

Go Through, Go Through the Gates

“Go through, Go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people; Build up, Build up the highway! Take out the stones, Lift up a banner for the peoples! Indeed, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Surely your salvation is coming; Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.’” (Isaiah 62:10-11)

This was God’s commandment to the priests and Levites guiding them to the steps of preparing His people to His coming. The commandment, “Go through, go through the gates” came as a first step in this preparation. The repetition of the words, *go through* emphasizes the necessity and urgency of this passing through. But what type of passing through the Lord urge the priests and Levites to? What type of gates He requires them to go through?

(1) *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep” (John 10:1-2)* = The pivot of a priest’s ministry is the person of Jesus Christ the Savior who is the door of the sheep. Whoever priest climbs up some other way proclaiming something else than the message of salvation is a thief and a robber.

(2) *“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24)* = A priest is required to enter through the gates of tribulations and mortifications on both personal and ministerial levels because a grain of wheat if it dies it produces much grain.

(3) *“Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter” (Psalms 118:1-2)* = A priest must pass through the gates of righteousness, but not the self-righteousness and the righteousness of the law but he is justified through the righteousness of Christ the Savior and Redeemer.

(4) *“And those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut” (Matthew 25:10)* = A priest must watch over his own salvation and ready through his striving according to the rules in order for him to enter through the kingdom’s door before it is shut forever.

(5) *“Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered” (Luke 11:52)* = A priest has to open the door of spiritual knowledge and of the kingdom’s mysteries before himself and his congregation.

(6) *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Revelation 3:20)* = The center of a priest’s ministry is to cross the boundaries of sin and ego the Devil built around people’s minds and hearts. A priest’s work is to keep knocking the doors and not to leave them before passing through them to the depths of souls.

(7) “*Come over to Macedonia and help us*” (Acts 16:9) = A priest coming over to his served one to help him means that he must put himself in the place of the afflicted, distressed and sinful in order to understand his situation, circumstances and weakness. A priest does not serve weak and sinful people from a high tower called *Saints’ tower* but he voids himself like Christ in order to come over to them and help them.

(8) “*And entered Simon’s house*” (Luke 4:38) = A priest must not neglect the visitation service. “*Go through, Go through the gates*” is the Lord’s commandment to the priests to enter the houses in visitation and seek their inhabitants.

(9) “*See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it*” (Revelation 3:8) = A priest must not neglect and ignore the new doors and fields of service the Lord opens before him and the Holy Spirit urges him to enter through.

(10) “*Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel*” (Revelation 21:12) = While a priest teaches, he must pass through the gates of the tradition of the early church fathers lest his teaching deviates from the right faith.

Jesus Christ's Commandments Not Burdensome

St. John. in his first epistle, declared that Jesus Christ's commandments "are not heavy". However, at the first glance from a blurred vision colored by an earthly frame of mind stringently wired and bound by fleshly desires, Jesus Christ's commandments might seem heavy, not feasible, impractical, applicably impossible, incomprehensible and incompatible with the current social standards. For example, how does one possibly die to live, or get weary to rest or spend more to gain more? Jesus Christ's commandments put us face to face with the essential truth that we cannot understand all the secrets of life but should trust the One Who has designed life and destined for us to live it. The more we contemplate these life contradictory dichotomies, the more convinced we become that we need to depend on Jesus Christ and His commandments in order to experience the peace therein. Some examples of these paradoxical commands are:

1. Get Tired to Get Rest

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). By this commandment Jesus Christ calls the tired and bearer of heavy loads to approach Him to "find rest". Rest in Jesus Christ entails carrying His yoke. By definition, a yoke is that heavy piece of wood placed around the necks of the two animals together turning a waterwheel or plough in rural countries. This yoke resembles discipleship to Jesus Christ. Such discipleship requires total submission to Him regardless of any other calling in life; and obedience as students carrying out the Master's teachings and orders.

However, the Lord Jesus Christ asserts that such an endeavor would be "light and easy" assuring that He Himself will put His neck, that is to say, His power along with the bearer of Jesus Christ's yoke thus loading all the weight on Himself; although seemingly it might appear that the disciple is carrying the yoke. In that effect St. John experientially declares, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:3). The result will be rest, peace, joy, energy and activeness.

It is important to spend a quality time in prayers and know that Jesus Christ participates in your burden carrying the plus part of it; (the lion's portion) while experiencing the validity of Christ's words "*and I give you rest*".

2. Give to Receive

The more we give the more we receive. This statement sounds ridiculous. However the Holy Bible expresses it overtly saying, "*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*" (Luke 6:38). The truth of the matter is that God's abundant wealth can be experienced abundantly in giving and not in hoarding materials and withholding from the poor what you own. Through giving, God wants you to experience supernatural things hidden from those not enrolled among His disciples. Remember that wealth, as attested by the rich people, does not bring about happiness. Joy is wrought only by being like God in giving freely without measure. "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him*" (James 1:5). Selfishness strips off of happiness and robs from all joy. Let your measuring scale be your status in God's eyes and not your belongings. God treasures you even in poverty because of your priceless value in his eyes and not because of earthly richness. Remember that all we own is a gift from Him. Everything is from Him and will return to Him. Make sure you share God's gifts with others in the manner He directs you. In the end, you will experience the greatest joy which is more precious than all your belongings.

3. Serve to be Served

Serving and putting oneself at the feet of others is the only road to gaining and possessing . This concept of becoming small to become great and serve to be served is one of the most difficult equations. Our Lord Jesus Christ expressed it saying "*Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:43-45). Jesus Christ's words typically represent the life He Himself had lived and His commandments summarize it. If we follow His model, peace will prevail, wars will cease and weapons will be laid down and deserted. Towards the end of His service as a slave to humanity about to willingly give Himself up to death yet to usher in the onset of the glory of power and authority, Jesus Christ said to His disciples "*For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves*" (Luke 22:27). "*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them*" (John 13:14-17).

Jesus Christ obligates us all to do so because we are not greater than our Master and sender. Failing to fulfill His orders, results in a turmoil- ridden world engulfed in wars and torn with strife destroying mankind wherever he is found. That is exactly what is happening in the world around us today. I call upon parents, teachers, directors, and overseers who have under their authority those whom they teach direct, and oversee, to ask Jesus Christ to grant them humbleness enough to help them revert their attention from the self and direct it to Jesus Christ and to the others who are in need of participation in their love.

4. Die to Live

It is only common sense to run for life by running away from death. Escaping from death takes up different forms and roads; but in the end all venues eventually lead back to death. However Jesus Christ has stated what is beyond the common sense; the antithesis of running to death to gain life (Matthew 16:24-25). *"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name"* (Philippians 2:4-9). The application of these words will be found by whoever seeks Jesus Christ coming to Him and anchored in Him throughout life till he can boldly say, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20); and *"buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead"* (Colossians 2:12); and *"and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together"* (Romans 8:17); there are many other biblical verses that bear the same message. Before becoming sanctified by Jesus Christ's baptism and dyed by His sacrificial dye, death with and for Jesus Christ becomes difficult and against the human nature. Trying to escape pain and trials or complaining against both hoping to evade them or mere fear from them is enough to hasten death. But for the martyrs and the righteous and those who boldly face death everyday, their death becomes a bridge whereby crossing to the other side becomes a hope, desire and aspiration.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'" (Romans 8:36).

How to Attain the Harmony of these Antithesis

1. Walk by Faith Not by Sight

"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:1-7); it is important to differentiate between eye sight and internal vision. There is so much around us hidden from the human eye. Let us ask God to grant us the internal vision to behold such things.

2. Seek God's Wisdom to Become Wise

Instead of putting your trust and reliance on what is seen by the human eye (the here and now), place your trust in what is grasped by faith (the eternal and everlasting). Place your dreams and hopes in the hands of God knowing that God has in store what you do not perceive with your

human eye. Choose to live unrestricted with your human eyes, but according to the boundless resources that God has put under your disposal. Just start with faith and it will lead you into the limitless life with God.

3. Strive to be Filled with God's Wisdom

God's wisdom seems stupidity in people's eyes. *"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'"* (1 Corinthians 3:18-19). It is easy to look for wisdom in the wrong people. So many youths, men and women perished because of seeking wisdom outside the true divine source. The only safe source of wisdom is God. Meekness and perpetual desire to learn are the means to obtaining true divine wisdom. God is greater than the human brain and cannot be contained therein. But, the Holy Spirit lives in humble hearts granting them the basics of true divine wisdom required for a sanctified life. People who ignore the source of wisdom get lost while running for its mirage.

Ask God to grant you the Holy Spirit's wisdom through perpetual prayers and deep meditation in the word of God in the Holy Bible and by experiencing and living them meticulously and faithfully listening and harkening to the voice of the conscience through which the Holy Spirit will reveal God's will to you.

Articles on the Christian History - The Fourth Century

St. Macarius' visits to St Anthony, the father of all monks

St. Macarius visited St. Anthony twice during the year 343 AD and a third time ten years later in the year 353 AD. The story about the first visit found in "The Paradise of the Fathers" says that when St. Anthony saw St. Macarius approaching, he ran inside his cave and closed its entrance. His aim was to test St. Macarius' patience and endurance. Seeing how so long St. Macarius had waited patiently outside the cave, St. Anthony received him inside and accommodated him. They chatted for a considerable time discussing salvation of the soul and the life of seclusion and asceticism (which St. Macarius later on wrote down and sent as messages to his disciples). St. Macarius also received the monastic gown previously handed down to St. Anthony by an angel in a vision. In the evening of that day St. Anthony resumed his work of weaving baskets. St. Macarius asked permission to do so. After a short while, noticing how productive St. Macarius was in a short time, St. Anthony commented "a great power resides in these hands".

According to the manuscripts found in his monastery, St. Macarius visited St. Shenouda the father of the ascetics six or seven years after his visit to St. Anthony.

Ten years later, in 353 AD, as a result of the increase in the number of St. Macarius' disciples, he felt a need to visit St. Anthony to get more advice and counsel. According to the manuscripts, during this visit St. Anthony handed over his staff to St. Macarius (some believe this was a prophetic sign of passing on the monastic management).

Due to the lack of a church in the desert of Scetes, St Macarius used to frequently visit the cells in a region known as "Nitria Mountain " or "Albarnoug" to receive Holy Communion. There he became known as (the young elder) for his piety and deep spiritual experience.

St. Macarius' Outstanding Achievement

St. Macarius lived a highly sanctified spiritual life the aroma of which spread throughout Egypt and attracted a lot of youths whose hearts were inclined towards a life of seclusion, asceticism and Christian perfection. St. Macarius was nicknamed "the friend of the cherubim". St. Macarius's life was full of supernatural miracles one of them was the raising of a dead man to tell his wife important information. St Sisoës relates the story saying,

"During the harvest time, while working in the fields to support and sustain the poor brethren seven monks came across a woman crying hopelessly because her husband had died without telling her where he had kept the money his friend had entrusted him with. The owner threatened to sell her two sons as slaves. Hearing the story, St. Macarius, took to the grave of the widow's husband and asked the dead man where he had put the deposit. The brethren with St. Macarius heard him say to the man "go in peace and repose till the resurrection day". St. Macarius informed the widow about the place. Finding the deposit, the woman glorified God and praised and thanked St. Macarius. Refusing the praise and glorifications the saint said, "the dead man did not respond because of my prayers but because of God's love for the widows and the poor." This is one of many other supernatural deeds performed by St. Macarius.

The Exile of St. Macarius the Great and St. Macarius the Alexandrian:

After the departure of St. Athanasius in the year 373 AD, Arianism was gradually dwindling approaching an end. Therefore, in order to survive and revive their beliefs, the Arians had to revert to ferocity and weaponry against whoever opposed them. Pope Peter II, who succeeded St. Athanasius (373- 378 AD) drank from their cup having been persecuted by Emperor Valens who had appointed an Arian bishop by the name Lucius in the Pope's place. The historian Socrates described this bishop as having the aggression of wolves. He was protected by a big number from the emperor's special troops. In addition, he sent to Tetian, the governor in Egypt, ordering him to exile all those who still practiced the Nicene faith. As a result, the national and church forces both allied together for the benefit of Arianism.

The Arian Bishop Lucius came to Alexandria and killed a lot of the Christians. Before the end of 373 AD, getting to know that the monks in their monasteries had been supporting Pope Peter II, Lucius sent Roman troops to the monasteries led by leaders thirsty for bloodshed. The historian Rufinus happened to be present in the region to record what had taken place. He wrote specifically, "Upon arriving at the desert the troops found the monks armed with no defensive weapons except their prayers, fasts and worship; determined to die for the sake of the faith they had inherited from their ancestors. They also encountered hermits who did not raise their hands to ward off blows but submitted their necks to slaughter saying nothing but "praise be to God in everything". In this respect, St. Jerome confirms that total communities of monks were martyred by the troops of that fake priest.

Seeing the futility of their attempts before the strength of the Christian faith, the Roman troops leaders ordered the arrest of the monastery abbots. Among those were St. Macarius the Great and St. Macarius the Alexandrian.

In the month of Paremhotep they sent both into exile in an island in the Nile surrounded by marshes and whose inhabitants were all unexceptionally pagans and where there was also an old temple for one of the old Egyptian gods. It happened that the daughter of the Abbot of this temple was demon possessed. As soon as she saw the two saints coming to the island, she shouted loudly, "you followers of Jesus Christ, how great is your power! Have you come here to

send us out of this place?" The two saints prayed over her. So, the devil cast her down but then came out of her and she stood up whole.

The two saints took their exile as a Jesus Christ granted opportunity to evangelize in the island and tell the natives about the Lord Jesus Christ. After seven months, the temple was inaugurated a church in the month of Tobe of the following year.

The Departure of St. Macarius

Serapion, St. Macarius biography author, has it that St. Macarius' sight weakened having reached the age of ninety-seven, and would be guided by one of his disciples. As the day of his departure approached, two men appeared to him (one of them was Abba Pachom the Abbot of Donas monks) and said, "get ready, because after nine days you will take off this body and be with us."

On the twenty-seventh of Paremhotep of the Coptic year 113, St. Macarius got sick with high fever. A cherubim appeared to him saying "hurry up, all are waiting for you". Then in a low voice heard by his disciple St. Macarius said, "my beloved Lord Jesus Christ, receive my soul." And after that he departed.

As soon as his disciples heard the news of his departure, they gathered to bid the last farewell to their spiritual director and mentor. After the funeral prayers, they buried him reverently in a cave next to the church he had built and where he used to pray and meet with his disciples. May the prayers of this great saint be with us.