grace and the voice of God are ignored, either due to ignorance and lack of recognition of God's voice, or due to blatant disregard of this voice, even if recognized, the visit becomes ineffective in one's life.

The Holy Bible offers many examples of righteous people who successfully reacted to their divine visit. Abraham was called directly: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you."⁴ He went out not knowing where to go. Abraham's obedient response was the beginning of an eternal covenant and continuous blessings culminating in Christ being a descendent of Abraham. Likewise, Matthew the tax collector was at work doing his accounts when the Lord passed by (visited) and called him to follow Him. His immediate response was the beginning of his choice as one of the twelve. St. Peter and his brother, St. Andrew, also had a similar calling while at work casting their nets. Their immediate response of leaving everything and following Him, together with God's grace, made them fishers of men. This also happened to St. John and St. James, the sons of Zebedee.

Saul of Tarsus was dramatically visited on the road to Damascus while he was a suppressor of the church. This visit was a calling and, with his obedient response, made him the great messenger to the Gentiles. St. John the Beloved, while in exile on

the island of Patmos, was visited in a way he could not have expected. A voice and a great revelation started, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, what you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches."⁵

Grace visits were not only for the righteous; they also occurred to some sinners. The Samaritan woman was visited unexpectedly when a Man asked her for a drink. This changed her entire sinful life. The revelation was gradual. At first, she felt the one talking to her was a "Jew," then a "sir," then a "prophet," and finally, that He was the awaited Messiah.⁶ Zacchaeus the rich chief tax collector climbed the sycamore tree in expectation. "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house,"⁷ the Lord said. The visit caused Zacchaeus to repent: "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."⁸ The Holy Bible is full of such stories of visits of grace.

Many feel the voice calling them for a holy life with Christ. Every person should, therefore, take stock of what he or she reads and hears, and take heed to the lessons imparted by life's situations. Be sure that grace will visit you. And when He does, be prepared to respond positively with fortitude. May God bless us all.

This article benefited from sermons on the topic by H. H. Pope Shenouda III (3 October 2007) and H. G. Metropolitan Arsanious of El-Minya (26 August 2011), both available in Arabic on YouTube and Facebook.

¹ Beni-Suef Publication Committee. *Bustan-El-Ruhban*. 2nd Edition. Vol. Arabic. Beni-Suef: Generation Publishing House, 1977, 21.

² Mathew 19:21.

³ Ibid *Bustan*.

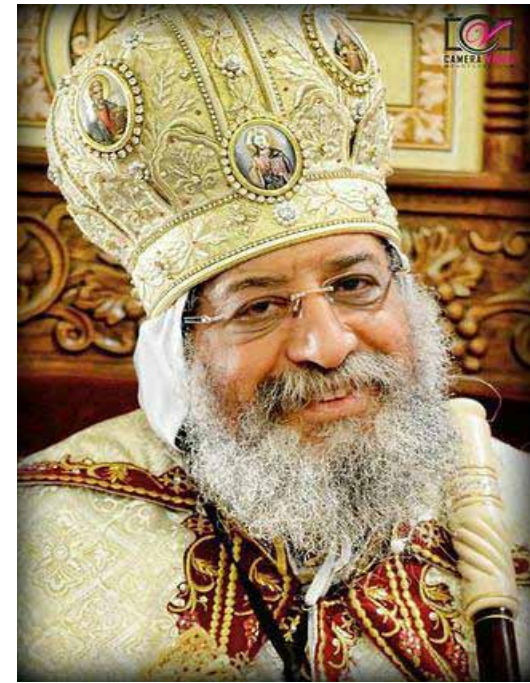
⁴ Genesis 12:1.

⁵ Revelation 1:11.

⁶ John 4.

⁷ Luke 19:5.

⁸ Luke 19:8.



Anecdote

BY HIS HOLINESS
POPE TAWADROS II

In the 1980s, before heading for a servants meeting where he was due to give a lecture, His Eminence Metropolitan Pachomius was confronted with a problem which ignited his anger (he is the type of person whose emotions show on his face). On the way, before reaching the lecture hall, a little girl tugged on the tip of his gown and said, "You are so sweet, as sweet as sugar"! He proceeded to the lecture where he spoke about how a little child can change everything.

-His Holiness Pope Tawadros

The problem remained; only his emotions changed. Negative emotions (anger, hatred, resentment, etc.) never alter events; the one carrying the emotions suffers the loss. Do not let any person or event have negative power over you.



Zacchaeus



Demas



Judas

FINDING GRACE

Comparison Among Three Thieves



Special Featured Article

BY HIS GRACE BISHOP YOUSSEF

“ Grace transformed the hearts and minds of Demas and Zacchaeus, but lack of faith in His grace drove Judas to self-destruction. ”

Our Lord Jesus Christ encountered three unusual thieves in His ministry. He met one in the beginning of His ministry, another was a companion throughout His ministry, and the third only appeared a few hours at the end of His ministry. All three men were accused of similar transgressions—greed and robbery. Each thief had the privilege of having Christ’s undivided attention for a period of time. Visits of grace came to each of them in their own territory. Each of these three men had to overcome their own barriers that they had created in order to allow the visit of grace to enter into their lives and heal them.

Zacchaeus—The Tax Collector

He was one of the most notorious criminals in town. Being despised by his countrymen made no difference to him. His infamous reputation subjected his own family to the shame of his corruption and robbery of innocent victims through the badge of his profession. Why did He want to see Jesus? The time of visitation had come. The time had come when this man of little stature decided to climb a sycamore tree just to get a glimpse of Christ. When he set his pride and greed aside at the base of the tree long enough, he was elevated to see more clearly, not with human eyes, but with his heart that would eventually be transformed.

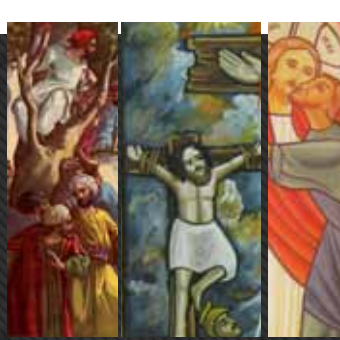
Christ’s visit to Jericho was not a mere coincidence. He was obviously seeking Zacchaeus and curtailed all plans to go to his home for a more personal visit. It was not enough for our Lord to just waive at him along the way, or to acknowledge him by name, or even to let him touch His hands. These would be illustrations of Christ at the door knocking. Zacchaeus’ taking the initiative by a desire to seek Jesus is the door opening. Thus, as Christ promised, He would and did enter Zacchaeus’ home and dined with Him—bringing salvation to the once marginalized household.

Judas Iscariot—The Disciple

Called to be an apostle and a close disciple of the Lord Jesus

Christ, Judas Iscariot witnessed more miracles than all of Christ’s followers because he was one of the chosen twelve. Not even St. Mary, the Mother of God, saw all the miracles that Judas did. There was no need for her to do so; she already knew. The miracles and the teachings were more than enough to satisfy the other eleven disciples who remained loyal to their end. Perfect—they were not. They had faults and weaknesses. Peter denied Christ, Thomas had doubts about His resurrection, Phillip had insecurities, Nathanael (also known as Bartholomew) mocked if anything good can come out of Nazareth, James and the beloved John were not so gentle and loving at first and were referred to as “sons of thunder.” Thus, righteousness alone was not the main criteria to be a disciple.

Judas had obviously more opportunities to accept Christ’s grace because he knew Him well. Thus, it is not a matter of quantity or a matter of whom you know, but a true disciple has to be teachable. The Ninevites did not know God, but they repented immediately when Jonah finally arrived to warn them that God’s wrath would come upon them if they continued in their corruption.¹ Judas, on the other hand, could not see beyond himself. Money was his god. He was the treasurer and used the money in the treasury to advance his own purposes, not the will of God. He was not seeking his salvation or any opportunity for charity towards others. He rejected his discipleship from the beginning and all the way through to the end of his life.



**Finding Grace:
Comparison
Among
Three Thieves**
**HIS GRACE
BISHOP
YOUSSEF**

A disciple has to be teachable, but Judas refused to learn, though Christ Jesus our Lord gave him many chances.

Demas—The Thief on the Right Hours before their deaths—side-by-side upon their own crosses, defined a close relationship between Christ and Demas—commonly known as the “*thief on the right.*” No privileged perspective did Demas have about Christ—no miracles, no sermons, no parables—really nothing, but he knew his time of visitation had come and responded with a strong welcome. Demas was determined to not let this visit come and go. Grace found him even while he was nailed to a cross minutes before his death. He died with Christ Jesus and entered into Paradise with Him.

Demas represents hope for salvation. The relationship between Christ and Demas was illustrative of Christ seeking the lost sheep as far and as long as it takes. Servants often tire quickly, too soon, when one of their Sunday school children strays and refuses to return. Christ demonstrated an important lesson of perseverance towards pursuing the lost soul. Demas—humbled by Christ’s love buried his face and shameful past in Christ’s heart and won salvation through Christ’s grace.

Transformation

How were the lives of Demas and Zacchaeus transformed, but not Judas? Demas and Zacchaeus were

known thieves, but Judas was a disciple of Christ. Zacchaeus and Demas knew they were sinners, but Judas was a hypocrite and hid behind a cloak of righteousness. His love of money was more discreet than the others. Judas knew Jesus Christ our Lord for a longer time and knew Him better than the other two characters. Nonetheless, love was not in his heart. He accused Mary, Lazarus and Martha’s sister, of being wasteful when she poured the expensive fragrant oil upon the feet of our Lord, then wiped them with her hair.² This she did out of love, but Judas did not understand love. He could only manifest the pretense of love.

Zacchaeus and Demas stole heaven by accepting their visits of grace, while Judas rejected his time of visitation. Grace transformed the hearts and minds of Demas and Zacchaeus, but lack of faith in His grace drove Judas to self-destruction. Christ knows our weaknesses and struggles. He knows we are unworthy of His grace. Though He does not walk among us now in the flesh as He did two thousand years ago, He appears to us in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned, so that if and when we reach out to others, He reveals that it is really He whom we are touching. These are also visits of grace.

“I was hungry and you gave Me food.”³

“I was thirsty and you gave Me drink.”⁴

“I was a stranger and you took Me in.”⁵

“I was naked and you clothed Me.”⁶

“I was sick and you visited Me.”⁷

“I was in prison and you came to Me.”⁸

Conclusion

In the peculiar setting when Christ first met with Zacchaeus, a transformation began to happen. It did not end there. Christ went to Zacchaeus’ home and dined together with him and his family at their home. The corrupt tax collector’s heart was finally completely transformed. Zacchaeus learned his lesson and vowed to not only give one half of his goods to the poor, but also to restore fourfold to anyone from whom he had taken goods by false accusation.⁹

Demas, on the other hand, had run out of all options to find grace—so grace came to him. In his final hours, he was also completely transformed. He repented, confessed his sins, accepted the Lord, and died with Him in faith and purity. Demas’ only request was granted, “*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.*”¹⁰ The unworthy was granted worth by grace.

We have choices. Judas made his choice clear and rejected many visits of grace. Thus, he was not transformed, but actually worsened by his greed and pride. Had he been a true disciple, he would have learned the beauty of grace—not by worth, but by grace and truth through our Lord Jesus Christ. Transformation is the result of grace. Transform to His will, so that by His grace, His will, will be your will.

To God be the glory, forever,
Amen.

¹ Jonah 3 ⁷ Ibid.
² John 12:3 ⁸ Ibid.
³ Matthew 25:35 ⁹ Luke 19:8.
⁴ Ibid. ¹⁰ Luke 23:42.
⁵ Ibid. ¹¹ John 1:16
⁶ Matthew 25:36

My Grace is Sufficient for You

My strength is made perfect in weakness.

BY THEOPESTE KERELOS



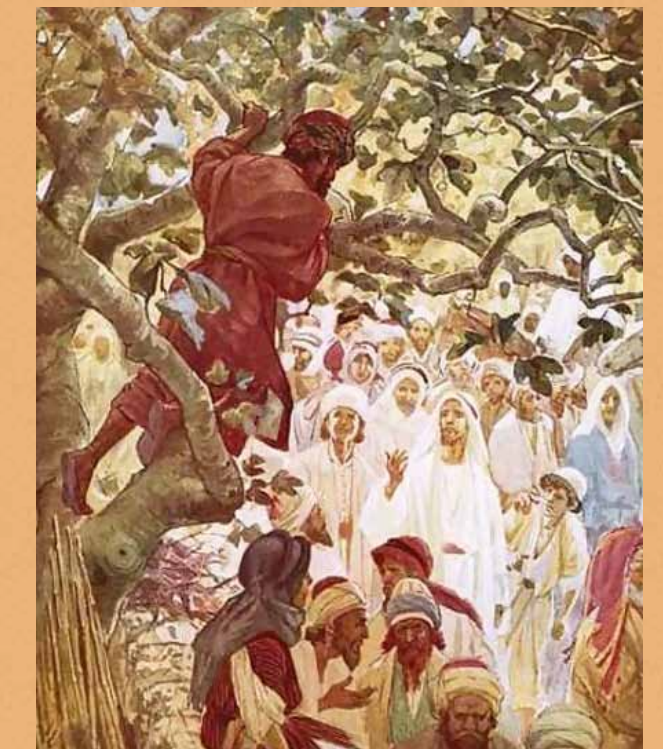
“Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when... there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.”¹ Perhaps if not for this verse, one might never wonder why God did not send Elijah to any Israelite household or why He did not just provide for him without the aid of any human being. It is simply that the widow was the one who needed Elijah. His dwelling with her was God’s visit of grace to her. If Elijah had gone to a household in Israel, he most likely would have received complaints about the famine and maybe even accusations that he had caused the famine. In contrast, when Elijah went to the widow of Zarephath in Sidon, she admitted her weakness: that she only had enough oil and flour to feed herself and her only son once and then die. Despite her weakness, though, she obeyed Elijah when he asked her to cook food for him first. It was at that point that God’s grace was revealed: when the widow recognized and admitted her weakness and submitted to the will of God. The bin of flour was never used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry. So, God’s words to St. Paul, saying, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness,*”² can be applied and observed under various circumstances. Notice St. Paul’s response to God’s promise of grace. He says that he will boast in his infirmities and in his weakness. He immediately took advantage of the promise in order to attain God’s grace.

In the case of the widow, God, who searches the hearts, acknowledged her humbleness and endowed her with a visit of grace. In the case of St. Paul, God explained the matter to him. However, in countless other situations, the visits of grace came to people who innately felt that humbling themselves before God was the key to being lifted up. For instance, the centurion at Capernaum who needed our Lord Jesus Christ to heal his servant came and knelt down before the Lord and presented his request. How surprising it is that a man of such authority would come and kneel down before our incarnate Lord who appeared as an average man wandering around with some followers! On top of that, the centurion did not deem himself worthy of receiving our Lord Jesus Christ in his house. As a result, he received not only the healing of his servant, but also praise from the Lord and fame throughout all the generations up until now.³

Likewise, Zacchaeus the chief tax collector was humble enough to climb a tree in order to merely see our Lord Jesus Christ. His humbleness won him the honor of being worthy to entertain the Lord at his home. Upon meeting the Lord, Zacchaeus soon realized his weaknesses and admitted his sins. Immediately, he obtained grace and assurance that salvation had come to his house.⁴

No doubt, there are countless other examples of people who received grace in times of weakness or humbleness. Now it is our turn. We have the biblical promises and diverse examples from the Holy Bible and from the lives of the saints. Therefore, let us admit our human weaknesses and submit to God in order to gain our visits of grace. As the desert fathers used to say, “*For God seeing our weakness, protects us; when we glorify ourselves, He withdraws His protection and we are lost.*”⁵

¹ Luke 4:25-26.
² 2 Corinthians 12:9.
³ Matthew 8:5-13.
⁴ Luke 19:1-10.
⁵ Ward, Benedicta, trans. *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers: Systematic Sayings from the Anonymous Series of the Apophthegmata Patrum.* Fairacres: SLG Press, 1997, 49.



Once Upon a Visit

I will make a new covenant...they all shall know Me.

BY MARIAM GUIRGIS



Nermine

Nermine was a teenager who went to church regularly. She had her own personal time with the Lord regularly as well. She spent time reading the Word and meditating on it. She did not realize it, but that was the time when the seed that was planted in her heart was growing into a tree.

One Sunday, while she was praying during the Liturgy, she was attacked by unpleasant thoughts. She tried to fight them, but they were stronger. She kept fighting and asking God for help, but they were still there giving her a hard time. When it was time for Communion, she approached the Holy Sacrament with fear and a plea for mercy. The moment she partook of the Holy Body, the thoughts immediately disappeared, like a vapor that appeared for a little time and then vanished away. She could not even remember those thoughts. The mere remembrance of them could not be found any more. A few days later, she revealed this incident to her father of confession. That was when she first learned that it was a visit of grace.

Stacy

Stacy was one of those Christians who thought deeply about the Word of God. She usually studied the Holy Bible with the aid of commentaries. It was not unusual for her to spend an hour or more on a chapter every day. She read, understood, meditated, prayed the Word, and wrote personal notes. Spending time in the presence of the Holy Spirit was priceless to her, and she did not keep track of the time. Studying the Word was like standing in front of a mirror. She could see her sins and learned how to be cleansed from them. That precious time was a purifying process.

One Sunday, while Stacy was driving to church, she was pondering about the pain we feel when we do something wrong. She knew that the Holy Bible commended suffering inflicted on us by others for no fault of our own. But she wondered about suffering for our faults and inaudibly, asked a question of God. She arrived at the church, attended the Divine Liturgy, and sat down to listen to the priest's sermon. She was pleasantly

surprised when the sermon turned to be on the passage from 1 Peter 2:18-25 (mind you she had not spoken with the priest before the Divine Liturgy). That passage talks about enduring suffering for Christ's sake. On exactly what she had been meditating before coming to church that morning. To her further amazement, she found the priest answering the question she had inaudibly posed to God. The priest had even used the exact words she had in her question to God. Stacy knew that it was God answering her question and had used the priest to talk to her. She knew it was one of those visits of grace, and she glorified God.

Andrew

Andrew had been walking with God for many years. He had many personal experiences with Him, upon which Andrew built his faith. It was because of these personal experiences that Andrew learned that every hardship would pass, even though it surely did not seem so at

the time. Andrew learned that God is not far away, and that He allows tribulations for our purification. He knew God keeps an eye on us while we are in the fire until the right time comes to pull us out of the trial. Andrew knew all of this; he knew it in his mind as well as in his heart.

At some point in his life, Andrew was faced with one of those extremely difficult situations. He used to tell himself that this too would pass. He knew he had to bear the suffering, and weather the storm, keep his eyes on the Lord, pray fervently, and stand fast in his faith. His feelings lay very heavily on his heart. He was very depressed, hopeless, and extremely stressed out. In his mind, he knew he just had to bear this and fight it by being closer to God, and he did just that. He prayed like he never did in the past. He felt like heaven was open when he prayed and that he was talking directly to God, as the only friend he had. He read the Holy Bible and meditated. He went to church more than usual because he needed it more than ever. Andrew kept praying, spending time in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and knocking at God's door for mercy during this difficult time. Things were not getting better; his nights were long and restless. He yearned for the sunshine every day so he could get up and get out. He prayed for peace, but he was not getting any. He prayed for rest, but he spent night after night without sleep. It was very hard, to say the least. He prayed to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but it was dark everywhere he turned. It was painful!

One night, Andrew was kneeling at his bed praying. He read the Holy Bible. When he finished reading, he closed the Bible, set it aside on his bed and dropped his head in complete submission and said, "This is it Lord; I have done everything I know to do. I prayed. I sought. I asked. I knocked. But I

have not received. I read Your Word, but I have no peace. I talked to You, but nothing is getting better. I have done all I could; there is nothing else left for me to do. It is in Your hand. If You want to give me rest tonight, then it is Your call. If You do not, then there is nothing I can do to change that. It is all in Your hand."

Andrew prayed those words meaning every one of them. He then got in his bed to spend a restless night waiting for the bright sun to come up. When morning arrived, he woke up very surprised. He actually slept that night, and very peacefully. He did not have all those negative emotions. His thoughts were not a raging sea anymore. Depression and hopelessness were not there. He had the best restful night in his life! Up to this day, he had never had as much rest as he had that night. Andrew knew then that what he was experiencing was one of the devil's wars against God's people. When Andrew sought God like Peter sought Jesus when he was drowning, immediately he was pulled out of the trial by an amazing hand—the hand of God. Andrew knew it was God's hand that pulled him out of the pit. He knew he was visited by grace.

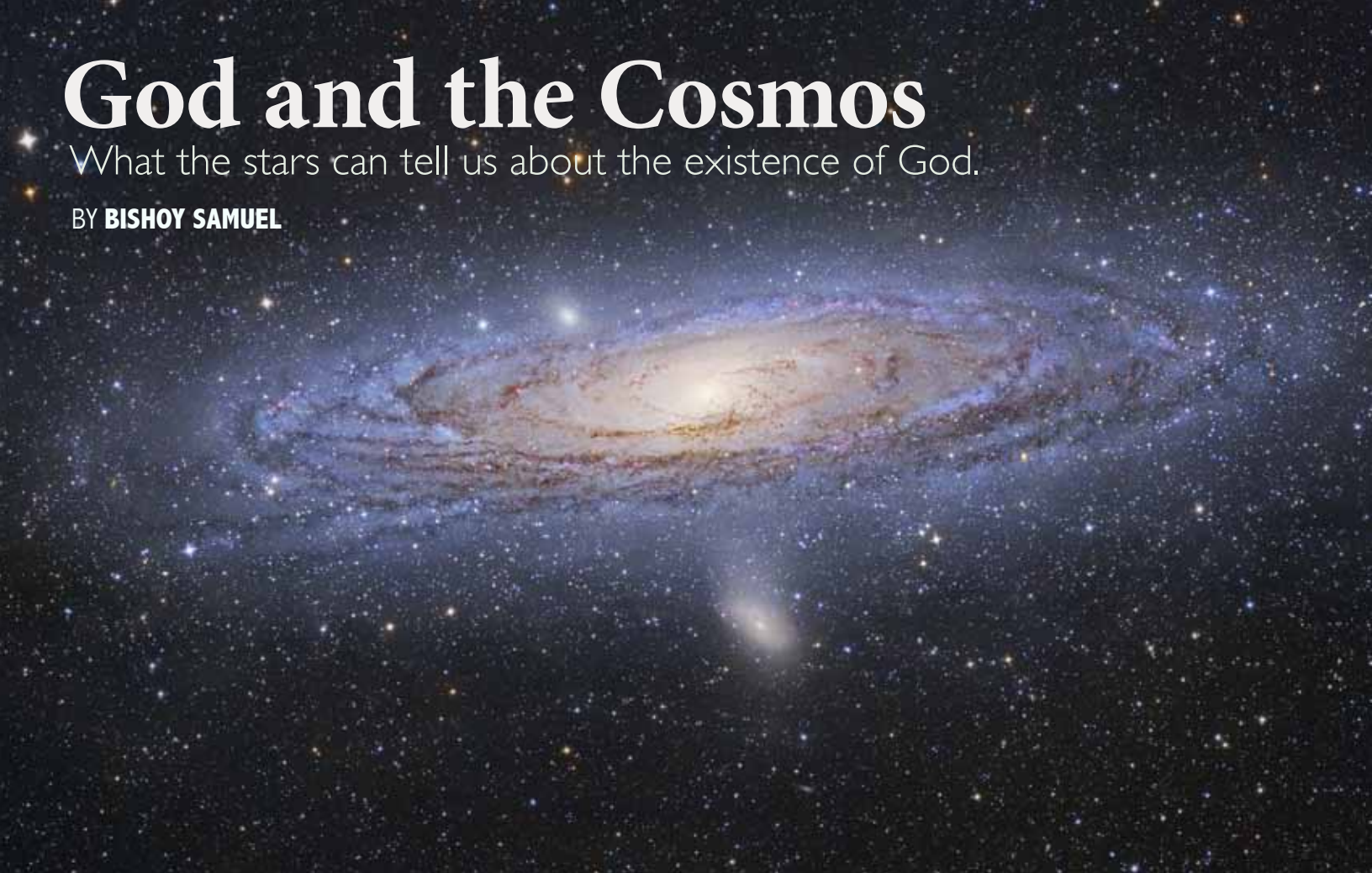
Visits of grace come unexpectedly, but always right on time. Sometimes they come as a result of a prayer, and other times they come just because of God's kindness. Although unannounced, you will know they are not of human doing, but of the Divine. They come to all, in every stage of life and to every season. They may be short in duration, sometimes for a fraction of a second, but they are very effective in their purpose. They bring good tidings and heavenly powers. They teach, help, convict, and support. May the Lord never cease to visit us with His grace.



God and the Cosmos

What the stars can tell us about the existence of God.

BY BISHOP SAMUEL



Does God exist? As Christians, this is not a question we should be afraid to ask. It is a question that should drive us to search for a meaningful answer, and believe that it can be answered. It is a question that is crucial to answer in the challenge of our growing morally-relative culture, swathed in the ideals of secularism and atheism. It is a question that can mean as much for the defense of our faith as it can for strengthening that faith in Christ. In the first article in this series, we will first look to the stars, as doubtless do, “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.”¹

The history of the *Cosmological Argument* for the existence of God can first be traced to ancient Greece. It was there that the philosopher Aristotle first reasoned the existence of an *Unmoved Mover* who initiates all movement in the universe without being moved. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle writes: “There

is, then something which is always moved with an unceasing motion...And since that which is moved and moves is intermediate, there is something which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance and actuality.”² During the Medieval Ages, a priest by the name of Thomas Aquinas reconciled many of Aristotle’s teachings into a more coherent Christian philosophy, reasoning that since the universe exists contingently, it was possible for it to have never existed, therefore, implying a transcendent source.

In the realm of modern Christian apologetics, the greatest contributor to reviving this classic argument is William Lane Craig. In his book *Reasonable Faith*, he draws from philosophy and modern cosmology to support the conclusion that it is very logical to see that God is the cause of the universe. His formulation is thus: whatever begins to exist has a cause, and since the universe began to exist, the universe therefore has a cause.

On intuition alone, a person can reason that anything that begins to exist must have a cause. The emphasis on *begins* here also points to the philosophical principle of *contingency* which can be understood as the possibility of not having existence or being, at some prior point in time. All that we know around us, from the subatomic to the cosmological, is contingent. Inanimate objects in our reality are contingent as much as we ourselves are as well, having been born through our parents after numerous generations since Adam was created by God. In the hierarchy of contingent things, therefore, the universe is the highest but still needs a cause which cannot be contingent. In the seventeenth century, a German mathematician and philosopher by the name of Gottfried Leibniz formulated his *Principle of Sufficient Reason* to explain this cause: “There can be no fact that is true or existent, or any true proposition, without there being a sufficient reason for its being so and not

otherwise.”³ He then elucidates: “The sufficient reason is found in a substance which is a necessary being bearing the reason for its own existence”⁴ - that is, God, who does not exist contingently but necessarily —changeless, timeless, transcendent, and eternal.

The findings of modern cosmology further support the idea of the universe having begun to exist in the distant past. In the 1950s, the Big Bang Theory was formulated to explain the origin of the universe, and has since stood unchallenged as the best *Standard Model* for the universe even as other theories have come and gone. The theory states that about 13.8 billion years ago, the universe came into existence from nothingness and has been rapidly expanding ever since. In the very moment of the universe popping into existence is a singularity of matter, energy, and space-time itself all coming into existence together. The Big Bang Theory has since been supported through several scientific discoveries. In the 1960s the discovery of the cosmic microwave background radiation (early remnants of the Big Bang when the universe started expanding rapidly) pointed to the age of the universe as we know it today. More recently in 2003, a theorem posited by three cosmologists dubbed the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem stated that any universe in a state of expansion, like ours, cannot be eternal in the past and must have a finite beginning. More recent still, in March 2014, the discovery of gravitational waves made headlines in the physics world. These waves were first theorized by Einstein to exist in relation to his general theory of relativity. He stated they were necessary for the effects of gravity to propagate at the speed of light, relative to non-accelerated motion and how matter interacts with space-time. The detection of these waves and their effects on light polarization in the cosmic background radiation required an event on the scale of cosmic expansion. Although the study findings are still being verified, it remains exciting nonetheless as support for the Big Bang.

And so, having argued for the truth of the premises that whatever begins to exist has a cause and that the universe began to exist, we then arrive at the logical conclusion that the universe has a cause. On further understanding, we can draw much more from this conclusion. Indeed as God is eternal and changeless, and exists outside time, space, matter, and energy, He is the only one capable of creating the universe. However, an eternally-existing God can be said to have brought an eternally-existing universe into being. An eternal cause would beget an eternal effect. However, as the universe began to exist at some point in time, prior to which was absolute nothingness, this creates a bit of a dilemma.

In his seminal work *On the Incarnation*,⁵ St. Athanasius the Apostolic writes: “...neither spontaneously, as it is not without providence, nor from pre-existent matter, as God is not weak, but from nothing and having absolutely no existence God brought the universe into being through the Word.” Indeed “by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that which is seen was not made out of things which appear.”⁶ Furthermore, we know that “since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.”⁷

To reconcile this, we then come to understand God as the personal cause of the universe. His creation was a willful act. God, from eternity past, had chosen to bring into being at some finite point in time. As indeed He is outside time itself, He is capable of doing so, bringing both the universe and time itself as we perceive it into existence, with He himself existing eternally. Furthermore, because an impersonal eternal God could freely have chosen not to create the universe, we come to understand creation as an extension of one of the most powerful of God’s attributes — love.

St. Athanasius further writes: “For the human being is by nature mortal,



having come into being from nothing. But because of his likeness to the One who is... if he guarded through his comprehension of Him, would have remained incorruptible.” And so what does it mean that the Creator of the cosmos itself, which He fashioned into existence out of love, came down and died for us in the greatest demonstration of that love? For me, this is greater than any star or galaxy, that by seeing, I glorify God, yet through which I understand if even a fraction of His love.

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3. Saint Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*. Trans. John Behr. Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011. 49-53. Print.

¹ Psalm 19:1.

² Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* Book XII.

³ *Monadologie* (1714). Nicholas Rescher, trans., 1991. *The Monadology: An Edition for Students*. University of Pittsburg Press.

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ *On the Incarnation*, 49-53.

⁶ Hebrews 11:3.

⁷ Romans 1:20.



God Came Near: Encounter 3

Grace that saved a wretch like him.

BY CHRISTINE MASSOUD

“Solomon! Come Solomon, it’s story time. But this time, I’ll tell you my story. I believe you’re old enough to understand its meaning now. Come sit on my lap,” he said as he tapped his lap and opened his arm to behold the young prince. Solomon was young; he was in his teen years. In the last couple years, he had started his training for battle, leadership, and rituals for his right of manhood. He was a prince and he wanted to act like it, so he immediately

protested, “I’m not a child anymore! I weigh too much to sit on your lap.”

With a smile, he was given an answer, “I’m lame in both legs, remember? I’m never going to feel your weight, which means that till you’re old and gray, you will still sit on my lap and we would laugh and cry together. Now come.”

And with that Solomon went and sat. “Are you going to finally tell me how you’ve become lame? Are you?” he asked.

“Yes, but I want you to know the

whole story so you’d learn a thing or two from it. Are you ready?”

Quickly Solomon answered, “Yes, I sure am.”

“Long ago, the land was divided. God had anointed Saul, my grandfather, to be king. Saul was something—tall and handsome, a fearless warrior, and the Spirit of God was with him as long as he obeyed God. He won many battles as I’m sure you’ve learned from your studies in history. He also became so proud and worried about losing his throne that he devoted so much of

his war effort not to fight against the enemies of God who were trying to harm us, but to seek David, your father and kill him before he could become king. David was anointed too, but before he became king, he was chased, and he ran and hid from Saul.

In one of the wars, my dad, Jonathon, was one of warriors who went out with Saul to yet another battle. This one was at Gilboa, and unfortunately, it was their last. Both King Saul and my dad, Prince Jonathon were killed. My nurse heard of this sad news and took me and ran. She was afraid for my life. She figured our royal residence in Gibeah would not be safe any longer. She ran with all her might and I fell down from her arms and became as you see now, lame for life.”

Solomon couldn’t help himself, he asked the question that’s been on his mind almost from the beginning, “Why are you smiling? This is a sad story. You became lame for life. You lost your dad, your grandpa, your palace. And to top it off, you couldn’t ever walk!”

“I know Solomon, but we’re not done with the story. There’s a good ending I promise and that’s why I’m smiling. You see, when all seems bad, God steps in to show how He can turn it all for good. Keep listening and before long you will have a smile on your face too.”

With that, the older man continued, “My nurse took me far, far away, to a good, righteous man and his family to take care of me, Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar. That’s where I lived for a long time. They took very good care of me and I didn’t need or want much, but it was definitely no palace. I was never united with any family members, and pretty soon there were none alive left to claim me. Peacetime came at the hands of your father, David, with God’s will at his side. The land flourished, but I was, of course, still lame and not being able to care for myself, and I had no family or friends.

But one day, something better than I ever imagined or expected happened. I couldn’t tell at the time, but it was

the best thing that happened to me. I received a visit from Ziba, one of Saul’s servants. To be honest with you, I was scared at first. David saw a lot of hardships because of my grandfather. I was the only surviving member of Saul’s line and I was afraid David would just want to secure his throne by killing me. Little did I know!

Ziba arranged for me to come to the king’s court and you can only imagine how terrified I was. I was helped to his throne room and...” he paused and wiped a tear that flowed so unwillingly from his eyes.

Solomon was at the edge of his seat, unable to wait the seconds it took to wipe the storyteller’s tears. “David said, ‘Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathon your father’s sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually.’ Can you believe it, Solomon?! Your father, out of the blue and because of nothing I did, in fact, there was never anything I could do. There was never anything I could give since the enemies took my father’s land. There was nothing. I owned nothing, could give nothing and frankly deserved nothing. But here he was, David the king, telling me that he will restore what was not mine and that I would have plenty. That wasn’t it, David made a loud proclamation: he asked me to join his family—to eat at the dinner table with you and your brothers and sisters, not for a night or even two, but for all my life! I had no good answer. I was in shock, Solomon! In fact, I remember saying to him ‘What is your servant that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?’ I felt like a nobody made prince in seconds. He even had Ziba and his family work the land so it would prosper and bring forth fruit and just like that I became as one of the king’s sons.”

“Wow!” said Solomon in great amazement. “I never knew you weren’t part of the family, Mephibosheth! You must have wanted to jump for joy! Well, I’m sorry you couldn’t.”

Mephibosheth looked down onto his lame legs but quickly a hand lifted

up his chin and with a smile said “Remember, the story is about the kindness, the mercy, and the grace I was shown. My legs would not heal but my heart sure did. From this kindness, I am able to give of the land to others. From that mercy, I’m reminded to forgive those who hurt me. From that grace, I’m encouraged and given peace for the rest of my life; and from that peace, I could speak of grace to you too.”

“What is grace?” asked Solomon inquisitively.

Simply put, mercy is not receiving the deserved punishment for what we’ve done. Grace is extending that mercy even further and giving undeserved kindness. One of the first mentions of grace in the New Testament is in St. John’s first chapter. He starts off with “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*”¹

Jesus is the perfect image of grace shown to us. We are sinners who deserve death but rather than receiving this death, God has shown us mercy. If he stopped there, then we would just have a life on earth and that is it. We might be like those destroyed by the flood in Noah’s day. But God loved us so much that, to satisfy this deserved death, gave us His Word, and took our punishment so we could live. That’s amazing grace, grace that came to forgive you, to wash you clean, clothe you in white, to bring you to the table, to make you a son and a daughter, to give you an inheritance and blessings, to, as they say in the south, love on you. That’s my God, that’s His love for me and you, and that’s the amazing grace “that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now, I see.”²

¹ John 1:1,14,16.

² Amazing Grace by John Newton.

Grace of Visits

Early Christians and visiting the sick.

BY DAVID W. T. BRATTSTON

Like Jesus, you can make sick people better. This is not just one of many possible interpretations of the Holy Bible, but a belief that was shared by early Christians who were contemporaries or within a few years from the New Testament writers, and could have personally asked them for clarifications or explanations as to what they had written. The following article will include biblical and non-biblical authors whose teachings also illustrate how ancient Christians embraced the same ideas the Coptic Orthodox Church does presently about treating the sick.

A chief way of helping the ill is to visit them. Remember Christ's teaching in Matthew 25:34-39 that it is deeds of love and mercy—such as feeding the hungry, visiting prisoners, and looking after the sick—that will be rewarded in heaven. This agrees with Matthew 7:21-23, where Christ said that performing miracles does not replace such works. What we do for the least sick person, we do for Christ.¹ Visiting might not cure the patient, but it can render their symptoms less uncomfortable, and thus, make their lives better, although not perfect.

Visiting the sick was strongly encouraged in early Christianity. The dean of Christianity's foremost educational institution, Clement of Alexandria quoted Matthew 25:34-40 to remind Christians of this duty in the 190s.² A decade later, another North African church father spoke of it as one desirable fruit of a happy Christian marriage.³ Another ancient Christian writer considered it a very serious duty.⁴

Shortly before AD 249, yet another North African church authority classed visiting the sick to be among such important Christian activities as forgiving sins, helping the poor, loving enemies, and the Golden Rule itself, all of which indicate that Christians held visiting the sick in the highest regard.⁵ The author repeated Matthew 25:36 and quoted an earlier author: "Be not slack to visit the sick man; for from these things thou shalt be strengthened in love."

It is particularly appropriate for clergy to visit the sick. James 5:14 instructs church officers to do so, adding that they should also pray for them and anoint them with oil. A church manual written around AD 217 encourages deacons to find out who is sick and inform the pastor so that he can pay a visit. Ill people, it says, are much comforted when they know the pastor (their "high priest") is mindful of them.⁶

Some Christians are gifted in improving the state of the ill. After declaring that Christians possess spiritual gifts differing according to the grace that is given to each, St. Paul the Apostle encouraged readers to use them in proportion to each individual's faith, simplicity,



diligence, and cheerfulness.⁷ Commenting on this verse, Origen wrote that our good works and enthusiasm could lead us to a higher grace according to our personal faith. A native Egyptian, Origen was Clement's student and later a scholar in his own right.

However, wrote Origen, even if our faith merits a higher grace, the Holy Spirit will grant it only to Christians for whom it is beneficial. For instance, grace will be withheld from someone who will become arrogant or prideful about it, or becomes negligent in mind or lazy in body in their exercise of it.⁸ For this reason, St. Paul admonished a junior associate, saying, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."⁹

Continuing, Origen pointed out that just as God grants us spiritual gifts, "there is something in us that merits grace according to the measure or rule of each person."¹⁰ Christians with the grace of helping and cheering up the sick should, therefore, use it to the fullest, with faith and conscientious effort, and not be proud or boastful lest they abuse it. Again, as St. Paul wrote, "We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain."¹¹

According to John 14:12, whoever believes in Jesus will do greater works than His. Although people gifted with the grace of divine healing have never been plentiful, certainly not all Christians, the Holy Bible and church fathers state that anyone at all can do great works equal in love and mercy to those of Christ. By visiting the sick and taking care of them, we can all make the sick better and so fulfill the law of God.

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¹ Matthew 25:40.

² *Quis Dives Salvetur* 30.

³ Tertullian *To His Wife* 2.8.

⁴ *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 7.4.

⁵ *Three Books of Testimonies* 109.

⁶ Hippolytus *Apostolic Tradition* 30.

⁷ Romans 12:6.

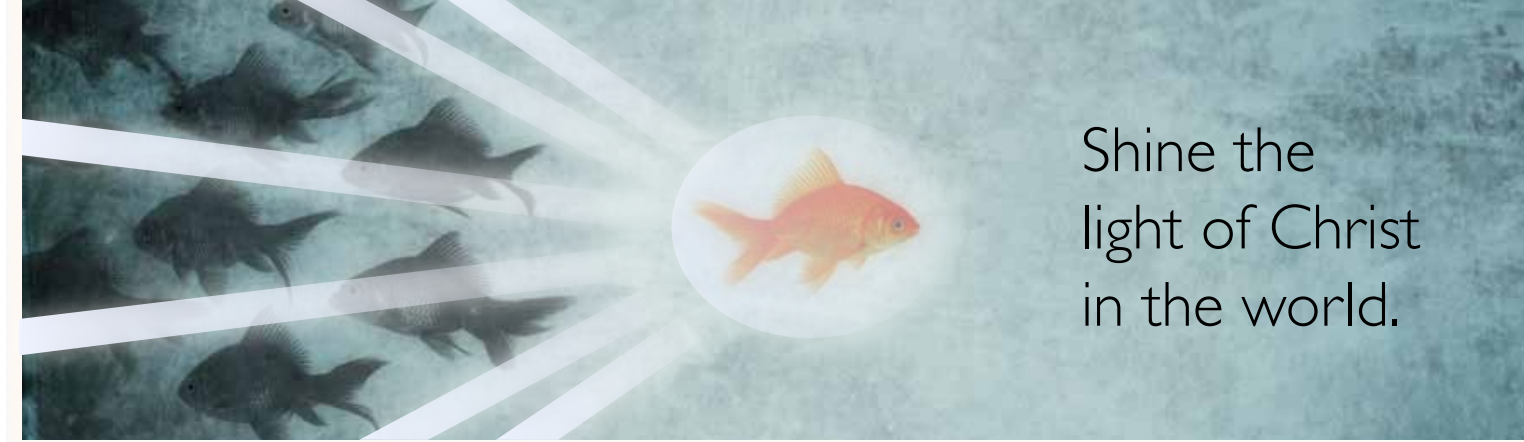
⁸ Origen *Commentary on the*

Epistle of Paul to the Romans 9.3.4.

⁹ 2 Timothy 2:1.

¹⁰ Origen *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans* 9.3.7 trans. Thomas P. Scheck Origen: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), p. 207.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 6:1.



Shine the light of Christ in the world.

Influencing Culture by Our Faith

BY RANYA BOTROS

As Orthodox Christians, we should really ask ourselves whether we are influencing our culture or whether it is influencing us. Our culture is sadly becoming more and more immoral: gay marriage is being legalized in many states; schools and employers are now trying to create another gender category for those who consider themselves *transgender*; and drugs which were once illegal, like marijuana, are now becoming legal and acceptable. What other evidence do we need to prove this world is passing away? Now, this culture wants to infiltrate our church by stating that our ancient and most beloved church should be more *progressive* and *inclusive* with respect to women being ordained to the priesthood and acceptance of immoral behavior, such as homosexuality. No matter how culture or society changes, our faith will never change.

We are taught to "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s], that [we] may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."¹

This means that we will always be different, and that we will never fit into the ways of this world. We are called to be in the world, but not of the world. Our Lord Jesus Christ told us that the Holy Spirit is within us: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."² Satan is the prince or ruler of this world, "and he has nothing in [Christ]."³ "The ruler of this world, the devil, dominates the realm of those who do not love Christ or keep His commandments. Jesus said the devil has nothing in Him because there can be no compromise between Christ—or us—and the devil."⁴

Truth will not conform to this world and neither should we because we are rooted in the Word of God. We are called to love the sinner and hate the sin, not love the sinner and change the commandments. Our faith is rich in many treasures. Our Coptic Church is a Church of martyrs who witnessed to Christ by sacrificing their lives. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,"⁵ we are taught. If the saints give up their lives for Christ, then likewise, we should strive to live our faith in everything we do in this world. We are not all called to be martyrs in the traditional sense, but many of us are called to be *dry martyrs*, those who suffer social persecution for Christ rather than death.

What does it mean to live our faith? It means that we are Orthodox Christians at work, school, home, while driving, and while voting to elect our leaders. Everything we do should be filtered through our faith. It is done by setting a godly example for others, especially to those who are lost. It requires suffering, and while none of us like pain, we are called to suffer, nonetheless.

If we do not live our faith, the world will see us as hypocrites. More importantly, if we choose to take the easy way out and conform to this world, our Lord warns us by saying, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"⁶

We should not be discouraged by the evil in this world. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."⁷

We need to remember that heaven is our destination and that our life in this world is temporary. We will be hated by the world because the world hates truth. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."⁸

Let us shine the light of Christ in this world, and influence our culture by walking in righteousness and by joining David the Psalmist in praising our Lord: "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him."⁹

¹ Romans 12:2.

² John 14:26.

³ John 14:30.

⁴ Orthodox Study Bible Commentary, p. 253.

⁵ Tertullian's *Apologeticus*, Chapter 50.

⁶ Matthew 7:21-23.

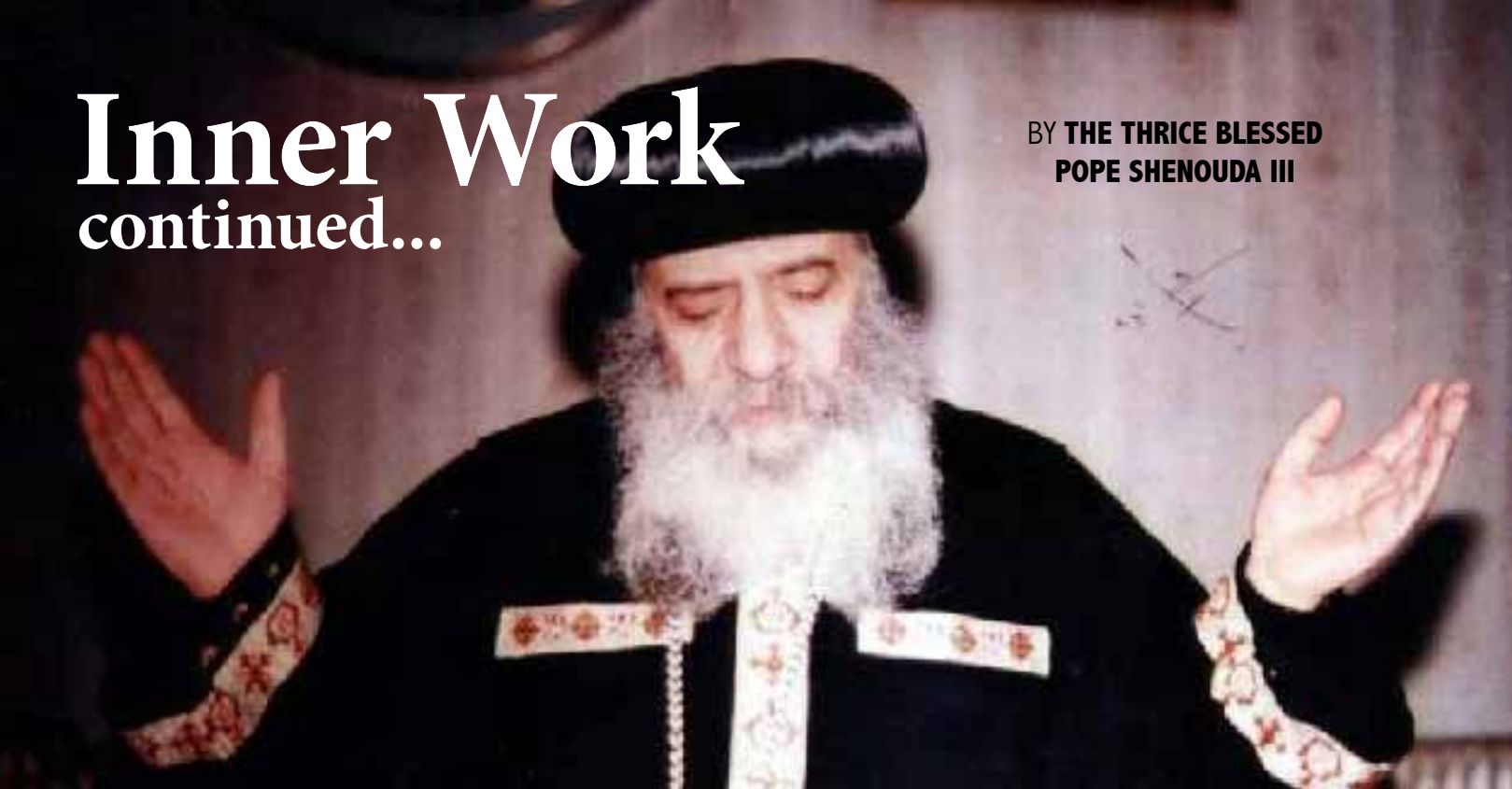
⁷ Romans 12:21.

⁸ John 15:19.

⁹ Psalm 33:8.

Inner Work continued...

BY THE THRICE BLESSED
POPE SHENOUDA III



Sermons to Monastics by The Thrice Blessed Pope Shenouda III

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

If a person delves into inner work, one makes a number of discoveries.

First, one discovers a personal inability to persist in this work. One will also discover a desire to flee from inner work. One will discover a desire to think freely, spontaneously, to have wandering thoughts. Also, one will discover the massive effort needed to cut off the self from all strange thoughts and attach the thoughts to God, as King David says, “But it is good for me to draw near to God.”¹ How does one attach to God? Each time you come to attach to God, you will find another thought come and try to squeeze itself in—trying to control your mind.

Here we encounter the diabolic wars and obstacles to inner work. The first one is wandering thoughts, to prevent the person from inner work. Believe me, my beloved, many times, a person does not remember important items, except when one comes to pray or meditate. At this time, one remembers very important obligations. The devil reminds you, to prevent your work. If you come to pray, you will find tens of thoughts knocking on the door of your mind, and you will feel that each one of them is very important, to the point that you might grab a piece of paper and say, “Let me write this down so I can get rid of this nagging, and stop thinking about it,” and so you leave the prayer and begin to write. First you write the topic of the thought, and then you find a long list of specific details with keen understanding come to mind. Why all this? It is to keep you from thinking of God. They are thoughts that wander with you in all directions, as the devil said of himself when God asked him in the story of Job, he said his work was “going to and fro on the earth, and... walking back and forth on it.”²

The devil wants to walk the earth. Each time you want to be preoccupied with God, he tells you, “Go to and fro on the earth.” He is ready to make a monastic wander in all corners and all cells in the monastery, all work areas, the guest quarters, everywhere, just to keep you “going to and fro on the earth.” Thoughts! How does one cut off these thoughts, in order to attach to God? Here I remember the words of St.

Isaac, in defining pure prayer; he said, “A man who prays correctly is the equal of the man who is dead to the world.”³ If you want pure prayer, attaching to God, you have to die to all the world ideas that want to stuff themselves inside your prayer and distract you from inner work, taking you wandering outside in many places. Resist thoughts, and try to get rid of them; attaching the mind to God needs struggle. If I tell you, you will reach this overnight; that is impossible; this needs much work. Wandering thoughts are one issue.

Another issue is business. If you are continually busy, how will you work internally? If you say, “I want to free myself,” once you try, you will find distractions that you would have never imagined, impressing on you that you are the only one who could accomplish this job. These are wars. The essence is not the job, it is your conception that this job is more important than prayer. This is the crux of the issue. When you say, “I will pray later. I don’t have time for it now. Let me just finish this job first; it is very important.” The more your duties increase, the more your inner work delays. This does not mean that you should go to the monastery abbot after this meeting and say, “Please release me of my duties.” Perhaps if he releases you of your duties, you will end up sitting with evil thoughts. This might be so if you have not trained on inner work. Inner work also needs long periods of training and much labor. One person might decide to sit alone, and along comes the devil saying, “Let me sit along with you.”

Among the obstacles to inner work is forgetfulness. One basically forgets. If we decide to work internally, one might forget the training, or forget the whole issue altogether, and simply drift off. This needs continual reminders every once in a while.

Among the vital hindrances to inner work are talkativeness, friendships, and

familiarity. If you decide to be occupied with God, you might find someone come to sit and chat with you, who does not stop, and wanders from one subject to another relentlessly. If you try to end the conversation, your loquacious friend takes offense, becomes upset, turns it into an issue, and then tries to guilt you: “How will you be able to take communion when I am upset with you.” If you attempt to make peace by apologizing, your friend’s loquaciousness comes back full force. It is based on how you condition people. One should have friendships that lead to God, not friendships that lead away from God. If you are obliged, and you are unable to be rid of this friendship and familiarity, try to turn the words in a spiritual direction. If this person is not spiritual, this person will get bored of you and walk away without becoming upset. If you ask your interlocutor to stay and continue the conversation, you will only find welcomed rejection as your conversation is not of interest. Your guest will leave. As one of the fathers said, “If one of these brethren that love idleness passes by you. Ask him to pray with you. He will leave you and go away, and not return.”⁴ One might say, “Believe me, I’m backlogged on my prayers, I haven’t finished my psalms. Let us pray together,” the visitor will say, “I don’t have time for you,” and will leave. Now, if any of you passes by a brother and he asks you to pray with him, do not automatically assume that he considers you one of these idle people; I am speaking in a general sense. This issue needs labor. You might ask me, “What if a person takes offense,” and my answer would be, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.”⁵ If you love anyone more than God, you will not be able to live with God. He adds, “Cannot be My disciple.”⁶ I do not want to prolong my talk with you on inner work, but let us suffice with these words, and try to

resist all obstacles that prevent us from inner work.

By the way, you can work internally while sitting with people. A group might be talking, but the sailors are in one world while the captain is in another; they are occupied with any words, and you are drifting in your inner words, without anyone sensing. This is why the silent type of person, working internally, has depth, as in the poem that says, “In your silence, there is a mystery, whose holy of holies is unseen, except by those who are silent.” Only those who have experienced the beauty of this silence and its sanctity, and inner work, would understand it. Yet, there might be a person sitting with others, silent while they are all talking, but sits judging them during this silence. The inner work of one who judges others does not agree with God. You are to monitor your inner work. Which way is it headed? Where are your thoughts and feelings headed? Monitor, search, and correct yourself. Your self-correction is part of inner work. Purging the heart and purifying the mind are inner work. Perhaps, part of inner work is self-examination. To search yourself and know your faults is inner work, because you enter into your inner self and know what is inside it, what you need to keep, and what you need to eliminate. Self-examination is part of inner work. This suffices for now. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

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¹ Psalm 73:28.

² Job 1:7.

³ (Miller 1984), 325.

⁴ Ibid, 108.

⁵ Matthew 10:37.

⁶ Luke 14:26.

“Watchfulness helps a man more than works, and laxity harms him more than rest.”

PILLARS OF OUR TIME

Ordinary People Serving in Extraordinary Ways

MAKING AN IMPACT

The Thrice Blessed
Metropolitan Daniel
Of Sudan

BY VERA SALAMA AND SALAMA BOTROS



Metropolitan Daniel was chosen by God to shepherd the flock of our Lord Jesus Christ in Khartoum, Sudan. He dedicated many years of his life to lovingly serving and guiding his children—the Copts of Sudan, down the path of holiness.

He was born on October 10, 1922 and given the name Damian. His family was holy and righteous. Many of their older children were sacrificed to martyrdom for witnessing to Christ during the Mehdi Reign in Sudan. When Damian's mother was pregnant with him, many members of his family would see a bright cross over her womb, but no one realized the significance of this vision at the time. God was announcing that this child was known by Him and was chosen from the womb to be a messenger of the Lord.

After Damian's birth, a man dressed in bright white clothing approached him while he was sleeping, made the sign of the cross over his head three times, blew in his face, and then disappeared. Damian grew in God's grace and was drawn to a life of prayer. He also had a deep love for the church. He was ordained a deacon in 1928, when he was six years old. In 1934, he left the world to live an ascetic life in a rural area called Jireff, which is close to Khartoum. In doing so, he became the first Coptic monk from Sudan. On November 2, 1947, he was ordained a priest for St. Mary's Church in Khartoum, Sudan and given the name Domadius. He paid particular

attention to the needs of the poor, widows, and orphans. He lived by the words of our Lord who said, "Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back."

One night while he was praying, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him and said, "Do not be afraid Domadius, I will be with you always, and everything you ask of my Son will be granted to you." Shortly thereafter, the Thrice Blessed Metropolitan Youannes of Khartoum passed away. His Holiness Pope Kyrillos VI ordained Fr. Domadius as Metropolitan Daniel of Khartoum on June 20, 1968. During the ordination, Pope Kyrillos proclaimed that the church in Sudan would see glorious days during the reign of His Grace Metropolitan Daniel.

Metropolitan Daniel's service continued to be characterized by a deep concern for the poor and the needy, and the salvation of every soul. He continued to practice strong asceticism. Whenever he was faced with a trial, he took refuge in praying the Psalms and the Holy Liturgy. He passed away on April 16, 2000, after having fought the good fight and having served the flock of Christ with faithfulness and determination. He is buried under an altar in St. Mary's Church in Khartoum.

Pray for us, Metropolitan Daniel, before the throne of God that we may gain the salvation of our souls and meet you in the heavenly Jerusalem.

¹ Luke 6:30

Several Young Men, One Servant, Divergent Paths.

When God visits you, what will you do?

BY JOHN HABIB

This is the true story of several boys who have since become men who took very different paths in life, although all of them were visited by the same servant who shared the same story to guide them towards safety in Christ's loving embrace.

While teenagers, all of these boys were exposed to similar temptations that boys their age typically face: lust, drugs, and other misguided distractions. One servant who knew them all shared with them a story about the afterlife experiences of certain Orthodox Christians, hoping that their lives would be affected by the story as his once was.

That servant had grown up in the church, as most of us begin. His parents were extremely devout, and he served with his father as a chanter. Unfortunately, upon entering college, the servant's life turned far away from the church, abandoning the source of eternal life and turning instead to the depth of sin made easily accessible during those years. The servant stopped going to church, stopped confessing, and stopped taking communion. All of this left his devout mother in tears and fervent prayer, hoping one day that her son would return. Her son, however, did not care because the enjoyment of sin consumed him, and it was all that was in front of him. He had forgotten something very important: he will die and have to face his choices, and their consequences, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."¹

The servant was visited by God's grace when he learned of an afterlife experience of an Orthodox Christian, presented to him when he was visiting his mother's home. He was accompanied that day by a friend from school. This friend was a primary source of his spiritual demise, but as the story was read to him, the friend, his life in college, and the sins he so cherished, all seemed like vapor with no real value. The worth of all these things simply dissipated, and only one fear gripped the servant: how will I face my choices?

The Church Fathers have consistently taught, and the afterlife experiences of Orthodox Christians have consis-

tently revealed for nearly two millennia, that when we die we must pass through the air to reach one of two destinations—one of bliss, or one of torment—and the "prince of the power of the air,"² the devil, is waiting to grasp souls whose life expressed an affinity for works of darkness, and therefore, whose fitting place is with him in the darkness of Hades.

The servant examined his life, realized how unprepared he was, and started to comprehend the grace that God was bestowing upon him through his mother. His life was changed forever. He knew that forgiveness comes only by the blood of Christ, and the Church is where that blood and washing of sins can be found. But why is it fair that only he be saved by this visit of grace? Why not share what he found with others? Why not be a conduit of God's grace himself?

There were several boys he came to know in various ways through service in the church. He spoke to them at length about eternal life and preparedness. One of the boys had a similar reaction as the servant had, completely changing his life, so that his spiritual path became more elevated than even that of the servant to the extent that the servant now turns to that boy for spiritual advice. Another of the boys continued to maintain his already well-guided spiritual direction throughout the course of his life to the present. Yet, another boy had a turbulent period in college but has striven to keep within the confines of salvation.

Several other boys, unfortunately, have entirely abandoned the church and are living lives that they were warned they would live if they did not quickly deepen their spiritual resolve. Those same boys, long ago, young and naïve, refused the idea that they would ever drift as far away as the servant said they would (having even given the boys real examples of others who took the same path and ended up where they are now). But there they are, distant from salvation, distant from Christ, and the connection to the servant slowly faded to its present dilapidated state. The servant just ponders with a heavy heart and eyes welling up with tears, regret, and fear that he himself is at fault for not pursuing those boys as faithfully as he should have. They, like all of us, will one day have to face their choices and it will be too late to wash away their misdeeds then. I fear they may join in the wailing and gnashing of teeth of all those in Hades who are tormented with wishing that they could just have the few minutes you have spent reading this article to live again and offer utmost sincere repentance.

God's grace is always visiting us; what will you do with it?

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:10.

² Ephesians 2:2.

QUESTION & ANSWER

New WINTER 2015 Edition
GENERAL QUESTION
And its Answer

Q: I don't understand this verse: "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom."

A: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke 6:37-38 speaks in favor of mercy; both verses should be read together to fully comprehend the message being given: "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you shall be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

The Kingdom of God calls us to follow a path of life in which mercy abounds. To follow this path, we must not judge, nor condemn others, and we must forgive. Judging and condemning others leads us to depart from the way of mercy. We are asked to forgive. Forgiveness can only come out of the heart of mercy.

We are to give. When we give abundantly, we are promised that we will receive from God in the same measure. But the overall message here is to be merciful.

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

New WINTER 2015 Edition
BIBLE QUESTION
And its Answer

FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW CHAPTER 6

Q: If your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him (v. 8), why then does God want us to ask Him?

A: The more time you spend in the presence of God, the more opportunity you give to the Holy Spirit to work in you and to transform you into His image. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8I7x782SMs>

Diocese Photos

Three Holy Youth College Convention Florida
December 2014



Events & Activities

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Theological Seminary Program tsp.suscopts.org

Program Registration deadline: March 15, 2015

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Theological Seminary Boarding Program - Abbey

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

Asaph Hymns Institute | www.sushymns.org/

(AHI) is the first ever online hymnological seminary.

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

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CPAR Convention | Feb 26-Mar 1, 2015

SUS Diocese Mission Experience Trip 2015 - Ethiopia | May 26 - June 5, 2015

Coptic Renewal Retreat | Mar 13-15, 2015

Diocese Pilgrimage to the Holy Land | Oct 19-31, 2015

Details coming soon. Registration to open in March.

FOR MORE - See suscopts.org

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



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Ethiopian Mission

MIGHTY MAGAZINE MARROWS

Life. God. Truth. For Coptic Youth



Ordination of Father Angelos | Jan 2015

Location: St. Mary & St. Demiana Convent



Art Title: Duality. It shows contrasting setting of thorns and roses.

Artist Name: Mariam Mikhael

School: Wellington High School, Florida 11th grade.

In December 2014, she won the 1st place in a contest sponsored by Art Shop (Eyes of Wellington) at her school Wellington High School, Florida. She won for the same art work an honorable award in Scholastic art and writing contest. Both held on December 2014.

