

## **Mercy and Compassion in the Christian life:**

### **A Personal First Hand Account**

It is May 18<sup>th</sup> of 2011. A poor section of Cairo, called Imbaba, is blistering with activity. One's ears are filled with screams and wailings of distressed people and their families, as they stampede out of their burning homes to take refuge where they feel most secure: their mother, the Church. Little did these innocent Coptic Christians know that the same Salafist Muslims who have burned their homes and stores have already reached their beloved church of St. Mary. Even though twelve people were killed and two-hundred were wounded during this day, it is not a very well-known story, at least not like the bomb that detonated outside of a church in Alexandria, or of the many youth shot to death in Nag-Hammadi. We Coptic youth must realize that information of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Egypt will not be given to us on a silver platter. We must look for ourselves for the truth behind everything that happens, because truth is the force behind any change. And it doesn't take a lot of effort to dig out the truth. Unbeknownst to many of us, the reality of the persecution that is occurring in our homeland can be found right here in America, within the walls of our home. In fact, it doesn't even take a Facebook account, Internet, or even a computer to know the true facts behind the animalistic brutality that our brothers and sisters in Egypt have to deal with every day. All you have to do to share in their suffering is to ask someone around you, whether he or she be a local resident who has immigrated from Egypt who attends your church, or even a relative who has immigrated for the same reason. Sharing in ones suffering, whether he be a stranger, friend, or relative, is a form of compassion, as St. Augustine defined this virtue as "Suffering with the Sufferer."

I did not have to search long for a person who was persecuted back in the motherland, Egypt. My mother was caused great distress by discriminatory action that

were acted towards her for no reason other than the fact that she is a Christian who had lived in a Muslim majority Egypt.

My mother had worked very hard throughout her academic life during her childhood in Egypt, striving for perfect scores in every class that she had ever taken. She had told me stories of sleepless nights she had gone through studying, locked up in her room, not even stepping out for dinner. She had told me stories of how she had kept herself awake by opening the balcony during the freezing Egyptian winter nights, so that the cold air could blow against her face to keep her alert. My mother had done all of this for years, just to reach her one goal: to be a college professor of nursing. She thought that her hard work had paid off when she graduated nursing school as the number 1 of her class. Usually, the top student would be given permission by the dean to become a professor in the college, only this dean was a discriminatory woman who would not accept the fact that her colleges number 1 student was a Christian. So the dean gave the position away to the number 2 of their class, a Muslim girl.

My mother, still very determined, would not give up. Everyday, she traveled to a different college where she could pursue her life-long dream, even though the great distance to this other college wasted time and money.

I found that talking to my mom face to face enhanced my experience as an interviewer greatly. Looking into the speaker's eyes while hearing their story let me feel the speaker's emotions in a more vivid manner. I believe that as youth, who are spiritually, mentally, and physically young and inexperienced, it is important for us to feel and share the emotions so that we can fully understand the reality of the story that was told. This experience though, has greatly questioned my spiritual life. When I first heard my mother's story, many questions rose in my mind: how can one citizen of the same country, who lives within the same block, show so much hatred to her sister? Is it God's plan for His children to be persecuted? Why? Does God expect for us weak

mortals to withstand our persecutor's intense pressure without faltering in our faith? As I was greatly disturbed by the intense hatred shown toward my mom ,I decided to find answers to my questions. Yet the answers seemed to find me, because the answers were so clear and obvious in the Holy Bible. For example, Jesus Christ Himself told us "... you will be hated by all nations for My Name's sake... And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another."

(Matthew 24). When Christ says "you will be hated by all nations," He does not exclude the nation that you are living in. it is expected for me and every other person who stands on the solid rock of faith to have faith just as solid, and not be blown away by Satan's tempests of sin. St. Symeon the New Theologian explains: "He [who] has the fear of God within him ... wears the invincible armor of faith. This makes him strong and able to take on anything, even things that seem difficult or impossible to most people. Such a man is like a giant surrounded by monkeys, or a roaring lion among dogs and foxes."

The answer to my question about God's will for His children's persecution was found in Luke 21: "They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict." The persecution of God's children is witnessing God in front of men. It is a form of evangelism, of which St. Anthony says, "If we gain our brother, we have gained God".

Rather than saying that it is God's will for us to endure suffering for His Name's sake, I think it is important to make point that it should be OUR will to endure suffering. The question should not be whether or not God expects us weaklings to endure pain and discomfort offered to us by our persecutors without wavering in our

faith. The question should be asked about ourselves: is it appropriate for us to expect from ourselves anything more comforting? This does not mean that we throw ourselves into a fire hotter than we can endure, because St. Anthony says, "If we stretch the brethren beyond measure they will soon break." John 17 clarifies exactly what is expected of us: "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one." God wants us to face the temptations and persecution, not run away from it.