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Coptic Empathy

Coptic youth abiding in countries with contemporary safeguards against persecution tend to consign to oblivion regarding the struggles our brethren Copts face in Egypt. Youth in the Coptic church tend to participate in a plethora of activities, ranging from vigorous academic schedules, athletics, church activities and much more. It is facile for the youth in our church to forget that we have brethren that face hardships and tribulations abroad the globe, for the sake of worshipping our holy emancipator Jesus Christ. It is exceedingly important for youth habituating in fortunate areas to comprehend and relay back the importance of mercy and compassion. Coptic youth subsisting in felicitous environments have an unfortunate inclination to lose sight of the persecution of our fellow Copts in Egypt and it is cardinal that youth do not forget the importance of mercy and compassion.

St. John Chrysostom says the meaning of Christianity comes from the verse “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus: 19:18). It is therefore our duty as Coptic youth to carry this out, and show love and compassion for our brothers and sisters in Egypt. Christ holds this commandment high. He has this same message delivered to us through the teachings of the Holy Bible eleven times. It appears once in the book of Leviticus, once in the book of Zechariah, three times in The Gospel of St. Matthew, once in The Gospel of St. Mark, once in the Gospel of St. Luke, twice in the book of Romans, once in the book of Galatians, and once in the book of James. It is the commandment that is repeated to us the most through out our readings in the Holy Bible and is carried from the Old Testament to the New

Testament. It is clearly a point of emphasis that the Bible makes. As the great saying goes, "Our life and our death are with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained our God; but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ" (Abba Anthony). It is the commandment that every church father, saint, and martyr has preached. It may have not always been preached with words, but always through example.

The best person to imitate to guarantee salvation is Christ. Christ is the ultimate example of mercy and compassion. He saved the thief at his right on the cross solely because he recognized him. This is a perfect example of suffering with the sufferer. He forgives sins just for repeating them in confession. Youth in the Coptic church must relay compassion over in our daily lives. We must ask and worry for our Coptic brothers in Egypt. We must be like Christ.

To begin the mission of showing mercy, compassion, and love for one another, I set the goal of interviewing a victim of persecution. I considered doing an interview abroad, but I set out to see what I could accomplish locally. As it turns out, I live with a victim of persecution, and would have never realized it if I didn't ask. I asked my mom if she knew anyone who lived around us who was persecuted because of religion and she replied jokingly, "Do I count?" I didn't think much of it at the time, but I thought more into it that night. Right under my nose, I had a victim of persecution, but was always too preoccupied to inquire. I asked my mom if she was persecuted in Egypt because of her religion and she replied yes. She told me a story of how one Christmas Eve, she and her sisters were all dressed and ready to go to attend the liturgy, when fire crackers were being thrown outside. They lived in an area predominantly Christian in Egypt, and the fire crackers were thrown to intimidate anyone from leaving to

attend church that meridian. My mind immediately raced with thoughts of why or how anyone could do this. It was even more real to me because it was a person I see and talk to every day. It really made an impression on me that this stuff isn't just on television, but it happens to real people. All year, we look forward to attending the liturgies of the feasts, and we become preoccupied with what we are going to wear, what we are going to eat, and what we are getting for gifts. I take going to church for granted. I realized this after sitting with my mom. My stomach turned into a knot when I realized youth my age living in Egypt don't care about the worldly things. Their main concern is to get to church, praise God and rejoice with God, and come back home safely. I learned that we should show our compassion and love through prayers and praises. When we sit down to pray to God, we should ask him to help our brethren who are not as fortunate and free as us. We must remember them when we pray during liturgies, we should lift up our hearts and ask for his mercy on the persecuted Copts in Egypt. When we pray "Lord Have Mercy," we should mean it with all our hearts. We should tenaciously seek and ask about our brothers. These are all things that have bettered my spiritual life immensely, all from one sitting with my own mother. Coptic youth have the ability to make a difference, and use these opportunities to better our spiritual lives.

In continuing the questions with my mom, I asked her about being a Copt in school. She proceeded to tell me how in college, she wrote an essay that was phenomenal. She said she worked on it for 3 weeks straight, perfecting it. The professor at the time was known to show bias against Christians. My mom told me the professor had given her, and three of her Christian friends, failing grades. We complain now about teachers being mean, but nothing compares to this. This is an abasement to the

education system. How can someone work so hard, only to be denied a fair echelon based on religion?

We, as Coptic youth, should use this as a lesson, to take our education seriously.

All of the Coptic youth participating in this essay have participated first hand in showing mercy and compassion toward our brethren in Egypt, especially and perhaps to those who have recently immigrated. Many of them are in financial distress, and by participating, one of our brothers will receive a scholarship. This is one of the Lord's commands regarding compassion. Christ goes as far as to promise us a reward. This is how much it means to Christ. "Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble." (Psalm 41:1). Christ also tells us to try him regarding this issue. It is the only time Christ tells us to try him. "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the Lord of Hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it." The tithe does not necessarily have to be money. In the case of writing this essay a tithe could mean our time. It is a privilege to be participating in this service, as this is a service with many rewards.

Coptic youth flourishing in stable, peaceful environments may misrecollect the masochism occurring to our kinsperson in Egypt. This activity however has helped me immensely to constantly reminisce about our brothers. My spiritual life has improved with a whole new addition. I have a new layer of prayer to add when I speak to Christ. I can ask him to remember those being tantalized for his sake, and He will listen to me. It was a remarkable discovery to learn that my own mother was a victim of persecution for being a Coptic Christian in Egypt. Indeed, mercy is a key virtue to possess.