

**That Signs and Wonders May Be Done Through The Name of Your Holy Servant Jesus**

While we celebrate the Apostles' fast and feast, I like to meditate with you upon the secret lying behind their strong and powerful ministry. The Apostolic era was characterized by a fiery extended ministry that bore abundant fruits. This type of Ministry, the Apostolic era ministry, is the ministry that every bishop and priest yearn to achieve. It is a ministry that does not fail its goal and brings abundant fruits to the heavenly kingdom.

If we meditate upon the story of St. Peter and St. John healing the man lame from his mother's womb, the secret of the efficacy and strength of the Apostles' ministry will be revealed to us. At the moment of healing, St. Peter said to the lame man, "***In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk***" (Acts 3:6). Then, when St. Peter found all the people amazed, he told them, "***And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know***" (Acts 3:16). When the two apostles were arrested and on the second day were set in the midst of the priests, elders and scribes who interrogated them asking, "***By what power or by what name have you done this?***" (Acts 4:7), St. Peter replied saying, "***let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole***" (Acts 4:10). The priests and scribes' conclusion was, "***But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name. So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus***" (Acts 4:17-18). The two apostles, being let go, went to their own companions and they raised their voice to God with one accord in a prayer concluded with a statement that lead the place where they were assembled together to be shaken, "***Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your Holy Servant Jesus***" (Acts 4:29-30). Now, we can extract the following points:

- The wonder was done by the name of Jesus Christ
- Due to this wonder, the name of Jesus Christ became the pivot of St. Peter's preaching to the people
- The priests and elders asked in wonder by what name the two apostles have made this power
- St. Peter gave testimony about the name of Jesus Christ before the priests and elders
- The mere mention of the name of Jesus Christ, and not the presence of His real person, became a source of tension and irritability to the priests and elders to the degree that their only concern was to stop the two apostles speaking and teaching in this name
- The Apostles held more on the name of Jesus Christ and asked the Lord to continue doing signs and wonders through the name of His Holy Servant Jesus
- Heavens responded to this prayer by making the place in where they were assembled be shaken

All the above mentioned means that the name of Jesus Christ alone was the pivot of the Apostles' preaching, work and power, while it was, at the same time, the source of tension and irritability of the priests and elders. It is clear that the Apostles had learned to use the name of Jesus Christ as a password to their ministry when the Lord Jesus Christ Himself addressed them beforehand saying, "***Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full***" (John 16:24).

Many priests and servants complains nowadays from the difficulty of the service due to what faces them among the people they serve like for example heart cruelty, resistance, carelessness, pride, stubbornness ...etc. **This means that these priests' joy in their ministry is not full.** The cause of this incomplete joy is the absence of the effectiveness of the name of Jesus Christ from their ministry.

In the Old Testament, as in other ancient cultures, there was a close connection between someone's soul and his name. His personality, with its peculiarities and its energy, was in some sense present in his name. Therefore, to know a person's name was to gain an insight into his nature, and thereby to acquire a relationship with him. This is why the mysterious messenger who wrestled with Jacob refused to disclose his name to him (Genesis 32:29). The same attitude was reflected in the reply of the angel to Manoah, "*Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?*" (Judges 13:18). A change of name indicates a decisive change in a person's life. This is actually what happened with many people mentioned in the Holy Bible and what happens during the ordination of bishops, priests, monks and nuns. In the Hebrew tradition, to invoke a person's name was to make that person effectively present<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the mere mention of the name of Jesus Christ is an invocation of His person and His power of salvation.

Hence, we need to learn from our fathers the Apostles how to invoke the power of the name of Jesus Christ, not only in our service but also in our entire life. There are many ways to achieve that. The most famous of these ways is constant repetition of the Jesus prayer. But also, whenever one of the congregation asks us to pray for a certain matter (someone's repentance, healing, success, solving a certain problem, finding a convenient spouse, finding a good job...etc), we can make the name of Jesus Christ the password of our supplications and prayers for the sake of that person. We can say for example: *In the name of Jesus Christ, God grant you healing* (success, offspring, or job...etc)

Finally, I pray for you all, in the name of Jesus Christ, to be granted the full joy in your ministry as well as all your hearts' desires!!

### **The Liturgical Collective Repentance**

During the service of the Divine Liturgy, before the priest prays loudly, "The Holies for the holy", the deacon serving at the altar draws the attention of the congregation and clergy alike by reminding them to bow down their heads before the Lord. For, that moment is a moment of repentance and confession of sins after which the participants can claim worthiness to receive the absolution prayer offered by the priest and the peace therein. The priest offers a confession on behalf of and with the people praying, "O God, who takes away the sin of the world, hasten to accept the repentance of Your servants, for the light of knowledge and forgiveness of sins...O God, absolve us, and absolve all Your people from every sin, and from every curse, and from every denial, and from every false oath, and from every encounter with the heretics and the heathen." It is worth noting that the calling is for bowing the heads down without prostration to remind us of the tax collector who had been described by the Lord Jesus Christ, "*And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other;*

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<sup>1</sup>- Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, *The Power of the Name*, SLG Press, P. 11-12

*for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*” (Luke 18:13-14). Therefore, what makes us bow down our heads during those awesome moments is primarily sin. It is this mixture of feelings of shame, sadness and terrible regret that makes a person unable to lift up the head. Such a situation befits the presence of the deity, the Holy Body and Blood and all the saints.

It is noticeable that all the rituals listed by the Pharisee, represented in fasting, prayer and almsgiving but void of repentance, did not make him worthy of justification before God. However, the sinner who had condemned himself and bowed down his head was accepted. Thus, when the deacon inside the altar calls for bowing down, he summons each one present to reprove oneself in order to be ready for acceptance and justification by God through the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why the whole church stand in repentance with heads bowed down seeking forgiveness; and so the church becomes a community of repentant believers.

Out of the bowing down of heads, the church has made a ritual of penitence. This ritual is a calling for unity under a common feeling of contrition which qualifies the church to participate in the communion of the Holy Body and Blood and after that the faithful believers return home justified. When the serving priest prays loudly, “The Holies for the holy”, he asserts that God has accepted their repentance, lifted up their faces and completed their propitiation as a result of their confession. Thus they have become saints by the act of forgiveness and obtained worthiness of propitiation.

### **The Repentance of the Priest**

Before the priest can proclaim that “The Holies for the holy”, he will have confessed his own sins before God praying with a contrite heart saying “Remember, O Lord, my own weaknesses and forgive my many sins, and where transgression has abounded, let Your grace be multiplied in abundance. Because of my own sins and the abomination of my heart, deprive not Your people of the grace of Your Holy Spirit”. After that, he receives an encouraging message from the deacon serving at the altar saying, “Saved. Amen. And with your spirit. In the fear of God, let us attend.” The outcome of salvation and forgiveness is manifest in the priests subsequent declaration “Peace be with all”. This holy scenario inside the altar carried out by the priest, the serving deacon in the presence of the Holy Spirit and the involvement of the congregation outside proves that a priest serving at a Coptic altar is a sinner repenting of his sins and representing the penance and confession of his people for the sake of obtaining justification and the peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:6-7).

### **The Washing of Feet**

The washing of the disciples’ feet by the Lord Jesus Christ was symbolic of the Holy Mystery of Repentance and confession. In general, the act of washing indicates removal of sins. “*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter as snow*” (Psalm 51:7). Washing in its essence refers to the Holy Mystery of Baptism. Before the Holy Supper and the partaking of the Holy Body and Blood, the Lord was satisfied with washing the disciples’ feet only, asserting that baptism is not to be repeated but rather sins to be removed. “*Jesus said to him, ‘He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.’*” (John 13:10). This is a clear indication that before receiving Holy Communion, the need is only for washing one's feet; that is to say having newly committed sins washed away by Jesus Christ.

That is why the church teaches us to take off our shoes before entering the altar as an indication of the beginning of the hidden cleansing process from our sins which we have confessed with a contrite heart. It is believed that among the early basic church rituals was the placing of a brass washing bowl at the step of the side altar for the priest to wash his feet before starting his service. In this way, the Holy Spirit announces the need for the initiation of the process of collective repentance and confession of sins headed by the priest who in so doing becomes a true example and genuine role model to be followed thereby achieving union and participation with the Lord.

### **The Church Revival**

It is impossible for individual members to gain revival in a church simply by simulation. For genuine revival to take place it has to be a group revival guided by the Holy Spirit. The church as a community is directly responsible for the nation and the world at large having been placed on earth to save it through praying and fasting. When the people of Nineveh fasted and prayed with true repentance and contrition, they saved the city from destruction. On the other hand, Sodom and Gomorrah did not have men who would pray and supplicate for them, and so they were destroyed.

Nowadays, there is a dire need for collective fasting and repentance so that Egypt and the whole world may be saved from the coming danger.

## **Articles on the Christian History The Fifth Century**

### **A New Heresy**

No soon had Pope Kyrillos finished refuting the ten volumes written by the heretic Julian, he faced new strange thoughts initiated by Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople. This new heresy would not accept the mystery of the Lord's death on the cross but propagated the strange, wrong theology of the two natures of Jesus Christ, a human nature capable of accepting pain and suffering and a detached godly nature that separated from the human nature during the sufferings on the cross. Thus, the mother of God "Theotokos" would be renamed as the mother of Jesus Christ "Christotokos". Such heresies and wrong theological interpretations of the Holy Bible where it is written, *"And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.'"* (Luke 1:35); started to spread among the Christian population. Pope Kyrillos picked up the chance of the approach of the Holy Feast of the Resurrection and wrote his festal message, as was the custom since the Nicene Council 325 AD for the pope of Alexandria to send a message to his overseers announcing the date of the feast, clarifying the Christian faith concerning the nature of Christ-God the incarnate. Pope Kyrillos clarified the union between the deity and the flesh likening this unchanging unity to the one existing between the iron and heat in a hot iron rod.

Pope Kyrillos introduced a lot of biblical verses to support his cause. Some of them are:

- *"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.'"* (Matthew 1:23).
- *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel"* (Isaiah 7:14).
- *"But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' Jesus said, 'I am. And you will see the Son of Man"*

*sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”* (Mark 14:61-62).

- *“And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’”* (Luke 1:35).
- *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14).

There are many other verses mentioned in the festal message that clarified the church's beliefs concerning the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The festal message carried to Nestorius by some articulate, knowledgeable monks was not welcomed by that arrogant opinionated man. On the contrary, his arguments were weak and unacceptable. Therefore, the monks had no choice but to return to Alexandria and report to Pope Kyrillos. The news brought by the messengers caused Pope Kyrillos to convene a Holy Synod composed of the Egyptian bishops during which was composed the introduction to the Creed of Faith. “We exalt you, the Mother of the true light. We glorify you, O saint, the Theotokos...” The subject matter of that introduction was mainly the supernatural motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the Logos. This introduction has continued to be prayed in our Orthodox churches till today. That same Holy Synod determined another important decision, the excommunication of Nestorius. After that, Pope Kyrillos exchanged letters with him, but the man was too stubborn and arrogant to change his mind. Pope Kyrillos, in his last letter to the heretic patriarch wrote, “you do not dare fight the One Who had tasted death for our sake and is now alive with the power of His deity standing at the right hand of His Father incessantly worshipped by the angels, authorities and powers.”

Through playing on the strings of emotions, politics and friendly relationships, Nestorius tried to manipulate the bishop of Rome to gain him to his side. Therefore, he sent him a message in the Greek language in which he was very knowledgeable. Through manipulation of words and twisting of their meanings, he managed to distort the true Christian faith and made his message seemingly acceptable to Suasions and others. When Pope Kyrillos heard, he wrote a message in Greek to the bishop of Rome in which he revealed the fallacies in Nestorius’ teachings and the extent of their danger over the true Christian precepts. He also asserted the true name of the Mother of God as the “Theotokos” (Mother of God). The bishop of Rome received Pope Kyrillos’ message positively; and calling for a meeting with his bishops he announced the excommunication of Nestorius because of his false teachings.

Although Nestorius was excommunicated by both sees, that of Alexandria and Rome, yet he still insisted on his perverted thinking and continued to disseminate his poison. Pope Kyrillos did not cease to fight this heretic. So, he sent messages to his friend Bishop John of Antioch (also a friend of Nestorius), Julian, Bishop of Jerusalem, and Acacius, Bishop of Aleppo. In addition, he convened a second Holy Synod in Alexandria and showed his bishops those messages. After that, with the consent of the Holy Synod of Alexandria, he sent the excommunication messages to the congregation of Constantinople, the servants, and the monks along with new teaching messages. Messages were sent to Nestorius to sign the twelve excommunication acts. Unfortunately, he

refused to sign them and thus deprived himself of the privilege of partnership in the Catholic Apostolic church.