



His Grace Bishop Youssef in the previous issue of the *Mighty Arrows* wrote about the importance of spiritual friendships... this issue addresses spiritual friendships among relatives:

What Undying Greatness Transpired out of Two Cousins Spiritual Friendship

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Saint Bidaba, The Bishop of Qift

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Written by: Christine Awad, St. Mary & Archangel Michael (Houston, TX)

Among all eras of martyrdom within the Coptic faith, no time was ever so trying as during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian. At no time in Christian history was the bloodshed so pervasive and extensive. Many of the greatest saints carried their crosses and strengthened the faith by their bloodshed during that time.

One of these saints is Saint Bidaba the Bishop of Qift. He was born in Egypt in a city called Armant. Saint Bidaba was born to Christian parents who raised him in the faith. He grew up with his cousin Andrew and the two spent their days reading Holy Scripture and religious books, widening their comprehension and becoming authorities of their times in piety and godliness. When Bidaba was ten years old he had already committed to memory religious books as well as spiritual teachings. Andrew and Bidaba would also practice very strict fasting periods for days at a time and would spend those days and nights in fervent prayer.

Because they had a strong desire to be away from the world, they decided to leave their families and live in seclusion. They went to the Eastern mount where they found Anba Isaac who comforted and strengthened them toward enduring the hardships of the journey of receiving Eternal Life. Anba Isaac blessed them and commanded them to go to another place where they could fulfill their desire to live the

life of solitude. He prophesied to Bidaba, saying, *“O, my son, you shall shepherd the flock of Christ and many toils, tribulations and great persecutions will befall you.”* He also foretold to Andrew that he would receive the crown of martyrdom.

After they left Anba Isaac, they went to another side of the mount and built a cell for themselves. Once the bishops of the region heard about them, he ordained Bidaba a priest and Andrew a deacon. They went to church in a nearby city once every forty days to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. One day, they went to church and found the bishop there; Bidaba stood in reverence and respect for him. The bishop sat on his chair and looking at Bidaba, he was amazed to see his face shining as the moon and light emanating from him as well as a crown of gold on his head. The bishop asked to see Bidaba and Andrew and asked them to stay with him. Bidaba refused, desiring to continue living in the desert. Andrew, however, accepted to stay.

Bidaba returned to his cell weeping and saying *“I ask you O my Lord Christ to consecrate this place for Yourself that Your Name might be mentioned in it forever”*. He then left that place and went to another further away. Later, the bishop sent a messenger to the cell of Bidaba but found no one. The bishop then built a church in the name of the saint in that place and consecrated it. St. Bidaba



St. Bidaba, Bishop of Qift

would continue to attend the church but would take a different way to pray. Many signs and miracles were done by his hands and he increased in grace and blessing.

As his fame grew many who were physically and spiritually sick came to him and he healed them. Bidaba was soon promoted to the rank of Hegumen (Arch-priest). When the bishop of Qift departed, the people unanimously decided to have Bidaba ordained in his place. The people decided to go to Pope Peter the first to ordain Bidaba bishop for them. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Pope Peter and told him to go seek out Bidaba, for the Lord has chosen him. When Bidaba learned of the desire of the people, he wept bitterly and said, “Woe

to me the poor sinner for the devil wishes my perishing”. Then he prayed, “Let it be according to Your will, O Lord, and not according to mine, for You know that I am weak, powerless and incapable of handling this position.” When Pope Peter asked the people whom they wanted, they asked for Bidaba for he was worthy for this honorable position.

At his ordination, while Pope Peter was laying his hand over the pure saint’s head, a voice from Heaven said, “Worthy, worthy, O Bidaba to receive this position”. Bidaba remained with the Pope for a few days and celebrated the Divine Liturgy. Whenever Bidaba placed his hand over the chalice **to make the sign of the cross, the wine changed to blood.**

The Pope was amazed and said to the saint, “Truly you are chosen from God.”

When St. Bidaba returned to his parish, the people bearing candles, crosses, censers, olive branches and palm branches in their hands greeted him. They took him in a procession until they entered the church and he sat on his Episcopal Chair. He continued to live the ascetic life and would pray day and night. Many signs and wonders were manifested through him.

As the terror of Emperor Diocletian began against the Christians, the governor Arianus came to Upper Egypt to incite persecution and seize the Christians. He threw them into prison and tortured them severely. When St. Bidaba knew of these things he was moved with spiritual zeal to join his fellow Christian brothers and die with them. He called his people and celebrated the Divine Liturgy with them. After administering the Holy Mysteries, he spoke to the people about keeping their faith in the



Lord Jesus Christ so they can overcome obstacles. The bishop preached and strengthened his people and after he made the sign of the cross over them he blessed them and bid them farewell saying, “*I shall go to be martyred by the hand of the Arianus the governor.*” The people cried and wept for his departure but he comforted and strengthened them.

On his way to Upper Egypt he was found by his cousin now Father Andrew and another bishop named Anba Christozoulas (Servant of Christ). St. Bidaba asked them where they were going and they said that they were going with him to die for their love of the Lord Jesus Christ. The blessed saint looked upon them and saw their faces shining; he strengthened them and commanded them to be steadfast in the faith. The crown of martyrdom was awaiting them.

When they arrived in the city of Esna they saw the tortures of a multitude of Christian believers as well as those professing their faith boldly before the Governor as he continued to order them to be beheaded. Anba Bidaba watched as the tortures continued and as he watched he saw angels coming from Heaven with crowns of light for those who endured to the end and the angels raising them to heaven with great honor and glory. With that, the Bishop and his companions cried out to the Governor that they were Christians and believers in the Jesus Christ the Lord.

The Governor therefore asked who they were and where they were from. The Governor knew that St. Bidaba was a bishop and questioned whether he feared his retaliation. The saint courageously answered, “*Have you not heard of the saying of the Book by the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘There-*

fore whoever confesses me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in Heaven. But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in Heaven.’ (Matthew 10:32-33)”. The Governor attempted to bribe the pure saint but he was not moved. Therefore it was ordered that he be imprisoned.

While in prison the Archangel Michael appeared to him and told him that he would receive three crowns: the first for his worship and asceticism since his youth, the second for shepherding the flock on the straight path, and the third for his martyrdom. When the angel departed, St. Bidaba prayed and asked that his prayer be accepted before God and that the Lord would receive his soul. He finished his prayer and angels came and comforted him.

The next morning the Governor ordered all the prisoners to be brought out before the people of the city. When the people saw St. Bidaba they professed their faith in the God of St. Bidaba. The governor became enraged and ordered the heads of St. Bidaba, his companions, and the people who proclaimed the faith to be cut off. Their blood ran through the city like a stream of water. The skies were filled with pure angels who welcomed the spirits of the righteous saints. St. Bidaba and his companions received the joy of eternal life. May their prayers, their blessings, their courage and zeal always be with us. Amen.✠

