



KNOW YOURSELF

Reference: The Release of the Spirit

H.H. Pope Shenouda III

117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark,

A MIGHTY ARROW

FROM ST. MARY & ARCHANGEL MICHAEL CHURCH

HOUSTON □ TEXAS

My Beloved Brother; Do You Want To Be Perfect?

Do you want your soul to be released into a place where there are neither bonds nor restrictions? Then, first of all, you have to rid yourself of everything, of every desire, knowledge and feeling which the world may have implanted within you. You have to first deny yourself, and to stand before God as nothing. Know your real self. Who are you? Are you not a mere handful of the dust of the earth..? *You are even less than the dust. You are nothing.* There was time when you did not exist while the world existed... without you... Then God made you out of nothing'. First He created the dust, then, He made you of the dust. Why then do you exalt yourself? Who are you to be exalted? Lower your head in bashfulness and humility, for you are nothing... Stand before God broken - hearted and humiliated in spirit and remember your origin... Now, have you recognized that you are nothing? I tell you furthermore that you are less than nothing, for nothingness is non-existence... and non existence is better than the sin committed by man because, "... *every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*" (Gen. 6:5) .

If you find something good in you, be certainly sure that it is not due to you, but to God because He alone is ultimately good, perfect and holy



as the Lord says: "*No one is good but One, that is, God.*" (Matt. 19:17). If you find something good in you, do not be puffed up and do not boast. Do not fight yourself with self righteousness but attribute every glory to God. It is His due not yours, for good is made by Him as He is the benevolent and creator of all good. He is even good itself, and goodness... Without Him you are nothing, you can do nothing. So, do not rob God's glory and ascribe it to yourself. You may shine like the

moon and your light increases till you become a full moon, but, in all this remember that the moon is a dark satellite which derives its light from the sun and has no light in itself. If the sun disappears, the moon will not appear because it is dark by its nature. Now, would the moon dare speak of its light before the sun! It is the same with you, my beloved, in the presence of God.

On the other hand, if you find something evil within you, know that it is from you, because of the sin which was lying at the door having desire for you. It was in your power to rule over it but you let it rule over you (Gen. 4:7) nothing evil comes from God. God's nature does not conform to evil as we see when He made everything with His holy spotless and undefiled hands, "*God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good*" (Gen. 1:31). Now, did you know yourself, my beloved brother?



Did you recognize that self-denial must be the rule that governs your relation with God? I do not mean that your self is something that is not worthily and so you ought to deny it out of humbleness! For we have seen that your “self” is nothing. So, I do not like to use the words “be humbled” because a humble person is that who comes down from his place to a lower and less elevated position. But a person of no worth like me and you, mere dust and nothingness, cannot be humbled because he actually has no position to refuse nor dignity to forsake. He is not elevated so that he may be put down nor eminent that he may be humbled. All that I mean by self-denial, my beloved brother is to know yourself and thus you can realize that you have no worth whatever. It is God who gives you, out of His loving kindness. If you love Him, some of His glory is given, a thing which you do not deserve but for His mercy, His humbleness and condescension. Let us contemplate on the beautiful verse which says: “*God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are..*” (1 Cor. 1:27-29). What does this mean? Does the kingdom of God fit only the foolish, the weak and the despised? No, for God had chosen before some learned men such as Moses the Prophet, St. Paul the Apostle & St. Arsanus.. He chose also some holy men who were philosophers like Athenagoras, Pentinus, and St. Augustine. God chose some of the valiant such as Samson and St. Moses the powerful; He chose also some dignified persons like David the King and the princes Maximus and Domadius.

How Can Both Matters Come Together?

What is meant is not that God chooses only the foolish,

the weak and the despised but perhaps that God-blessed be His name-chooses such persons who, though they attain great knowledge, power or honor, stand before Him as if ignorant, weak and despised.

Here is Moses, who was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, was not sent by God when he was self-confident, depending on his human power. But God called him only when he said, “*Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? I am not eloquent, neither before, nor since you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech, and slow of tongue.*” (Ex. 3:11, 4:10).



St. Paul also who studied the law and was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, was not sent by God except when he could say, ‘*For it is written I will*

destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling and my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” (1 Cor. 1:19,2:3,4).

St. Arsanus was not made by God a father and a guide when he was teaching the princes Arcadius and Onorius in the palace of their father Theodosius the Emperor, but only when his soul was purified and could say, ‘*Arsanus the teacher of the Kings’ sons, who studied the wisdom of the Greek and the Romans, does not know the Alpha Veta (alphabet) which, an illiterate Egyptian knows’* Do you think, my brother who worship God, that you will lay a foundation in the Church with your knowledge and culture! Oh you are poor! Truly I say to you that if you are not freed from



dependence on your own knowledge, you will not approach God. God will not also bless your ministry because if you do succeed in your ministry, people will ascribe this success to what the world granted you of certificates and scientific degrees. Thus God's glory would be robbed and given to the world.

My dear learned brother, God is able in this twentieth century to go again to the lake and call an uneducated fisherman to be an apostle and evangelist and this person will teach people better than you do. When God divided the Red Sea, He did not choose a rod of gold but just a plain rod which resembled millions of rods in the world. So, be aware not to think of yourself highly or boast because of a worldly or a religious knowledge, or because of your spiritual readings or past experience. But in spite of your increased knowledge and deep spirituality, stand before God everyday feeling your ignorance and deficiency and feeling that you need Him to guide you, as a beginner even though you are old. Stand before Him feeling that you urgently need Him to protect you against the weakest devils and against the sins and transgressions which you consider the simplest or the slightest. Let this be your feeling, for I have seen many people who read and write about deep spiritual matters but fall in the sins of the beginners... I tell you this fearing that out of confidence of your spiritual knowledge and experience, you would depend on your human power (arm) while the Holy Bible says, "*Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength*" (Jer. 17:5).

Know, my beloved brother, that any spiritual or worldly knowledge that does not lead you to humiliation and to the feeling that you are ignorant, is a false deceitful knowledge.

It is a blow from the devil to make you turn from asking, requiring and knocking at the door... Feel then, my brother, that you are ignorant as the Holy Bible says, "*If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become*

wise" (1 Cor. 3:18). Before God, the wise and the



fool are equal because both are ignorant and both are subject to the same death, and the same breath of air blows upon both of them. Before God, the weak and the strong are equal also because both are weak for no one has any power in the presence of God.

Do you think, my friend, that you are powerful?

From where did you get this power? It is not yours of course because you are dust and ashes, you are nothing and ruin. This power is not also from another being other than God because He - blessed be His name - is alone the powerful and every power is derived from Him. Is your power then from God? If so, why do you boast and swagger? Why do you use God's power in works not relating to Him? So, he that glories, let him glory in the Lord because He - the highest in glory - is the source of every thing that deserves boasting. But if you are powerful through God though weak by nature, then say along with the blessed St. Paul, "*Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities... for when I am weak, then am I strong.*" (2 Cor. 12:9, 10).

A person who thinks of himself strong will not be called by God because God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty. So, be careful not to trust the power you claim to have because sin, "*... has cost down many wounded, and all who were slain by her are strong men*". (Prov. 7:26). Rather say with David the Righteous, "*Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled*" (Ps. 6:2). Be sure then, my brother,



that you are weak; not because I told you so, but because it is a clear fact. Did you not fall into sin today? Did you not sin yesterday and the days before? Then, you are not strong. You are weak and a model of weakness. You will remain so until you confess that you are weak and hasten to abide in the Father and the Father in you. Let me whisper to you another piece of advice: Do not stay in your seclusion thinking yourself more powerful than the others and imagining great projects you would have carried out if only you had been given the authority or had been in the place of the others. You are not so powerful, my brother. These are only day dreams or perhaps vanity. For you are in fact weak. Perhaps if you had been in the place of those sinners whom you condemn, you would have sinned more than them and showed more weakness. If you have conquered in the past or conquer now, it is due to God's presence with you not due to your power. Keep with God then and know that God will not be pleased to be with you as long as you worship yourself instead of Him. Only one must work: God or you. If you believe that it is God who works and that you are nothing beside Him but you only stand to watch in wonder God's works, it is good that you believe so.. But if you think that it is you who work and that you

have enough power to do this, be sure then, that whatever you do is in vain and you will fall and fail. This does not apply only to your ministry and outer activities but also to your inner spiritual life. Again, if you think that it is you who strives to inherit the eternal life, you will fail. And if you think that a certain sin has no more dominion over you, you will fall in the same sin even after some time and it will be a great fall... The right thing is to feel that you are weak, in a land which brings forth thorns and thistles; and that you are weak before every temptation and sin. Say along with the psalmist, *"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us."*

(Ps. 124: 2, 3). Thus you will cry out to the Lord and see how He will fight on your behalf and conquer. Then you will give glory to God not to yourself because the victory is His.

Lastly, I feel that there is much more to be said concerning this subject, so my beloved brother, remember me, in your prayers till we meet again and continue our meditations if the Lord's grace wills that we remain alive till then.

Good to know about the Holy Bible				
New Testament Books				
History	Epistles			Prophecy
Matthew Mark Luke John Acts	St. Paul's Epistles			Catholic James Jude 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John
	Early during missionary journeys	Later after arrest at Jerusalem		
	Galatians 1 Thess 2 Thess 1 Cor 2 Cor	First Imprisonment Colossians Ephesians Philemon Philippians	Release 1 Timothy- Titus	
				Revelation