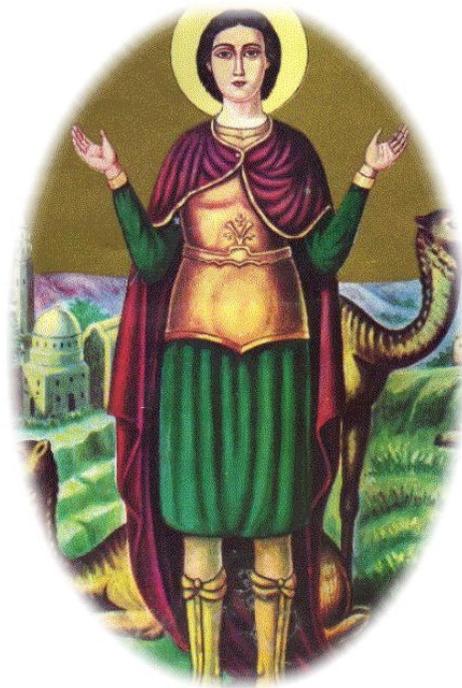


Sunday School Program

Grade 11

Class of St. Mina



PREFACE

These notes are intended to help the teacher prepare the lessons allotted for these months. They are based on the three-year curriculum designed for high school. The church education staff at the diocese of Malawi and the Patriarchate youth service has prepared the course. We offer the course to our beloved high school teachers. It is our belief that this stage has a vital role to play in the life of young people as it forms and shapes their attitudes. Of course you will have every lesson presented in detail. We leave you now in the care of God. May His Holy Spirit support you in your work, talk and discussion with young people. Before using these notes, you should make a thorough study of the introduction to the notes for the ninth grade book because they include:

1. The philosophy and aims of this course.
2. The features of the high school, its problems and the techniques followed in dealing with it.
3. The religious attitude that characterizes this stage, its attributes and how to develop these attitudes in the right direction.

May the Lord bless this effort for the benefit of the service of the secondary stage through the prayers of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.

Bishop Moussa
Bishop of Youth

Table of Contents

Month	Subject
The First Period	
<i>September</i>	
1.	How the church has prepared her Children for Martyrdom
2.	Martyrs in the Cause of Chastity
3.	The Holy Cross
4.	The Ten Commandments; First: You shall have no other Gods before Me
<i>October</i>	
5.	Second: You shall not make for yourself a graven image
6.	Third: You shall not take the name of the Lord yow God in Vain
7.	Fourth: Remember that You keep the holy the Sabbath Day
8.	Fifth: Honor You father and Mother
<i>November</i>	
9.	Sixth: You shall not Judge
10.	Seventh & Tenth: You shall not commit adultery -You shall not covet your neighbor's goods
11.	Eighth and Ninth: You shall not steel -You shall not be false witness
12.	The Events of the Pentecost
<i>December</i>	
13.	Our Bodies are for the Lord
14.	Love and the Body
15.	Freedom and Discipline
16.	The Hymn of Kiahk
17.	How to begin a New Year
<i>January</i>	
18.	Glory to God in the Highest
19.	Trinitarianism and Monotheism
20.	The Coptic Church
21.	The Acceptable Worship
<i>February</i>	
22.	Who is the Prophet?
23.	God in the Book of Jonah and Prophet
24.	Recitation
25.	A study and Contemplation St. John's Gospel; Chapter 1: The Incarnation of the Logos

March

- 26. Chapter 2: The Wedding at Cana in Galilee
- 27. Chapter 3: Being born from above
- 28. Chapter 4: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman
- 29. Chapter 5: The Sick Man at Bethesda

April

- 30. Chapter 6: The Bread of life
- 31. Chapter 7: The Living Water
- 32. Chapter 8: The Light of the World
- 33. Chapter 9: I was blind but now I can see

May

- 34. Chapter 10: Jesus is the good Shepherd
- 35. The Power of the Resurrection
- 36. The Titles of St. Mark
- 37. The Holy Bible and free from Perversion

June

- 38. The Authority of Scriptures
- 39. Ascension and our spiritual life
- 40. Pentecost and the Birth of the Church
- 41. One Church of God
- 42. The Body and the Temple

July

- 43. The Bride of Christ: Attributes of the church of the Apostles
- 44. The Parables of Our Lord Jesus Christ
- 45. Different kinds of soil
- 46. The forgiving father

August

- 47. Dedication of all
- 48. I am responsible
- 49. The final Judgment
- 50. The titles of St. Mary and her intercession
- 51. A Cloud of witnesses

(1) How The Church Has Prepared Her Children For Martyrdom

References

- + “Martyrdom in Christianity” Bishop Youannis
- + “They Did Not Love Their Life” Bishop Bemin
- + “The Great Feasts” Vol. 2, Bishop Bemin

The Lesson

Aim

Going back to the strong faith of the early church.

Introduction

Christianity never sought for all that torture for her children, but owing to the fierce attack of the evil world, she, as a mother, had to know what to do to help her children. She brings up saints. She insists on a sound start in following the Lord and in carrying out the main principle of His love: “He that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37, Luke 14:26-33). We hear about Mother Doulagi, who instructed her children the words they would say to the governors in advance: “We are the children of Jesus”.

The Holy Sacraments and Preparedness for Martyrdom

Those who had a desire to be baptized used to attend the meetings of Catechumen in Subterranean passages. They became children to what is right. They became champions in defending the Faith. When the faithful were baptized, they broke off their connections with the world “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans. 6:4). To them the sacraments were spiritual weaning from what is earthly and secular.

The Sharing of Holy Communion

- ❑ They received the Communion. They were like lambs among wolves but it was strange that they could turn wolves into lambs! It happened that pagans believed and became martyrs also while torturing the Christians. They were attracted by the heroic deeds, which were offered in the name of Jesus.
- ❑ Communion filled them with the spirit of power and faith.
- ❑ The Holy Mass comforted them and granted them the life of hope. The Sacraments sanctified their souls, bodies and thoughts. While delivering the Communion to the people, the bishops encouraged them to endure the attacks of persecutors. Whenever one of them was martyred, they put his bones under the altar. Thus the Sacrifice of Christ on the altar sanctified the sacrifices under the altar. In his revelation, St. John saw the sacrifices that were under the altar and said, “I saw underneath the altar the souls of those slaughtered because of the Word of God and because of the witness work which they used to have. And they cried with loud voice, saying; “Until when, Sovereign Lord holy and true, are you refraining from judging and avenging our blood upon those who dwell on the earth” (The Revelation 6:9,10).

Exhortation

Origen was a young man when his father was arrested. Young Origen exhorted his father to remain firm and to attain the crown of martyrdom. He said to him, “Do not change your mind for our sake”.

Caring for the martyrs’ families

The church considered herself responsible for those who were kept in prison to be martyred. She cared for them and visited the confessors. The bishops also visited the martyrs’ families and gave them spiritual, material and social care. Moreover, the Dascalia considered the bishop himself responsible for the martyrs’ daughters. It was his duty to marry them to good, pious people under his supervision. Additionally, the defenders’ writings defended faith by directing their letters to the Zealous Jews, the Greek philosophers and the Roman Politicians “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3: 15).

Honoring The Martyrs

The church puts her martyrs in a rank above the rank of other saints. She mentions them in her prayers and hymns and puts their relics in the church building. People usually kiss them and are blessed by them. The church celebrates the martyrs’ feasts on the first day of the Coptic year (Tute 1, which corresponds to September 11). St. Augustine said, “We do not pray for saints as they loved the Lord more than any other man did. It is we who ask them to pray for us”.

The Church Prepares her Children for Martyrdom

There are lessons given by the church to her children. These lessons aim at preparing the children of the church for martyrdom:

1. ***Asceticism:*** The person who rejects the world can leave the world without being sorry for leaving it; but the person who loves the world and sticks to it finds it difficult to leave it and becomes afraid of death “and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:11). In order to teach people this lesson, the church ordered this verse to be said in every Mass after reading the Catholic Epistle, “Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15).
2. ***Chastity:*** The person who is pure and chaste can suffer martyrdom, but the person who indulges in the lust of the flesh cannot be martyred as the lusts of the flesh humiliate him (Examples from the life of martyrs).
3. ***Complete Love For God:*** This great love for God surpassed their love for the world, flesh and desires. Christians, in the age of martyrs, loved the Lord in a way that surpassed description. God occupied all their mind, thought and life. God was all in all to them and no one else “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Philippians 1:23).
4. ***Courage:*** The church provided her children with bravery, courage and the daring heart that did not fear anything. Nobody was ashamed to declare his faith in front of all and before all, the same way David did when he said, “I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings, and shall not be put to shame” (Psalm 119:46).

Our Current Situation

If we are truly the children of martyrs, let's follow their steps; let's reject everything; let's stick to the life of chastity and love for God; let's not deny the cross "We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Prayer

O Lord, help us to live as our forefathers lived; in their worship, fellowship and service. Help us to bear witness to your name, to embrace your cross and wait for your coming.

Activities

- ❑ Train yourself to be like martyrs in their inner life so that you may be prepared to bear a true witness
- ❑ Collect the stories of martyrs, ask them to intercede for you and glorify them on their feast days.
- ❑ You must choose one of these martyrs to be your intercessor (advocate). Imitate them and learn from them the life of virtue and complete love for the Lord.

(2) Martyrs in the Cause of Chastity

References

- + "Martyrdom in Christianity" Bishop Youannis
- + "The Paradise of the Purity" Fr. Anastasi El Samoueli

The Lesson

Aim

Developing the tendency towards promoting love for purity, holiness and chastity "Be faithful unto death".

Introduction

- ❑ Was the personality of our forefathers, the martyrs only characterized by boldness and courage? What is the difference between martyrs of the church and the martyrs in other domains? (For the motherland -for science -for a humane principle).

Our forefathers, the martyrs, died for one and only one person whom they loved with all their hearts. They gave themselves completely to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why they felt that any sin would be considered unfaithfulness. They wanted to keep themselves and their bodies pure till the day on which they would meet Him. That is why they were not only characterized by boldness and bravery but they were also characterized by complete faithfulness unto death of the heart and inner life. That is also why pagans did their utmost to make them fall especially in the sin of lust, but our forefathers kept their life pure through chastity and purity till death. Let's listen to a historian who witnessed the struggle of our grandfathers, then let's make an imaginary tour among a group of those martyrs and listen to their eternal stories and life history.

Eusabius the historian, said: “Women were not less bold in defending the teachings of the Divine church than men. They shared men in their struggle and attained, with them, an equal number of crowns for chastity, and when they drew them for defiled purposes they preferred death to defiling their bodies”.

The young man who cut off his tongue to keep a bad woman away from him

Decans, the governor in the 249- 251 AD period wanted to defile a Christian young man by force. They tied his hands and feet and brought him a girl to tempt him. The young man couldn't bear the fierce fight. He could not keep himself away from her so he had to push her away and there was no way to do so. He cut his tongue with his teeth and spat it with the blood at the girl's face. The girl was astonished and filled with fear and left him. Thus the young man preferred the loss of his tongue to the loss of his chastity.

Chasteness unto death

St. Butamine was a young girl who received tortures that the strongest of men could not bear. The governor ordered his soldier to burn her in a boiling tar. All she wanted was that no one should see her naked body. She said to the governor, “I ask you, by the head of the emperor whom you fear, not to make them strip me of my clothes. I'll get into the tar little by little so that you may see the power of endurance given to me by Christ whom you do not know”.

She shunned sin not death

Theodora, who was seventeen years old, lived in Alexandria in the reign of King Diocletian. She lived in virginity and devoted her life to her heavenly Bridegroom. The governor sent her to a bad place as he intended to compel her to commit the sin. Dedimus, a Christian young man decided to save her. He disguised himself in the clothes of a soldier and met her. He advised her to change into the soldier's clothes and escape and he would remain in her place. She agreed to his plan and was able to escape. Next morning the matter was discovered so Dedimus was led to death. There from among the crowds came a sharp voice of a young girl crying, “I do not agree to your having my place in martyrdom. I only agreed to your plan so that my chastity might not be defiled”. That was Theodore who preferred to attain the crown of martyrdom with Dedimus.

Death is better than this

This story took place in 749 AD when the soldiers attacked a nunnery near Akhmim. After looting the nunnery, they got hold of a young nun called Verona and decided to take her away with them. She understood that they would defile her chastity so she entered her cell and prayed to Christ. She went out carrying some oil, which, as she said, would protect anyone who used it from being struck by a sword. She said that she would give it to them if they left her. To prove that what she said was true she anointed her neck with the oil and asked them to strike her neck with the sword. One of them struck her neck and her head was quickly cut off. They understood that she preferred death to going with them. They were greatly surprised. They left what they looted and left the nunnery quickly.

Exercise

- Keep on praying, reading the Bible and receiving the Communion so that you may enter into a relationship with the Lord. The Lord will purge you with hyssop and you will be clean. Your life will be whiter than snow.

- ❑ Keep reading the stories of the saints specially those who were martyred in the cause of chastity. This will give you power in your spiritual life and motivate you to insist on being chaste.

Activities

- ❑ Make a wall sheet and write about those who were martyred in the cause of chastity.
- ❑ Try to draw some pictures for those pure martyrs.
- ❑ Study this hymn by heart, “My Coptic Church is the Church of God”.
- ❑ Make use of Means of Illustration Center and show your children the various films about the pure martyrs in the church hall especially on the Nayrouz Day (Coptic New Year Day) to celebrate those saints.
- ❑ Collect the stories of those martyrs from the Synaxarium and the church books put them in an album and keep them in the Library for the benefit of all.

(3) The Holy Cross

References

- + “Why the Cross” Bishop Gregory
- + “The Life of the Orthodox Prayer” The Monastery of St. Macarius
- + “The Mystery of the Cross” Fr. Youhanna Hunein
- + “The Cross in our Life” Fr. Samaan Al Saurian
- + “The Golgotha Cross” Dr. Abdu Hunein

The Lesson

Aim

Why is the cross considered the emblem of Christianity? The effectiveness of the cross in our life.

Introduction

The cross was the most horrible device of execution known in history among the Romans. It was used for degrading, despising and torturing criminals to death. Suddenly the cross became a symbol of dignity and pride. It was raised high over our churches, placed on the top of the church tower, the domes and on the veil of the temple. The cross is held in front of church processions. In general, the cross has become the sign, the emblem and the symbol of Christianity and Christians everywhere. What is the secret behind this change? And why does the church insist on lifting the cross up at the time before her children?

The Holy Cross with reference to history

How wonderful this story is! Its heroine was not a young girl or an ordinary woman among the people, but she was an old woman above eighty years old. When she wanted to comfort herself after her son had been killed, she went to the place of the Holy Tomb enduring the troubles of travel to Jerusalem. She went to the Holy Land, motivated by a vision (a dream). She felt sad when she found out that the place had fallen into ruin as it was covered with a huge hill of garbage and dust on which pagan temple was built for the goddess Venus. Queen Helen ordered

her servants to demolish (pull down) the temple and to remove the dust. She found three crosses among which was the Lord's cross. She saw the notice written by Pontius Pilate on that cross. Then she also found the place of the tomb. She also found the nails with which the Lord's hands were nailed to the cross. She sent these nails to her son Constantine who fixed one of them to his royal helmet, which he used in battles. It became a custom later on for Kings to put a piece of iron in the shape of a nail on their crowns. Queen Helen sent a piece of the Cross to the Emperor's Palace in Constantinople and the remainder was put in a silver box inside the Resurrection Church.

Queen Helen built a big church over the Holy Tomb and called it the New Jerusalem. She also built another church on the Cave of Nativity in Bethlehem, the modest place in which Christ was born and this church was as beautiful as the first one.

A Cross appears in the sky

History tells us that the sign of the cross appeared in the sky several times as a pillar of light. The First Time: The Cross appeared in the sky to the Emperor Constantine together with his officers and soldiers to encourage him before starting the war. Late in the afternoon, Emperor Constantine saw the radiant sign of the cross above the sun in the sky. Inscribed upon it were the words, "By this sign you will conquer". That view had such a great effect on Constantine that he was converted to Christianity and waged a campaign against the tyrant Maxentius.

The cross appeared for another time as a pillar of light to all people in the sky of Jerusalem in 351 AD. It did not disappear quickly, but it remained visible for several hours. In that time it was more radiant than the sun. All the people of the city rushed out to see that sight. They were surprised and afraid but at the same time they were happy to see such a heavenly sight.

The Final Appearance

This will happen by the end of times when the sign of the cross covers the whole sky, east, west, north and south. At that time all the kingdoms of the earth will submit themselves to the Lord Christ.

The Cross with reference to the Christian Dogma

The Cross embodies the greatest and most important Christian creeds. The Lord Christ tasted death on it. This proves that He has true flesh, the same as that of all people. In other words, the Cross is a proof of the Incarnation Creed. Christ fulfilled Redemption with his propitiatory death on the Cross. So the Cross emphasized the second great Christian Creed; i.e. the Redemption Creed. When the faithful make the sign of the Cross, they state and confess their faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the One God. They declare their belief in the Creed of Trinity and One God, three hypostases and one essence (substance). Thus we see in the Cross the most important creeds of our holy faith.

- ❑ The reconciliation between God and man was fulfilled through the Cross. For this reason Christ was hung between the sky and the earth to be the way for man to come back to God. He stretched out His blessed hands to receive all those under the sky. He descended into Hades through the Cross to bring Adam and his children back to Paradise.
- ❑ We have also been justified through the Cross. We have become innocent of the charges

directed to man (as a blasphemer and evildoer). These are the same charges that were directed to the Lord and He was innocent of them all (We are now justified with His blood).

- Through the Cross all our previous debts have been paid. The Law could not payoff these debts but it emphasized them instead: “And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this He set aside, nailing it to the Cross” (Colossians 2:13,14).

The Holy Cross with reference to its rite

1. In Baptism: The water is sanctified with the sign of the Cross in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. St. John Chrysostom says, “Thus baptism is not only called a cross but the Cross also is called baptism” because the Cross is the baptism of blood and in baptism we die with Christ.
2. In Chrism: All our organs are circumcised with the sign of the Cross 36 times (for all parts of the body).
3. In the Sacrament of Confession (Penance): The Cross is placed on the Confessor’s head as a sign that his sins are forgiven with the blood of the Cross.
4. In the Sacrament of the Holy Communion: This is the blood of the Cross and the Holy Body broken for us is incarnate before our eyes.
5. In the Sacrament of the Unction of the Sick: Here the oil is first sanctified by crossing it with the Cross seven times during reading the seven appropriate texts from the Gospels and by lighting seven wicks.
6. In the Sacrament of the Holy Orders: When the Cross is put on the head of the person chosen to receive the Holy Order, the person receives, through prayer and the power of the Cross, the ability to carry the Cross and to exercise the other sacraments. You may notice that the priest wears a cross and holds a cross in his hand. He puts a cross on the front of his clothes (his own cross) and a cross on the back of his clothes (the people cross).
7. In the Sacrament of Marriage (Matrimony): The married life is a series of sacrifices starting from the moment when the Cross is put on the heads of the bride and the bridegroom and ending with the Crown of Victory and the glories of resurrection.

The Cross in our Life

- The sign of the Cross drives away demons as it reminds them of the Devil’s defeat at Golgotha.
- It is a cure for defiled lust and a power that quenches the flames of fire and the authority of sin.
- When we stretch our hands in the shape of the cross and cross our foreheads and chests, we become free from the authority of death, and we go deep into the depth of the soul through prayer like a bird stretching its wings and flying high in the sky.
- The Cross is also a means of triumph over temptation and a sign of Salvation. The martyrs used to cross the cup offered to them with the sign of the Cross.
- The Cross was and will remain a pride, a beauty, a crown, a weapon and declaration of faith and the irresistible power of God.

Memorize this text

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18).

Quotations from Sainly Fathers

- “Through the Cross man can drive away all the deceits of the demons”(Athansius the Apostolic).
- “The martyr did not drink the cup before furrowing it with the sign of the Cross which is the sign of salvation” (Theodoreit the Historian).
- “Our salvation is confirmed when we partake in the sacraments and their symbols. One of these symbols is the sign of the Cross” (St. Gregory of Nyssa).

Exercise

- Make the sign of the cross before doing anything. This should be done with accuracy and repentance and lifting the heart to God.
- Write about symbols of the Cross in the Old Testament. Express this idea by drawing a picture of several scenes or write an essay about this topic in wall Chart.

(4) The Ten Commandments

First Commandment: You shall have no other gods before me

References

- + “The Ten Commandments” Pope Shenouda III
- + Sermons and Lectures of Pope Shenouda III and his articles in “Kiraza” Magazine
- + “The First Commandment” Bishop Gregory

The Lesson

Aim

Emphasizing the Worship of God alone and rejecting the idols of the present age.

Introduction

The Lord commanded Moses to go up to the mountain to receive the Law of God. He said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain Shall be put to death... And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai... and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up and God spoke all these words” (Exodus 20).

We notice that these Ten Commandments, which were written with the finger of God, were a covenant with God, which is why the two tablets were called, “The Tables of the Covenant”. God made this covenant with us with great power so that we can feel the great value of the Covenant. The Commandments are so important that God Himself wrote them. When Moses handed them over to the people, he took the blood of the offerings and sprinkled it on the people so that they might be worthy to receive the Commandments.

The First Commandment

“I am the Lord your God which have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage... You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2,3).

The Lord Reveals Himself

- ❑ The Lord calls Himself “The God of Abraham, and God of Isaac and God of Jacob”. He is a God not of the dead, but of the living.
- ❑ When Moses asked the Lord about His name so that He might reveal the Divine name to Pharaoh, the Lord said, “Jehovah” [I Am That I Am].
- ❑ The Lord revealed Himself and His name in various ways. He appeared to Abraham in the shape of three men and to Moses in the flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and to the three young men in the shape of a person walking about with them in the blazing fire of the furnace.
- ❑ “But God who, at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:1,2).
- ❑ Thus the Lord Jesus revealed the Heavenly Father in a very clear way: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father...I am in the Father and the Father in Me” (John 14:9,10).
- ❑ Christ’s revelation of the Father is characterized by attributes in the New Testament. These attributes are different from those in the Old Testament.
 - In the New Testament, Christ reveals to us the secrets of God and the secret of the Holy Trinity is an example.
 - In the New Testament, God did not reveal Himself as a mighty God giving Law on a mountain covered with smoke and fire, but He revealed Himself as a God who is loving, gentle and lowly in heart and who washes the feet of His disciples.
 - In the New Testament God have become with us, in us and not far away from us “I in them and You in me” (John 17:23), “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). He became man, took our human nature and became like us in everything except sin.

Who brought you out of the Land of Egypt?

- ❑ God mentions His steadfast love and blessings to man. He does not mention His glory and greatness but He mentions His mercy and the works of His love.
- ❑ In the New testament God brought us out of darkness to light, and out of death to life. He gave us the gift to be born again with water and spirit. Crossing the Red Sea was a symbol of baptism, which we received through adoption (1 Corinthians 10).
- ❑ Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ always delivers us from all evil, for He who touches us touches the apple of His eye “Behold, I have graven you on the palms of My hands”.

You shall have no other gods before me

- ❑ It is true that we worship One God; the Holy Trinity, but true worship is not the mere confession of one God, but it also involves practical behavior.
- ❑ Let us take heed to ourselves lest pride be a god to us...Many people are enslaved to themselves and to their selfishness and they see everything through themselves “He who loves his life loses it”.
- ❑ The World is another god and the apostle advises us by saying, “Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 1:15). St. James the apostle says, “Friendship with the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). St. Paul the apostle said that Demas was faithless

to the message “Demas, in love with this present world; has deserted me” (2 Timothy 4:10).

- ❑ There is another god called The Flesh. Many young people are enslaved to their instincts, “Their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame” (Philippians 3:19). We have Esau as an example. He despised his birthright and sold it for a single meal of lentils.
- ❑ “Money” is also a god. The Lord says, “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). Money is a god. It is the idol of misers and lovers of silver. The apostle says, “For the love of money is the root of all evils” (2 Timothy 6:10). He also says, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). This does not mean that we hate money, but it means that we must use money as a means of glorifying God. We have to be careful not to let money be our Master. We should spend it wisely and with spiritual guidance.
- ❑ Also there is another god among the people called “Gossip”, so Many young people like to listen to people when they praise or curse one another. They like to know people’s opinions and to listen to what they say. The apostle says, “How can you believe, who receive glory from one another, and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

Who is the Atheist?

The atheist is the person who denies the existence of God and refuses to carry out the commandments of the Gospel as he considers them impractical.

Our Duty to God

So long as we believe in God, we have to perform our duty to Him. The Scripture refers to this duty by saying, “You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve” (Matthew 4:10). Let’s worship the Lord in spirit and truth, in faithfulness and fear all the days of our life.

Exercise

I keep the Lord always before me, because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. O Lord Jesus, you will be my companion in my life. You will help me in everything I do. I will submit to Your commandments however difficult they are to me, because You are my Lord, my God and my Savior. Because You love me, you will help me in carrying out Your commandments.

Questions and Activities

- ❑ What are the differences between God’s revelation of Himself in the Old Testament and in the New Testament?
- ❑ When God reveals Himself, Salvation and Love accompany His revelation. Explain and give evidence.
- ❑ What are the idols of the modern age?
- ❑ What are your attitudes, as a young person, towards these idols? How can you reject being enslaved to them?
- ❑ In this age of ours, atheism is not only denying the existence of God, but there is something else. What is it? How can you resist modern atheism?

(5) The Ten Commandments

Second Commandment: You shall not make for yourself a graven image

References

- + “The Ten Commandments” Pope Shenouda III
- + Sermons and Lectures of Pope Shenouda III and his articles in “Kiraza” Magazine

The Lesson

Aim

Emphasizing the Worship of God alone and rejecting the idols of the present age and show that the icon in the church is not to be worshipped.

Introduction

“You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me” (Exodus 20:4-6).

The Aim Of This Commandment

- ❑ Putting an end to the heathen worship and refraining from pagan beliefs and worshipping pictures or idols.
- ❑ This commandment does not mean that we should destroy pictures and statues because the Lord Himself commanded Moses to make two cherubim of gold. Solomon’s Temple was decorated with carved figures of winged creatures, palm trees and flowers.

The Church honors icons: veneration of icon

- ❑ An icon is a memorial to the history of important spiritual events. So when we honor an icon we honor those whom it represents.
- ❑ The icon stands for a person. When we venerate an icon, we venerate the person it stands for. When we look at the icon of the Lord Christ we feel that we are standing in the Presence of God. Through the icon, we see the person it represents.
- ❑ Since the early ages, the Church has venerated and honored the icons. Icons were painted on the Sanctuary Veil and on many places. The Lord Jesus agreed to this veneration as He made many icons perform miraculous deeds. Icons of the churches have become a blessed domain for the presence of saints and the faith of the people.

Benefits of Icons in the Churches

1. Ecclesiastical Aim: The Church wants to teach us that those who departed did not cease struggling. They still pray for us. They support us in our struggle. That is why we are encouraged when we see their pictures. St Paul the Apostle says, “Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).
2. Educational Aim: Icons accustom us to seeing victorious saints and remind us of the

eternal life. They show us the world to which we shall go after our departure. They are, then, excellent means of illustration. They satisfy our feelings, raise the soul up to heaven, and encourage the worshippers to indulge themselves in the spiritual life. Icons teach the children, the illiterate, and simple people.

3. Spiritual Aim: The word, whether written, uttered or illustrated in the form of pictures, affects us. It is food and life. Icons stand for deep spiritual symbols. We only need spiritual insight and spiritual maturity so that the Icons of the Church may become a source of inspiration and spiritual growth for our life. So, in the art of painting icons, the painter must have spiritual nature, to receive inspiration for this sort of work from the Lord so that with the light, which is in us, we may be able to see the light of the saints.

The Iconoclastic Movement

The Iconoclastic movement started at the beginning of the 8th Century and continued till the beginning of the 9th Century.

- ❑ That happened during the Ommayad Reign. The Byzantine Leon III and the Caliph Yazeed II Ben Abdel Malek (730 AD) destroyed the icons claiming that they were not worthy of being venerated.
- ❑ Fr. John Damascus was one of the Eastern Church men who defended the benefits of icons and was persecuted for honoring icons.
- ❑ The Seventh Council of Nicene, AD 787, declared that Icons should be used in churches. They are to be kissed and venerated.
- ❑ Those who opposed venerating icons claim that using them in the church means the inclination into the idolatrous worship. This is wrong, as we do not worship wood or copper. We worship God only that is illustrated in the icon and we honor the saint whom the icon represents.
- ❑ There is a remarkable relationship between the mystery of Incarnation and the veneration of the icon.
- ❑ The Logos incarnated and became man and revealed to us the Heavenly Father. The Lord Jesus became the Icon through whom we can see the Heavenly Father who is One with Him in Essence. Christ's face was copied on the handkerchief that He wiped His face with on His way to Golgotha. That is why some of the fathers of the church see that incarnation is the basis of making icons. God the Spirit is everywhere and material things are not despised.

Instructions

Let us kiss the Veil of the Sanctuary and the icons painted on it. Let us pray and ask saints and angels to pray for us so that their prayers, power and help be with us all the time.

Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children

In ancient times, the curse did not affect the sinner alone, but it also affected his family and children, as what happened with Canaan the Son of Ham who sinned to his father Noah, but the Lord declared in the Book of Jeremiah, "In those days they shall no longer say: The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge". But everyone shall die for his own sin; each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge" (Jeremiah 31:29,30). Although everyone dies for his own sin, yet, his sins may affect his children as when he suffers

from a serious bodily or mental sickness. There is no doubt that the son who does not benefit from the experience of his father or the past event is mistaken.

Prayer

My Lord Jesus Christ, You created me in Your image, after Your likeness. Allow me to worship You and offer respect and submission to Your honorable saints and ask for their prayers, which will help me to attain salvation of my soul. Amen.

Questions and Activities

1. Paint an icon for one of the saints whom you love. Put the Icon of Virgin Mary in your room to intercede with her in your spiritual struggle.
2. “The person who opposes the icons and denies them resists the mystery of Incarnation” Explain this statement.
3. “The Lord visits the Iniquity of the fathers upon the children” Explain this statement. What does the Lord declare through Prophet Jeremiah?

(6) The Third Commandment **You Shall Not Take The Name Of The Lord Your God In Vain**

References

- + “The Ten Commandments” Pope Shenouda III
- + Sermons and Lectures of Pope Shenouda III and his articles in “Kiraza” Magazine

The Lesson

Aim

Do not swear at all and honor the name of the Lord.

Verse

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

The Commandment in the Old Testament

The Lord says: If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey or an ox or a sheep or any beast to keep, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away, without anyone seeing it, an oath “by the Lord shall be between them both to see whether he has not put his hand to his neighbor’s property” (Exodus 22:10,11). This means that the Lord allowed an oath by the Lord when there were no witnesses. But the Lord drew the people’s attention to the fact that it was dangerous to lie or to take the name of the Lord in vain. He allowed them to swear by his name so that they might not swear by the names of Pagan gods. In the Old Testament, the name of the Lord was fearful. When a Jew wrote the name of Jehovah, he purified “ himself and showed signs of submission.

The Commandment in the New Testament

In the Sermon on the Mountain, the Lord spoke about this commandment (Matthew 5:33 -37). It is clear that the Lord does not allow us to swear by His name at all. We should venerate and

honor His name. We should be honest with people when we speak to them and when we deal with them. Because when a Christian unites with the Lord Christ, he becomes a son of God, so he says the truth and does not need to emphasize what he says as the grace in him and the truth he lives to bear witness. The Lord says that swearing by anything means that the person owns that thing and because we own nothing not even ourselves. We have no right to swear by anything. God alone owns everything so He alone has the right to swear, “The Lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4). Thus the Heavenly Father swore to His Son that He would be a priest forever. It is His right to swear The Lord is Truth in Truth.

The Lord’s Name for the believers

- ❑ The Lord’s Name is Light. This is a fact that never changes, “I am the Light of the World”.
- ❑ The Lord’s Name is Love. It is the flame of love that is never quenched. Anyone who touches him is kindled with his love.
- ❑ His name is a power for worship and praise.
- ❑ Have a look at the Church hymns and you will feel how the church honors the Name of the Lord, sings it and praise its sweetness “Your Name is sweet and blessed in the mouths of your saints, O My Lord Jesus Christ My good Savior”.
- ❑ The Name of God is Holy, Great and Wonderful “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth: You whose glory above the heavens is chanted” (Psalm 8:1,2).
- ❑ The Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe (Proverbs 18:10).
- ❑ The Name of the Lord causes terror to demons, “Even the demons are subject to us in your name” (Luke 10:17).
- ❑ “I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her and it came out that very hour”(Acts 16:18) (Review the Contemplations of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III in his Book, “The Ten Commandments”).

Our duty concerning the Great Name of God

- ❑ We should honor and venerate the Name of the Lord and the Name should be uttered with great respect and veneration.
- ❑ We have to glorify the Holy Name and give it due respect and glorification.
- ❑ The Name should be sweet in our mouth stimulating love.
- ❑ We have to use the Lord’s Name at the beginning of every prayer, in every meeting and in every work and also when we complete any work as He is the Alpha and the Omega “We love Your name O Lord. We meditate on your name all night long” (Midnight Prayer Piece No 13 - Vigil).
- ❑ I should never swear by the Holy Name whatever the circumstances may be. Some refuse to swear at Courts of Justice when they are asked to bear witness. Some of the fathers of the Church see that the vow here is not out of the personal will, but out of submission to the laws of the State. The Gospel demands that we should obey the laws of the State.

How can I get rid of the sin of swearing?

Always venerate and honor the name of the Lord in your prayer and in your daily life. At that

time I fear to swear and I refrain completely from swearing. If the Holy Spirit works in me, He will forbid me. He will prevent me from swearing. If someone asks me to swear that my words are true I keep silent for some time so that I may not swear. I pray the Lord to inspire my friend that my words are true and I say, "Believe me". The words "Believe me" characterize the Christian believer who refuses to swear.

Exercise

The Prayer of Jesus

- ❑ The fathers of the church advise us to use the Holy Name in that Divine word "Jesus" as, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And the psalm says, "Save me, O God, by Your name" (Psalm 54:1). When we start repeating this name, we feel that our thoughts gather inside us and unite with the Lord. In this way we feel that our souls are healed "If I may touch, but his clothes, I shall be whole" (Mark 5:28, 6:56). But the exercise does not end at this point...We must continue, saying with Jacob, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" so that we may feel His presence in our life and shout with Thomas, "My Lord and my God".
- ❑ Repeating the prayer of Jesus does not mean neglecting the other ritual prayers...but we must use this prayer when our thoughts are dispersed or when we are fought by thoughts or vexed by people or when we feel indifferent in our life or when we fall in despair.
- ❑ Using the Name of the Lord, then, is a blessed means of calm life dominated by the Spirit of God in the midst of worship, sanctification, joy and perpetual praise and thanksgiving "I give thanks to thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify Your name forever" (Psalm 86:12).

Questions and Activities

1. Why did the Lord allow people to swear in the Old Testament? What are the conditions of swearing?
2. Prove that the Name of God was fearful and highly respected among the Jews in the Old Testament.
 - a. What is Christ's preaching about swearing in His sermon on the mountain?
 - b. The Church venerates the Name of God in her worship. Explain.
 - c. The apostles used the power of the Lord's Name. Explain.
 - d. What is our duty to the Holy Name of God?
 - e. How can you get rid of the habit of swearing?

(7) The Fourth Commandment

Remember That You Keep Holy The Sabbath Day

References

- + "The Ten Commandments" Pope Shenouda III
- + Sermons and Lectures of Pope Shenouda III and his articles in "Kiraza" Magazine

The Lesson

Aim

Observing holy Sunday and devoting it to worship and service. If we cannot do that let us choose another day.

Verse

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work” (Exodus 20:8-11).

Introduction

- ❑ The Lord had given this Commandment to the people before He wrote it in the Ten Commandments and the Lord Himself put it into practice before the other commandments saw light, “So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it because on it God rested from all His work which He had done in creation” (Genesis 2:3).
- ❑ The Lord emphasized the importance of this day when He said, “and He blessed it” and this shows that one calm day with the Lord is much better than all the things on earth.
- ❑ We also notice that when the Lord said, “on the Seventh day God rested from all His work”, he meant the true rest, which occurred to the heart of the Lord when the Lord redeemed man from the sin on the cross. Accordingly, the Resurrection Day is the day of the Lord’s true rest as the Lord did not feel tired when he created man but He suffered a lot in the work of salvation.
- ❑ In Hebrew the word “Sabbath” (Shabat) means “A day of rest”. Its use is not restricted to the seventh day. Sometimes it was used to mean the day of rest whether it was the seventh day or not and at other times it was used to mean the whole week.

The Sabbath Commandment in the Old Testament

- ❑ The Lord regarded it as a very important Commandment. Whoever did not keep it was to be put to death “You shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off”.
- ❑ You shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that, you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people...whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death” (Exodus 31:12-17).
- ❑ “Everyone who keeps the Sabbath, and does not profane it and holds fast my Covenant these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer” (Isaiah 56:7).
- ❑ In the Book of Numbers, when the people were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering firewood on the Sabbath. They took him to Moses. The Lord said to Moses, “This man must be put to death” (Numbers 15:32).
- ❑ The Sabbath day was a day of rest for all: man and animal (Deuteronomy 5:14). Even the land itself was let to rest in the seventh year (Exodus 23:10).

The Sabbath Commandment in the New Testament

- ❑ Christianity did not destroy the Sabbath and substitute it with Sunday, but Christianity fulfilled the Sabbath in its divine spiritual meaning by devoting Sunday to rest and worship since as we have just said “Sabbath” means “rest” so Sunday is the day of true spiritual rest for the Lord and for all believers.
- ❑ In the past, “Sabbath” was a sign of circumcision. It was the sign of rest and it was substituted by Sunday, the soul’s rest instead of its ancient form, i.e. the bodily rest (Exodus 31:13).
- ❑ In the Old Testament, the Passover was called a Sabbath even if it happened to occur on any other day of the week. On the 15th day of the first month the Jews celebrated the feast of unleavened bread, and the day of atonement on which they did not work was celebrated on the 10th day of the seventh month and many other feasts were celebrated, as they happened to come, on any other day and they were called Sabbath (Leviticus 23). Thus Sunday could be regarded as Sabbath as many important events and occasions happened on Sunday. We take the following as examples:
 - ❑ The Passover, the feast of the Tabernacles, the Day of Atonement; which is the resurrection of the Lord from the dead (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20). Christ appeared many times after His resurrection on Sundays (John 20). Christ entered Jerusalem as a king on Sunday, and the coming of the Holy Spirit was on Sunday (Acts 2). St. John saw the new heaven and the New Earth on Sunday.
 - ❑ The Book of the Acts and Paul’s Epistles tell us that the Church made of Sunday a day of rest (Sabbath) and worship. The Acts of the Apostles says, “And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together, to break bread, Paul preached unto them...” (Acts 20:7). In another place we read, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the Churches of Galatia, even so do you. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gathering when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:1,2).
 - ❑ The Didascalia (the laws of the apostles) (Law No. 65 in the first book, and law No. 21 of the first group and law No. 45 of the second book) all of these laws emphasize the necessity of devoting Sunday to rest and worship inside the church. And also Law No. 20 of Nicene AD 325 states that people must not bow while praying on Sundays. They should only stand while saying their prayers, etc. There are many other laws issued by local councils in 364 and 365 AD and these laws emphasize that Sunday is the day of rest and worship among Christians.

How to observe Sunday?

Do not observe Sunday as the Pharaohs did or according to the way the Jews practiced in observing their Sabbath as they stuck to formalities and to the letter. Remember that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Lord said that it is right to do good on Sabbath when He healed many people and allowed His disciples to pick ears of corn and eat the grain when they were hungry. All that happened on the Sabbath. The Lord showed them that they broke the Sabbath law to circumcise their sons. It is much better if they do works of kindness on the Sabbath day. We must observe the Lord’s Day holy. We must not spend it in the cinema, theatre or playing grounds. That day should be devoted to prayers, Church education (Sunday School), serving the poor, visiting the sick and all kinds of works of mercy and worship.

Exercise

Try to spend a large proportion of the Lord's Day in worship and practicing works of mercy to please the heart of God.

Questions and activities

1. Why has the church chosen Sunday to be the day of rest and sanctification?
2. Give evidence to show that the church creed is correct.
3. How can you honor the Lord's Day?
4. What is the evidence that shows that the Jew was strict in observing the Sabbath Day?
5. How did the Jews look at the Sabbath Law?
6. How was the Lord's opinion different from theirs concerning this topic?
7. The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath. Explain.

(8) The Filth Commandment **Honor Your Father and Your Mother**

References

- + "The Ten Commandments" Pope Shenouda III
- + Sermons and Lectures of Pope Shenouda III and his articles in "Kiraza" Magazine

The Lesson

Aim

Honoring our parents and showing respect to them and rewarding them for their love to us

Verse

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you" (Exodus 20.12).

Introduction

- We notice that this commandment is so important that it is mentioned before important commandments such as: "You shall not kill... You shall not commit adultery". This means that the Lord regards this commandment as very important and of great value.
- We also notice that it is the first commandment with a promise "Honor your father and your mother which is the first commandment with promise" (Ephesians 6:2).

The Commandment in the Old Testament

- "Whosoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death" (Exodus 21:15-17, Leviticus 20:9).
- Solomon says, "If one curses his father or his mother his lamp will be put out in utter darkness" (Proverbs 20:20). He also says, "The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by vultures" (Proverbs 30:17).
- We read in the Old Testament about those who disobeyed their fathers and how they were punished, as they never found rest or comfort. An example of those is Absalom the

Son of King David. The Lord caused Ahithophel's Counsel, Absalom's Counselor, to fail (2 Samuel 16:23).

The Parent's Status

- ❑ In ancient times, the father was the priest of the family, her patron saint and mediator with God. The Lord authorized the blessing or the curse that a father gave.
- ❑ The Lord raised the rank of fatherhood when he called Himself Our Father and He likened His kindness and love to that of the mother "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15).
- ❑ Today the society celebrates the mother's day and the family day to honor the parents who sacrifice all they have to bring their children up.

How to honor our Parents

- ❑ A Christian honors his parents in a way that greatly differs from the way used by a sociable polite normal person honoring his parents, not only in appearance and behavior, but also in essence and depth.
- ❑ The true Christians honor their parents for Christ, in Christ and with Christ. This means that they see Christ as the aim of the Commandment. They take Christ as the power and the way to practice the carrying out of the Commandment. Christ cared for His mother when He was on the cross when He said to beloved John, "This is your mother".

The most important aspects of honoring parents

- ❑ To love them: Our love to them stems from a pure heart. As believers we are supposed to love our enemies, how much more then should we show our love to our parents and sacrifice everything for them and always pray for them.
- ❑ To obey them: Obedience here is not blind obedience but obedience of truth, accompanied with awareness and complete understanding. The Lord Jesus Christ gives an excellent example of the obedience of a son to His parents according to the flesh and Isaac offers a very nice example of obedience, as he was a symbol of Christ in the Old Testament "Hear my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching" (Proverbs 1:8).
- ❑ To support them: Lord Jesus reproached the Scribes and the Pharisees who did not perform their duty towards their parents because of offering sacrifices to the Temple. The Lord said that honoring parents and supporting them and providing them with the money they need is more important than offering money as sacrifice to the temple. Our teacher Paul the Apostle says to his disciple Timothy, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (I Timothy 5:8). When the Lord Jesus Christ was on the cross, He did not forget His mother and asked His disciple John to care for Her.
- ❑ To respect them: We show respect to them during talking to them, in discussion, when we walk with them in the street, in sitting with guests, in buying what they need, in estimating their opinion and points of view so long as they are within the boundaries of truth.

When do we take precaution in obeying them?

- ❑ “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).
- ❑ The Apostle says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right” (Ephesians 6: 1).
- ❑ When obedience to parents contradicts the Gospel, I prefer, with all calmness and modesty, to stick to truth rather than favoring them at the cost of pleasing the Lord Jesus. This demands firmness in attitude, strong faith, true modesty, clear self-denial, spiritual enlightenment and the advice of my Confession father.
- ❑ Man should obey the Lord rather than his parents when he receives a call for dedication or monasticism. He finds that sources of material and spiritual provision are available for parents and that he has performed his duty towards them. The Voice of God is clear in this respect and is not tied with the earthly feelings and relationships. This, of course, necessitates spiritual and wise advice and guiding.
- ❑ One of the most beautiful examples of taking precautions in obeying parents is the life of St. Barbara, and the life of St. Dimyana and Solomon’s attitude towards his mother (1 Kings 2:19-24).
- ❑ There is, of course, the obedience that we must show to our spiritual fathers, priests and saints. This has its blessed dimensions. You can refer to the Book written by his holiness Pope Shenouda III for more information.

Exercise

Active and conscious obedience to the fathers spiritually

Questions and Activities

- ❑ It is the first Commandment with promise. Explain.
- ❑ Why did the Lord demand that man should honor his parents? In what way should he honor them?
- ❑ To what extent should a Christian obey his parents?
- ❑ Who else should we honor other than our fathers according to flesh and how can that be?
- ❑ Paint a picture of a young man kissing his father’s hand and another picture for Abraham the father of fathers blessing Isaac. Put them on a wall chart about this Commandment.

(9) The Sixth commandment

You Shall Not Kill

References

- + “The Ten Commandments” Pope Shenouda III
- + Sermons and Lectures of Pope Shenouda III and his articles in “Kiraza” Magazine

The Lesson

Aim

The godliness of the heart and its purity of every hate

Why is “murder” a dangerous crime?

This sin is against God who created man in His image. The Lord says, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed for God made man in His own image” (Genesis 9:6). When man kills someone he completely destroys life, thus putting an end to a human life, which is a work that cannot be cured. Murder is a challenge to the Will of God in whose hands lies the fate of the people.

Kinds of Murder

1. Direct Murder

There are two types of direct murder: Individual murder or group murder. The individual murder occurs when people kill each other for one reason or another. Group murder takes place when a nation fights another nation, wages war or destroys the other nation. The most dangerous thing in war is that it despises human life. In this century, wars are very dangerous as they make use of deadly destructive weapons, which can cause the death of thousands of people in a few seconds. Although the Lord said that wars represent one of the marks and signs of the last days, Christianity draws the attention of those in charge to the dangers of wars and asks them to resort to peace, and using humane methods in solving the international problems. During war time, the church must do her best to comfort people so she calls for peace and insists on achieving it, she heals the wounds, supports the families of those who died in war.

2. Indirect Murder

- ❑ Such as any means that kills the fetus (embryo) in the womb, abortion and castration.
- ❑ Killing by intention or thought. This sort of murder is regarded as a serious sin in Christianity as the Lord Jesus Christ in His Sermon on the Mountain said, “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill; and whoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matthew 5:21,22).
- ❑ The moral murder; that is defaming the good reputation of people (Refer to the Third Book written by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III).

3. The Murder of the Soul

- ❑ Killing the soul is more dangerous than killing the body. The Lord Jesus said, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).
- ❑ Killing the soul means separating the soul from God and this is Satan’s task from the beginning, “The devil was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44).
- ❑ One of the best examples of the deeds that lead to the destruction of the soul is getting in touch with devils and magicians and the submission of the soul to them. That is why the Holy Bible warns us against dealing with them.
- ❑ There are people who believe in heresies specially those who deny the Divinity of Christ such as Jehovah’s Witnesses. All who follow their false belief will be destroyed. There are factors that cause the destruction of the soul such as when the Shepherd neglects his people and when parents neglect their children (Ezekiel 33:7-10).

4. Suicide

- ❑ His Holiness Pope Shenouda said suicide is a crime of murder, as people do not own their

souls. The soul is the possession of Christ as He bought that soul by His blood. The greatest sin which man commits is despair of the mercies of the Lord and this state of despair leads to suicide as Judas, the son of perdition, did.

- ❑ There is also the slow suicide such as drinking, smoking and taking drugs. All these destroy the body and the soul, spoil the systems of the body and weaken the soul. This is called self-murder “You have a name that you live and are dead” (Revelation 3:1).
- ❑ Killing the time, which is more dangerous than true murder (Wasting time and life in vain).

When is murder allowed?

- ❑ The Lord allowed murder in olden times. Anyone who broke the Commandments was put to death. Moses ordered the people to stone the man who gathered firewood on the Sabbath day... that was an instructive lesson that could be clearly understood by the people. And about the murderer the Lord said, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6). And the Lord said to Peter, “Put up again your sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matthew 26:52). And about the governor and his authority to kill, Paul the Apostle says, “For he is the minister of God to you for good...For he bears not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that does evil” (Romans 13:4).
- ❑ In the past, the Lord allowed the people of Israel to fight and sometimes the wars were called wars for the Lord as what happened in the days of Gideon, but the Lord forbade all these wars and came to give peace to the world and all the earth is the Lord’s and Christ’s. That is why the idea of the Crusade and Religious wars was not according to the Lord’s desire. Christianity does not agree to such an idea. But Christianity ensures the Christian soldier who defends his country does not kill but he obeys Caesar, and Caesar alone will be judged by the Lord for his deeds.

Prayer

O Lord, you demand that I should bear people no grudge nor should I be angry with anyone so that I may not be a murderer. O Lord, fill my heart with love for all so that I may not be the cause of destroying anyone. Let your life in me build, support and strengthen others.

Activities and Questions

- ❑ “Murder is a challenge to the Will of God and a sign of degrading the dignity of man”. Explain. How serious and dangerous is this sin?
- ❑ What is the difference between killing the body and killing the soul?
- ❑ A person may kill his brother and may kill himself. How? Why is the second type of murder serious?
- ❑ What was the teaching of Christ about murder in His Sermon on the Mountain?
- ❑ When is murder allowed?

(10) The Seventh and Tenth Commandments

You Shall Not Commit Adultery - You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor’s Goods

References

- + “The Ten Commandments” Pope Shenouda III
- + Sermons and Lectures of Pope Shenouda III and his articles in “Kiraza” Magazine

The Lesson

Aim

Purity of the soul, the body and thought and satisfaction in life

Verse

“You shall not commit adultery” (Genesis 20:14)

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s” (Genesis 20:17)

Adultery in the Old Testament

It is regarded as treachery. It is the complete practice of adultery. It is abominable to God. When the Lord spoke about the evil deeds of the Children of Israel in the Old Testament, as when He spoke about their worship of idols or keeping away from Him, He said that they played the harlot after other gods (Judges 2:17, Jeremiah 3:8). The person who contemplates the Book of Hosea the Prophet feels that the Lord hates this sin of adultery. Let us take a lesson from the life of David to know the dangerous consequences of committing adultery (2 Samuel 11-18).

Adultery in the New Testament

- ❑ It is committing adultery in mind and heart before it becomes a process of committing adultery (Matthew 5:27,28).
- ❑ It is not only dangerous for a believer to defile his thoughts but he is also forbidden to address those who commit adultery (1 Corinthians 5).
- ❑ There are many commandments that draw our attention to the fact that Christianity considers adulterers and adulteresses as enemies of God (Corinthians 10:8, Colossians 3:5, James 4:4).

Why is adultery dangerous?

- ❑ It is breaking the commandment the Lord says, “You shall not commit adultery”. So if I commit adultery, I break the Commandment and I shall be judged because of disobedience.
- ❑ Adultery also has another dangerous phase which St. Paul the Apostle refers to by saying, “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man does is without the body; but he that commits fornication sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).
- ❑ Because we do not possess our bodies, the sin of adultery is directed to the members of Christ “Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot? God forbid...For you are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God” (1 Corinthians 6:15,20).
- ❑ “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy” (1 Corinthians 3:17). In this St. John the seer says, “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable and murderers and whoremongers and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

- ❑ Committing adultery deprives man of the grace of baptism... Through baptism we put on the wedding dress and wear the light of eternity. Our bodies attain a great grace but if we use it for evil purposes we put light under a bushel and defile a pure dress and for this we shall be judged.
- ❑ Adultery hinders the psychological growth. The adulterer is a selfish, self-centered person who cannot love or give...as love means maturity, responsibility and commitment but the adulterer cannot bear responsibility or commit to anything good.

Reasons for committing adultery

- ❑ Need for affection and inner dissatisfaction: When man feels that he is not satisfied, he resorts to the desire of the flesh. The main cure lies in being filled with the Lord Jesus and enjoying the sweetness of the life of fellowship with him. When Christ fills my heart and my inner life I need nothing else and I do not resort to the desire of the flesh.
- ❑ The evil nature that lies in me drives me to death so if I do not crucify and mortify this nature everyday it will appear and dominate me and enslave me. The spiritual fathers spoke about many exercises such as the chastity of the senses (especially the sight), asceticism, fasting, public prayers, fear of God, remembering the day of judgment, contrition, perpetual worship and humbling oneself before God and keeping away from any stimulation that may cause one to sin.
- ❑ One of the main causes of committing adultery is pride “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). So when man becomes humble before the Lord, he attains grace and the Lord defends and protects him. The haughty is separated from grace so he falls. The humble say, “The snare is broken, and we have escaped” (Psalm 124:7).
- ❑ There is another reason for committing adultery, that is luxury and enjoying the luxuries of life. The best example we have is the Prophet David when he deserted his ascetic life and lived in luxury and laziness. He gave freedom to his senses and the result was his great fall. So, fasting, asceticism, activity in worship and spiritual vigilance are necessary for the believer to lead the life of chastity.

Prayer

O Lord, grant me the chastity of the senses, the purity of flesh, godliness of the heart and contrition of the soul so that I may lead a pure life for you. When the spiritual wars and defiled thoughts attack me, defend me and protect me, O Lord and give me the power to spend the whole night in true worship and grant me an honest and faithful heart.

You shall not covet your neighbor's goods

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's” (Exodus 20.17, Deuteronomy 5.21).

Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin!

Desire is the origin of every sin. Desire of possession is the cause of theft or stealing, the desire of the flesh is the cause of committing adultery, the desire of revenge is the cause of murder “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

Desire goes through many stages

- ❑ Thinking -meditation -consideration -acceptance
- ❑ Longing for it and repeated thoughts
- ❑ Emotion
- ❑ Practice, conation and performance
- ❑ Repetition and enslavement

The dangerous role of the desire of the flesh in the life of a believer

- ❑ The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit children and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. Those who follow the desires of the flesh are of the flesh and those who please the Spirit of God are the Children of God.
- ❑ The desire of the flesh is never satisfied and the more we practice it, the greater our inclination to it; “The eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear fined with hearing”(Ecclesiastes 1:8).
- ❑ The desire of the flesh blinds person and does not give him a chance to think. We have three groups of people; each has its own way of dealing with the desire of the flesh:
 - The spiritual person lives according to the desire of the spirit rather than the desire of the flesh.
 - The person of the flesh is like an animal whose desire of the flesh overcomes his spiritual attitude.
 - The regular person who is desire of the flesh and desire of the spirit are in conflict.
- ❑ Sometimes person degrades himself to a standard less than the animal level when he is completely enslaved to the desire of the flesh, as the animal practices the desire of the flesh within the limits of the natural instincts and it cannot go beyond its confines and this desire is practiced in special seasons.

Examples to show that it is dangerous to be enslaved to the desires of the flesh

- ❑ King David, the great king (2 Samuel 11)
- ❑ King Ahab and his submission to the covetousness of his wife Jezebel (1 Kings 21).
- ❑ King Solomon who said about himself, “ And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them” (Ecclesiastes 2:10).

Covetousness is the basis of all desires

- ❑ The person who covets the material things is a covetous person and a worshipper of idols.
- ❑ The person who covets good reputation and dignity wants to achieve a social status that is higher than their potentialities so they live a life of suffering and torment all their life.
- ❑ The person who desires the spiritual gifts and religious orders of priesthood loses his spiritual peace and perishes as he leads a life of envy and hatred...and the person who desires the gifts of others becomes strange to himself.

Our attitude towards the desires of the flesh

- ❑ “So shun youthful passions” (2 Timothy 2:22). Shunning the desires of the flesh is not a sign of weakness or cowardice but it is a sign of courage. To escape in such a situation means power, victory and courage (The example of Joseph).

- ❑ Resisting desires and passions by spiritual struggle, asceticism, fasting, prayers and perpetual worships is very effective (Examples: in the life history of our fathers, the saints and the monks).
- ❑ Our heart must be filled with Christ's love and Christ should be the desire of our hearts. In this way we love and think through Christ "But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16), "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).
- ❑ The feeling of being sojourners in this world, forsaking worldly pleasures, and that all is vanity and a striving after wind, and the world passes away, and the lust of it, all these develop in man the fear of God and hatred to the worldly pleasures.
- ❑ At last we say: love is the best cure of all sins specially the sin of covetousness and greediness "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right" (1 Corinthians 13:4-6).

Exercise

- ❑ Guard against the moments of weakness. Pray for God's help "Be pleased O God, to deliver me! O Lord make haste to help me".
- ❑ Keep away from leisure and control your thoughts and keep your mind pure by keeping away from evil thoughts.
- ❑ Guard yourself against despair, "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall I shall rise" (Micah 7:8) so that your body will be pure.

Questions and activities

- ❑ What are the stages that the desire of the flesh passes through till it becomes an abominable habit?
- ❑ "The eye is the lamp of the body". Explain.
- ❑ What are the consequences of the adultery sin in the life of Prophet David and what were the steps that led to those consequences?
- ❑ Why is covetousness regarded as a bad habit in Christianity? How can you resist it in social and spiritual life?
- ❑ Write an essay about the life history of some saints who resisted the desire of the flesh in their life.
- ❑ Make a wall Chart and write on some of the life history of some saints, mention their struggle against the desire of the flesh and refer to their sayings about this topic.

(11) The Eighth And Ninth Commandment

You Shall Not Steal - You Shall Not Bear False Witness Against Your Neighbor

References

- + "The Ten Commandments" Pope Shenouda III
- + Sermons and Lectures of Pope Shenouda III and his articles in "Kiraza" Magazine

The Lesson

Aim

Development of the Spirit of Christian honesty and faithfulness in action and deeds and words of speech.

Verse

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15, Deuteronomy 5:19)

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16)

Stealing in the Old Testament

“If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep” (Exodus 22:1). It is clear that God hates those who steal and demanded that thieves would be put to death (Exodus 21:16, Deuteronomy 24:7).

Stealing in the New Testament

It is one of the greatest sins like fornication, murder, and adultery. The Lord Jesus says, “For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man” (Matthew 15:19,20).

Why do people steal?

- ❑ Because they do greed and wanting to take what is not theirs: “and covetousness which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:15).
- ❑ Because of not wanting to toil as the Lord demands, “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread”. They want to eat in an easy comfortable way, “Stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant” (Proverbs 9:17).
- ❑ Because of a person may not fearing God...If one feels the presence of God and that the Lord’s eyes penetrate darkness, how can one steal?
- ❑ One of the prominent examples of the corruption of those who steal is the Character of Judas Iscariot who carried the moneybag and would help himself from it. He was a thief and dishonest (John 12:6).

Why does the Gospel demand that we should not steal?

- ❑ Paul the Apostle explains the true motive that makes a believer refrain from stealing by saying: “For we are members one of another...Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need” (Ephesians 4:28). Love that gathers the believers makes them refrain from stealing; on the contrary, they labor to give those in need.
- ❑ Within the frame of brotherhood and family ties, we find that any Christian thief causes shame to all Christians; as if all the church had stolen “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God” (I Peter 4:15-16).
- ❑ Tertilianus the lawyer and the Christian defender said to the Emperor, “If you found a Christian who killed, stole, committed adultery or was an evildoer, take us all and cut us into pieces”. This true Christian feeling filled the church in the apostolic age. For this reason, when Simon the magician wanted to attain the gifts of the Spirit by giving bribes, Peter the apostle cursed him (Acts 8: 18-20).
- ❑ Sometimes children steal because of deprivation so they resort to stealing which, in this

case, is regarded as an illness that needs psychological and social cure. As for the church, if her members live for the heavenly things, you will not find a thief among them because grace protects the believer from theft.

Types of unnoticed stealing

Let us guard against thefts that go unnoticed and that may not move our conscience such as:

- ❑ Getting into a bus or a tram without paying the price of a ticket.
- ❑ Using other's things in their absence without permission.
- ❑ Our attempt to know the secrets of others in their absence.
- ❑ Taking advantage of the time devoted for something else such as an official doing his private work in the government office.

Let us be honest in our work. Let us respect the time devoted for work. Let us keep our conscience awake so that we may be without blame before God in love.

Prayer

O Lord, grant me the spirit of honesty and care in using everything and performing every task and teach me to labor and toil so that others may be comforted, and not to enjoy rest at the cost of others.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16, Deuteronomy 5:20)

The importance of this commandment:

- ❑ This commandment treats an important social and spiritual topic. Telling lies is known to all and is practiced all over the world so false witnesses always appear before opponents. When person bears false witness, he may cause the death of an innocent person.
- ❑ One of the most prominent evidences of bearing false witness in the Old Testament is the following: "If a malicious witness rises against any person to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days; the judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother; so you shall purge the evil from the midst of you" (Deuteronomy 19:16-19).

The danger of bearing false witness

- ❑ It is a sin of telling a lie. It is also a slander, "You shall not go up and down as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand forth against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:16). It may cause injustice to an innocent person. The sin of telling lies denotes the darkness of the heart. That is why writers call the devil a J jar and the father of the lies (John 8:44).
- ❑ It is a sign of cowardice and weak personality and the inability to shoulder responsibility.
- ❑ In the Old Testament, telling lies was regarded as denying the right of God and His authority over His people. Solomon the Wise says, "There are six things which the Lord hates...haughty eyes, a lying tongue...false witness who breathes out lies" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Factors that drive person to bear false witness

- ❑ “Debates, envying, wrath, strife, back biting, whisperings, swellings, tumults” (2 Corinthians 12:20).
- ❑ Bribe: “And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right” (Exodus 23:8).
- ❑ Carelessness in all domains and listening to slanders, lies and rumors.
- ❑ Treachery and evil desire to hurt others.
- ❑ Flattery, partiality, hypocrisy & simulation.

Examples of false witnesses against saints

- ❑ Joseph’s brothers lied to their father (Genesis 37:31)
- ❑ Jezebel and Ahab with Naboth of Jezreel (1 Kings 21:9,10)
- ❑ False witnesses against St. Stephen the Archdeacon (Acts 6:13)

The spread of lying in our modern society

- ❑ Because of the spread of printing, the press, and different means of broadcasting, and because of the conflict between nations, parties, institutions and individuals and advertising, the means of deception spread everywhere. Few are those who commit themselves to truth and justice.
- ❑ One of the well-known types of lying is the cunning diplomacy, hiding some facts and revealing others and exaggeration in writing and talk.
- ❑ Silence in certain situations and concealing very important information sometimes, and revealing true facts at other times to achieve evil cunning purposes.

Our duty towards this commandment

- ❑ Carefulness in speaking and listening and resorting to original sources that are worthy of trust.
- ❑ Testing ourselves specially when we judge other’s deeds or bear witness about a person or a situation so that the heart may not be polluted with self-motivation.
- ❑ Living according to truth so that all what we think of is true.
- ❑ Not to be rash on the plea of frankness as not everything known can be said.
- ❑ Don’t believe all that is said and don’t judge without testing.
- ❑ Be careful in your talk and don’t exaggerate matters and do not listen to false accusations.
- ❑ It is not right to rely on what many witnesses say, but these witnesses should be good and sure of what they say.

Questions and Activities

- ❑ What is Christian faithfulness? What is its source? How can we keep it?
- ❑ What are the kinds of theft that man may practice other than stealing money? How can we train ourselves on complete honesty?
- ❑ This sin has many new forms in our modern society...What are these forms and how can we encounter them?
- ❑ What is our duty towards this commandment?

Exercise

Practice carefulness in giving opinion or judgment.

Tell the truth when you talk and reject partiality and lying.

(12) The events of the Pentecost

References

- + The School Book of Christian Religion
- + “The Church in the Apostolic Age” Bishop Youannis
- + “The Acts of the Apostles” Fr. Anistassy Shafeek

The Lesson

Aim

Understanding the events of the Pentecost and their effectiveness and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Book of the Acts.

The Holy Spirit and the Establishment of the Church

Question 1:

What are the signs of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples? What do these signs indicate?

Answer 1:

The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, which was a Jewish feast on which the Jews used to celebrate the harvest time and the early fruit of the crops, at the third hour of the day in the following manner:

1. The rush of a mighty wind, which indicates that the place was filled with a mighty Divine power, the wind destroys anything it blows upon.
2. Flames of fire dwelt in their hearts and gave them wisdom and boldness.
3. Speaking in other tongues and new languages as a sign of the beginning of preaching the Gospel to the whole world.

Question 2:

Write a summary of Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost and show its effectiveness.

Answer 2:

Peter explained that the disciples were not drunk since it was only the third hour of the day. He bravely declared that Jesus whom the Jews killed was Christ whom they were waiting for. He proved his resurrection from the dead, and then he declared the principles of repentance, faith and baptism for the forgiveness of sins and receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit. This sermon caused three thousand men to believe and receive faith.

Question 3:

Write down the gifts of the Holy Spirit and give examples of each.

Answer 3:

1. The gift of speaking in other tongues: this happened on the day of Pentecost when the

disciples spoke in new languages and the audience heard the same words each one in his language. Some disciples spoke in other languages they neither heard nor spoke before.

2. The gift of preaching and teaching: such as Peter's Sermon that was very effective.
3. The gift of healing: as when Peter and John healed the lame man and Peter said to him, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6).
4. The gift of raising the dead: Peter brought Tabitha back to life by the power of prayer. (Acts 9:36).
5. The ability to endure sufferings: They were beaten but they left the council rejoicing (Acts 5:41).

Question 4:

Speak about the life of fellowship in the early church.

Answer 4:

1. They shared everything: They prayed together and listened to the preaching of the apostles and received communion.
2. They shared property and money among themselves: All brought their money and redistributed them among each one according to his need.
3. It was an optional way of sharing in provision and no one was forced to share.
4. There was a financial system set by the church and the apostles who appointed seven deacons to serve the poor.
5. When Ananias and Sapphira lied to the apostles they were excommunicated from the community like what happened to Judas.

Question 5:

Mention some of the sufferings endured by the Early Church. What was the Church's attitude towards these sufferings?

Answer 5:

Stephen was martyred by being stoned. His face was like that of an angel. He was crying, "Lord, do not remember this sin against them".

Preaching the Gospel in the World

Question 1:

Speak about the faith of the nations in Christ and give two examples from the Acts of the Apostles.

Answer 1:

Examples of the faith of nations in Christ:

1. The faith of the Ethiopian eunuch on the hands of Philip the Preacher whom the Spirit took away to his boat. Philip found him reading the Book of Isaiah without understanding a word. He explained the Scripture to him. He was convinced so he believed and Philip baptized him.
2. Cornelius the pagan believed in Christ. He was searching for God through prayers and fasting. The Holy Spirit sent Peter to him. The Lord appeared to Peter in a dream so that

he might not regard the gentile as defiled. When Peter went to them, the Holy Spirit came upon the gentile as well as the believers of the Jews. This teaches us that all the people are called to receive godliness, holiness and faith.

Question 2:

Write Peter's life history showing his weaknesses and powers.

Answer 2:

1. Andrew told Simon his brother that he met the Messiah, but Jesus called him Peter, i.e. the Rock.
2. Jesus performed the miracle of catching lots of fish and he said to the fishermen, "I'll make you fishermen of people. You will be catching men".
3. Jesus accompanied Peter with Him to the Mountain of Transfiguration, and in Gethsemane Peter confessed the Divinity of Christ and Jesus said to Him, "On this rock I shall build my Church".
4. As a man, Peter made many mistakes. He denied Christ when He was judged but he repented and Christ, after His resurrection forgave Peter.
5. Peter declared faith before the Jews and he was the first to preach the Gentiles and Cornelius believed and received the true faith.
6. He preached the Gospel in Antioch, Asia, and Rome and there he wrote two epistles.
7. He was martyred. They crucified him with his head hanging down in Rome and he deserved the crown of martyrdom.

Question 3:

Speak about the preaching of Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

Answer 3:

(A) After the change that took place in Paul's life, Paul went on three journeys of preaching:

1. The first journey started from Antioch to Cyprus, Barnabas and Mark accompanied him. He also preached in Asia Minor.
2. On the Second journey, he accompanied Timothy and Silas. He went to Greece and preached in Philippi and Athens and spent a month and a half in Corinth.
3. On the third journey, he concentrated his effort on Ephesus and Corinth. He also visited the churches that he established.
4. The journey of martyrdom was his last journey. He was tied and driven to Rome in bondage and he attained the crown of Glory.

(B) Paul and Silas were in prison. They were praising the Lord and the prisoners were listening to them. A miracle took place. The foundations of the prison shook and the guard of Philippi believed and he, together with his family, was baptized.

Question 4:

How did the preaching of the Gospel spread? What were the factors of its success?

Answer 4:

At first preaching spread in Jerusalem, and Samaria then in the whole world and it was a great

success because:

1. The guidance of the Holy Spirit.
2. The perpetual prayers raised by the disciples.
3. The Core of the preaching: they were preaching the Lord Jesus the beloved Savior.

(13) Our Bodies are for the Lord

References

- + “Christianity and the flesh” Bishop Bemim
- + “Christian Chastity” Bishop Bemim
- + “My Purity” Archdeacon Remsis Nagib
- + “The Body” Deacon Nagib Girgis

The Lesson

Aim

The Christians attitude towards the dignity of the body and the necessity of its sanctification

Why did the Lord create the flesh?

The Lord created a body for man so as to make of him a unique creature that is different from angels and animals. Angels are spirits and the animals are flesh but man combines the two elements, the soul and the body. That is why the fathers said that man was a small universe (Microcosms). The body reacts with the soul and the soul reacts with the body and each of them feels the other and is affected by it. We observe that in practical life the spiritual life affects the body to a great extent.

The man who prays and fasts is different from the man who commits adultery. The saint’s face differs from the face of the evil man. Each of them reflects an inner world, which is completely different. If we keep our inner life pure, the body will be pure and if we keep the body and its organs in a state of chastity, the inner life increases in purity and depth. The Sound body helps its owner to fast, worship and spend the night in prayer. The opposite is the case of the weak body.

The body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit

The body plays a very important role in the life of a Christian man. Since the Lord Jesus incarnated and became man, the human nature has become one with Christ. The man who has been marked with the Holy Spirit through the mystery of Confirmation (Chrism) has become bearer of Christ (Christophorus). Although the baptized and anointed with Chrism keeps the appearance and shape of his body without change yet in the inner depth of his body dwell the Divine light and the new life. That is why the Bible regards the body as the temple of God “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; You were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (I Corinthians 6:19,20). In another place the Holy Bible says, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never” (1 Corinthians 6:15).

When Paul the apostle says that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, he means the real meaning of the words and does not use the words in a symbolic way. The fact that the Holy Bible

emphasizes is that “We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:30) and that He is the true vine and we are the branches and the branches are parts of the vine and not outside parts.

The dignity of the body (The Christians outlook on the body)

The sound Christian attitude is that all the parts of the body are honored because they all share in building up the temple of the Holy Spirit. There are no pure organs and defiled members in Christianity. It is impossible to imagine that God would create a temple with a defiled part. Paul the apostle explained the honor of the members of the body in detail, in his first epistle to the Corinthians and concentrated specially on what is called the inferior parts: “On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our un-presentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:22-25). St. Clement of Alexandria says, “We must not be ashamed of the members which God created”.

The Body as a tool for achieving the Lord’s purpose

The apostle says to the Romans, “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1,2). This means that the flesh was not granted for enjoyment and selfishness but it is granted to be given and consumed for others. The person who refuses to use his body in deeds that glorify God is like the person who took the talent and buried it in the sand and when its owner came, he did not offer the benefits with the talent.

One of the saints says, “O Jesus I offer myself to you as a sacrifice. I sacrifice myself without asking anything for myself”. The domains of sacrifice are wide before man. Through the works of his body he can give kindness, friendship, sacrifice, services and blessed works that glorify the Holy great name of God. The saints felt that they were in the world as the arms, hands and the legs, which carry out the blessed purposes of the Lord in the world. Each one of them seized the chance of his existence in the flesh to play the part appointed to him...waiting for the Divine Voice, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:21).

Do not be conformed to this world

The Christian who perceives the honor of the body is always careful to renew the mind to test the complete perfect good will of God. Renewing the mind is achieved through repentance, true confession and by examining the soul. Spending a period in a solitary place every now and then to find out if anything of the works of darkness has penetrated into the inner part of the soul. The renewal of mind enlightens it and increases its sensitivity and brightness and transparency and enables knowledge of the purpose of God, and His good will in every work performed.

That is why the apostle’s voice calls us nowadays: Are we conformed to this world in their aims

and methods and the way they live or have we become a new creation inside and outside? The Christians who do not honor their bodies expose them to ill treatment and insults when they put on inappropriate clothes. They adorn themselves in a way that does not conform to the honor of the temple of God in which the Holy Spirit dwells.

As the Lord entered the temple and drove out those who sold and bought and did not care for the holiness of the temple, the same will happen in His second coming when He drives out all those who did not honor their bodies and exposed their flesh to corruption and the work of the devil because it is written, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

Questions

1. Why did the Lord create the body in the life of man?
2. Why did the Logos (the Word) become flesh?
3. What is the mutual relationship between the body and the soul in the spiritual life?
4. “The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.” Explain.
5. The Saints felt that their flesh was a tool for performing God’s purposes in history. Explain.
6. How does a Christian regard his members, especially those that people consider of a low degree?
7. “Do not be conformed to this world in your life.” Explain.

Activities

1. Performing spiritual and social services, making use of our bodies to achieve the Lord’s purposes towards love.
2. Holding a debate about the body and invite a spiritual doctor and a physician to attend the debate.
3. Offering services to comfort bodily sufferings of some people such as patients.

Recitation

1 Corinthians 6:19,20

Exercise

Perpetual prayer: “Keep my body to be a temple for your Spirit”. We have to go to our confession father when we feel that our mind or our members have been corrupted by any lust.

(14) Love and the Flesh

References

- + “Social and Youthful Issues” Bishop Bemim
- + “The Mystery of Love” Bishop Bemim
- + “The Christian Education” Bishop Bemim and Dr. Siliman Niseem
- + “The Problem of Love” Dr .Zakarya Ibrahim

+ “Sex and its human meaning” Kosti Bendley

The Lesson

Aim

Understanding the purpose for which the Lord created passion and the way of directing it soundly

The meaning of love

Any person who loves another person for beauty, money, status or position does not know the meaning of love, as all these are no more than attributes. They are not the same person...but true love means that a person loves another person not for their qualities but for the person they are (Love means that I love you because you are what you are, without thinking of anything else). True love differs from lust as bodily love (Eros) is based on rashness and violent passion. True love is characterized by reverence, wisdom and loyalty. Man cannot love unless he is unselfish and has got rid of any deviation or rashness or weakness that may prevent the process of giving and meeting the other on the level of responsibility and loyalty. Bodily love does not satisfy man and does not quench the thirst of his inner life; neither does it keep away emptiness and solitude. St. John Chrysostom says, “True love can make one creature of two creatures but bodily passion cannot achieve unity neither can it satisfy the soul if it keeps away from true spiritual unity”.

The church, as a kind mother, rejects any personal relationship between a young man and a young woman before announcing their engagement and being prepared for marital life. The Christian young man is not rash and he does not seek the possession of the young woman’s heart through human methods. He wants to receive her from the hands of God and not from the hands of man. Love obliges the young man not to hurt the chastity and honor of the young woman. That is why he rejects any behavior that socially or spiritually may be inappropriate.

The Christian young man does not run after love or sexual relationships to get experience about the relationship between husband and wife because he insists on keeping his bodily passions on good terms with his spiritual desire. This makes him an integrated personality that is able to express the loyal love and true chastity in his life (1 Corinthians 6:12-18).

Characteristics of True Sexual Love

1. Maturity:

A child cannot love nor can an adolescent. Sacrifice needs adulthood and maturity, which, in this case, is bodily, psychological, social, mental and spiritual. Psychological growth is necessary as without it, there would be no soberness or independence and it would be difficult to get rid of self-centeredness. Spiritual growth is necessary as it is the first condition of love and guaranteeing its godliness, purity, clean essence and true Christianity.

Question: How can a young person be sure that the inner call, inspiration and attraction to the other person are true love and not bodily passion?

Answer: If the character of the lover leads a true life and has an inner proof and true conscience that is loyal to God, this means the choice is correct and not bad. The Divine love, which is

poured by the Holy Spirit in the heart of the young person, is able to sanctify his feelings, his mind and his senses, and qualify him to receive the altar of the holy marriage and a pure bed.

2. Freedom

The factor of freedom is combined with the bodily (physical), psychological and spiritual maturity. Freedom is the most important sign of manhood and maturity. Freedom here means inner and outer freedom. The inner freedom means being free from inferiority and psychological complexes, selfishness and narcissism so that man may not be enslaved to his passion and desires. Outer freedom means that a person is not enslaved to the opinions of others such as parents and friends. The personality has become mature enough to submit to truth only without being enslaved to others.

Marital Commitment

There is no love except through marriage and there is no marriage except through love as any love outside marriage is due to perish as in this case of the ability to form a family is lacking the human soul cannot deprive love of its natural physical expression and true sexual love is devoid of meaning outside the family and children. Paul the apostle says, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife has not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband has not power of his own body, but the wife” (I Corinthians 7:2-4).

The Holiness of Sexual Relationships in Marriage

The Divine Law gives us marriage as the mystery of union between a man and a woman who commit themselves to living together till death separates them, in a mutual relationship of love bearing in mind self purification and the sanctification of their children. Through the conscious commitment and through the mutual love between them, the fallen nature of the couple is renewed and qualifies them to dwell in the new heaven and the new earth. The marital love is a mark and witness of the kingdom of God. St. Clement of Alexandria refers to the grace that dominates the Christian marital life. In Cana of Galilee, the Lord Jesus and His Holy Spirit become the head of the wedding. They drink the new wonderful wine that fills the soul with heavenly delight. So it was not pure chance when Paul the apostle spoke about marital love while talking about the love between Christ and the church “Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it...So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies... This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:25-32). This shows that the marital life is likened to the unity between Christ and the church. In this marriage is regarded as a great mystery and the bond of the marital love is sanctified.

Prayer

O Lord, who blessed the wedding at Cana in Galilee bless now all married people for your glory. Make their homes pure and fill them with blessing, as they are houses of prayer. Grant us this grace and give it also to those who will come after us. O Lord who sanctified the wedding at Cana in Galilee by attending it and by the work of Your Holy Spirit, enter our houses now O Lord and turn them into holy churches so that marriage may become a sacred icon in the church.

Question

What is meant by “love” and what is the difference between true love and bodily love?

Activities

- Hold a debate and invite a priest to study the topic with you and to answer the questions.
- Summarizing a book about this subject such as “The Mystery of Love”

Recitation

I Corinthians 6:12-20

Exercise

- Keep your body and passions pure and undefiled and reject any love relationship outside the limits of married life.
- Keep away from exciting films and love stories and all that may cause a fall.
- Raise your heart to heaven through a short prayer if you meet with anything that may cause your fall.

(15) Freedom and Discipline

References

- + “Social and Youthful issues” Bishop Bemini
- + “The Problem of Freedom” Dr. Zakarya Ibrahim

The Lesson

Aim

How to use my freedom not as an end in itself but as a means to glorify God?

Freedom and Control

The word freedom has been misused. People often do wrong in the name of freedom, and people often confuse between freedom and impudence. St. Paul the apostle set to us the limits and dimensions of Christian freedom. In his epistle to the Galatians he says, “For, brethren, you have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you be not consumed one of another” (Galatians 5:13-15).

This text calls for the life of freedom to the Christian. This freedom is one of the signs of God’s image in people. In his life on earth, the Lord Jesus showed us how he respected the freedom, which he created in man but the Lord Jesus incarnated and united with our nature and gave us the right to unite with Him. Hence we could attain the power of true liberty, the inner freedom as freedom from sin and its authority, through our unity with him “If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

A Christian carries in himself two conflicting natures: the first nature is the law of enslavement

to lust and flesh or what the Scripture calls “The old corrupted man” and the second nature is the law of freedom, the law of the Spirit or what the Scripture calls “The new nature” (Galatians 5:17- 23). The top of freedom in the life of man is that the second nature completely overcomes the first nature. Paul expresses this when he said; “The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). St. Augustine explained this fact in one of his wise sayings: “I reached the top of the world (Complete freedom) when I feared nothing and desired nothing”. This means that Augustine believes that fear and desire are the enemies of true freedom. Let us apply this to the relationship between a young man and a young woman.

The danger of fear and suspicion

It is not good for a young man to be afraid of a young woman or a young woman to be afraid of a young man. Doubt and suspicion makes the image of the other sex a cause of falling. The true Christian has a pure eye and through this purity sees all persons as pure and righteousness.

The danger of lust and Don Juanism

This group is Imitating Don Juan who was a deviationist and also the deviation and this represents the opposite of the previous deviation (Fear and suspicion) this group is running after the satisfaction of instinct and the other sex and indulgence in sexual matters and enslavement to the desires of the flesh. Don Juanism is the desire to have a relationship with the other sex on a physical level and we know that the bodily passions do not satisfy man. The intercourse between two people without spiritual unity (in the mystery of marriage) causes separation, great hatred and enmity. The Holy Bible gives us a model of such a relationship: Ammon loved Tamar, Absalom’s sister but after “he forced her and lay with her, he hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her” (2 Samuel 13:15).

This explains the difference between the married person and the one who commits adultery. The adulterer and the adulteress meet on the flesh level only but the married people, as husband and wife are living in the unity of deep love, loyalty and truth, commitment, responsibility and keeping the covenant.

The Dimensions of the Relationship between a young man and a young woman

The other is a human being and not a thing: Within the limits of this outlook we heartily respect the other sex and we do not regard them as tools for amusement or satisfying the desire of the flesh.

We must not cause the fall of the other: The Holy Bible shows that temptation to sins cause perils and woe to the one who causes temptation. The Christian love that fills the heart of the Christian makes him love the other and makes him try his best to keep him away from temptation. He never vexes him in any way. Here the virtue of chastity in Christianity combines with love and forms the basis of all Christian virtues.

Christian Control, Sublimation and Reverence (Galatians 5:16-25): The true Christian lives according to the spirit and not according to the flesh. A Christian believes that the instincts of the flesh are out of control because of the inherited sin, and that the ancient man lies inside him. That is why he is keen to leave his instincts in Christ’s possession and to let the Holy Spirit work in

his heart and kindle it with love to the Lord as Christ alone is the cornerstone in the chastity life, He alone instructs the body, calms the nerves, kindle the spirit of giving and sacrifice and helps us to endure. Without the new nature man falls and degrades himself by being indulged in sexual affairs.

The Christian youth, in his struggle to control his instinct, follows the advice of Paul the apostle to his disciple Timothy, “So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call upon the Lord from pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).

In this way he perceives the excellent expression about spiritual struggle seeking the control of the instinct and sublimating it “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:24,25).

Questions for Discussion

1. Man was created to enjoy freedom. Explain.
2. What is the difference between freedom and impudence?
3. What is the Christian concept of freedom?
4. What hinders the Christian’s true freedom?
5. Show that it is necessary to resist the desires of the flesh within the limits of the spiritual struggle to enjoy true freedom.
6. How dangerous is suspicion and repression in sexual life?
7. How dangerous is Don Juanism (lust) in sexual life?
8. Define the dimension of the relationships between a young man and a young woman before marriage.

Activities

- Make a wall Chart about chastity.
- Inviting you men who did not taste chastity to attend a debate to deal with the subject of the dimensions of the relationship between man and woman before marriage.

Exercise

Practice controlling the senses to keep the body pure

Recitation

Galatians 5:13

(16) The Hymns of Kiahk

References

- + “The Spirituality of the Hymn” Part 7, Bishop Matteous
- + “The Psalmody of Kiahk: Seven and Four” St. George Church Sporting

The Lesson

Aim

Recognizing the rites of the church and sharing in the church hymns.

Introduction

The Coptic Orthodox Church is characterized by three important qualities in the Month of Kiahk:

1. The melodies of Kiahk or what is called “Seven and Four”.
2. Special texts that are read on Sunday Eves.
3. The Gospels of the Four Sundays.

I will turn aside and see this great sight

In the month of Kiahk, the whole church lives in a state of preparedness so that she may receive the Incarnate Son of God. The most prominent signs of the Divine Incarnation in the Old Testament, was that splendid appearance of the Lord to Moses the chief prophet on the Mountain of God Horeb. The Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. He looked and lo, the bush was burning; yet it was not consumed. Moses said, “I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt” (Exodus 3:2,3).

Moses fasted forty days and he received the two tablets of the Testimony written by the finger of God. That is why we fast the same period of time to receive the Incarnate Word of God. We have to stay up the nights in worship, raising praises to the Lord, giving thanks, glorifying God and in a state of joy. The church, guided by the Holy Spirit, expresses the spiritual feelings of the human soul when she lives in the heaven of God, frees herself from the ties of the language, and unites with the Lord. The top of these melodies is what the end of the third melody “Praise the Lord” utters. Let our souls wait for the coming of Lord Jesus Christ.

My mouth is filled with the praise and with your glory all the day

When David the Prophet said, “Seven times a day I praise You for Your righteous ordinances” (Psalm 119:164), he clarified that seven is a complete number. In the same way, the church organized the Canonical hours or the Seven-hour prayers to be prayed all the daylong. The rite that characterizes the Coptic month of Kiahk emphasizes this fact. This rite is known as Seven and Four. It means seven hymns glorifying the Mother of God, Theotokos. They are sung on the Seven days of the week to remind us of the perpetual worship and four hymns.

The meaning of some words used in the Melody

“Theotokeya” (Theotokos): to glorify the Virgin

It is a Greek word that means “The Mother of God”. It includes a group of Christian dogmas, which are written in Coptic poetic language, followed by Glorification of the Heavenly Father, then the Lady Virgin.

Hoas:

A Coptic word meaning, “Praise” and the four hoas of praise are quoted from the Books of the Old Testament.

The First Hoas of Praise:

This is the Song of Moses the Prophet and the Children of Israel. The Church sings this song to imitate them and to glorify and thank God because He saved us from the land of bondage and

granted us the freedom of the Children of God.

The Second Hoas (Psalm 136):

Give thanks to the Lord: To recognize His greatness and mercy, the church sings it to remember the mercies of God hoping for the Kingdom of God.

The Third Hoas:

The Three young men Hymn (Apocrypha)

The Fourth Hoas:

A group of psalms 148,149,150.

We thank the Lord for His mercies and express our delight for the inheritance and salvation.

Lobsh: Interpretation or explanation and it follow the hymn of praise or the Tathakya.

Epsalia: A hymn in the form of a poem, which is alphabetically written.

The basic system of annual holy melody necessitates singing the first three hymns of praise with their interpretations (lobshes) then the three young-men melody, the commemoration and the doxologies, then the fourth hymn of praise then the Epsali and Theotokos' hymn of Sunday.

But the rite of singing melodies in the blessed month of Kiahk is most enriching, abundant and enjoyable to anyone who practices singing its hymns.

The following is a rapid presentation of its basic system and the added melodies, songs, readings, and methods. All is included in the Book of the Holy Psalmody of the Coptic Month of Kiahk.

There is a large group of hymns organized to accompany each Tathakya. They are divided into two main groups "Adam" and "Watis Psalia" (the bush) according to the beginning of two famous hymns:

The first is: Adam the first who is created, You brought him back, O Mother of Jesus, from the land of labor and toil O Mary, Virgin Mary.

The second is: The burning bush seen by Moses in the desert. And the fire burning inside it but never hurting or harming.

The first type has a special tone and is devoted for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. The second type is characterized by its long tone and is sung on the other days of the week.

There are several hymns that are sung according to these two techniques. There are hymns, which are arranged to be sung with the four hymns of praise, to explain their meaning and repeat the same ideas some of them are sung in the Vespers or in the Matins.

Praise the Lord (Hoas Erof)

The Coptic month of Kiahk is the month of hymns. The church offers us a large number of hymns in this month. They are all nice, attractive and enjoyable. The fourth hymn of praise is characterized by an added passage to be said after each part of Psalm 150. This passage is:

“Glory and praise befit our Lord. Praise the Lord our God. Singing psalms is good”.

In the Holy Mass, some intercessions, and there are special melodies for the Lessons of the Acts, are certain hymns for the Gospel, as we listen to a certain tone that characterizes the Psalm of the Gospel and the same is with the last psalm of distribution. The church calls us and invites us to test the life of singing hymns when we say, “Holy, Holy, Holy, your glory fills the whole earth”.

Anthologies (Church readings) in the Month of Kiahk

Sunday Eves: The Gospel should be about a woman who performed a good deed to stand for Virgin Mary who received Salvation.

The Eve of the first Sunday: The woman who broke the jar of perfume and poured the perfume on Jesus’ head (Mark 14).

The Eve of the Second Sunday: The woman who lived a sinful life. When she heard that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar full of perfume and stood behind Jesus, by His feet crying and wetting His feet with her tears, then she dried His feet with her hair, kissed them, and poured the perfume on them (Luke 7).

The Eve of the Third Sunday: Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law (Luke 4).

The Eve of the Fourth Sunday: The woman who helped Jesus and His disciples with their belongings (Luke 8). How wonderful is the story that we listen to through what the church reads.

In the Gospels of Sundays

The church reads the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke. She divides the chapter into four parts:

The first Sunday: The angel of the Lord informs Zechariah of the good news (Luke 1:1-25).

The second Sunday: The birth of Jesus Announced. The Angel of the Lord carries good news to the virgin (Luke 1:26- 38).

The third Sunday: Mary visits Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56).

The fourth Sunday: The birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57-80).

The ember day: The Shepherds and the Angels (Luke 2:1-20).

The Eve of the Feast: Wise men from the East visit Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12).

Exercises and Activities

- Study parts of the Virgin’s melody by heart to take part in singing praises to the Lord in this blessed month
- Always attend the holy mass and study the hymns of the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospels. Repeat them in the church.
- Hymns sung to the Theotokos, the Mother of God, are full of symbols and similes about Virgin Mary. Collect them and make a wall Chart.

(17) How to begin a new year

References

+ “The life of repentance and cleanliness” Pope Shenouda III

+ “How to begin a New Year” Pope Shenouda III

+ “Words of Spiritual Benefits” Part 1,2,3, Pope Shenouda III

- + “How to begin” Bishop Bemin
- + “Turn me my Lord and I shall be turned” Fr. Youssef Assaad

The Lesson

Aim

Hindrances to repentance and how to overcome them

Discussion

Is the beginning from God or from man? God is the beginning and the end.

He is the beginning and the end. He loved you before your birth. You were in His mind. Then He uttered and you were formed. His love to you made Him do that.

Remember the situations in which the Lord showed His love to man

- ❑ Read the story of the Lord and Jerusalem (Ezekiel 16:1-14), which indicates God’s covenant with the human soul.
- ❑ The word of God was dear in those days. In the days of Samuel, the Lord chose a little child. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord (I Samuel 3:21).
- ❑ In Isaiah the Lord says, “Come now, let us reason together; says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

After the Exile the Lord began His work with the people

- ❑ “Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel. My way is hid from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God? He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might he increases strength” (Isaiah 40:27-31).
- ❑ “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save” (Isaiah 59:1).
- ❑ Paul the Apostle summarizes the whole topic in his Epistle to the Hebrews: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

God then makes a Peace Initiative

The most important part of it is that it is a Peace Initiative with the enemies: that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

God also makes a peace Initiative for the Salvation of the Nations

- ❑ “For through your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return” (Isaiah 10:22, Romans 9:27).
- ❑ The Lord makes the Incarnation Initiative and the Initiative of the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- ❑ The Lord comes to you and wants you to go with Him. He is the beginning and the end.

Your own attitude

- ❑ You may be wasting your time at the well with the Samaritan woman keeping away from the Salvation of yourself.
- ❑ You may be running away, living in the tombs and the burial caves of the Gerasenes with man men.
- ❑ You may be walking in the way you think is right but the course may deviate with you as what happened to Saul.
- ❑ You may not see Christ, who is calling as you are completely indulged in your worries, grieves and tears like Mary Magdalene on the day of resurrection.
- ❑ But the Lord has methods to deal with all the souls. Christ is still searching for you.

A sure start

There is no doubt that baptism is a chance for you to sow a spiritual seed in your heart. Your conscience may have not awaken you, you may have not understood the meaning of this initiative but be sure that you have already begun, but what you have to do is to go back to the covenant of baptism and test how the Lord deals with you.

Stand by the roads

Thus say's the Lord, "Stand by the roads, and look and ask for the ancient paths where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16). Repentance is a private talk with oneself and counting the expenses. Mar Ephraim the Syrian says:

- ❑ "Those who spend a lot and have no income soon ruin themselves".
- ❑ "Days quickly go by and our life today is not the same of our life yesterday. So repent now as death may come suddenly tonight".
- ❑ "If you are prepared to do anything begin it now at this moment".
- ❑ "If a good idea occurs to you, do not sleep. Do you work immediately?"
- ❑ "We should grieve as our life is worn out everyday. Days pass quickly to drive us out of the world and we do not hurry to do good or to give alms and this causes grief. Days go by and our sins increase".
- ❑ St. Anthony says, "Labor and toil when you are young so that you may have rest when you are old. Let us toil for a short time and then we shall have comfort forever".

Look and ask

This collection of the fathers' sayings urging us to go back to the roads of our fathers and to examine ourselves and seek the salvation of our souls: Renaissance, sometimes, means going back to the old principles and ways of living. It does not always mean running after what is new and modern "If you do not know, O fairest among women follow in the tracks of the flock, and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents" (The Song of Solomon 1: 8). Explain the meaning of the tracks of the flock.

Signs of the sound start

- ❑ Love of God
- ❑ Hate of evil deeds
- ❑ Love of people
- ❑ Deep peace of the heart

Prayer

“O Father: You made the initiation for me through your only begotten Son. Let me respond today and have a sound beginning. Help me to know the way and keep me firm in it so that I may not deviate to the left or to the right till I come to you. You are the Beginning and the End. You are the True Way leading to Life”.

A guide for examining oneself is to be distributed among young people

You can examine yourself by several ways:

First: Examine the sins of thought, saying and work (action).

Second: Examine the sins of the souls (pride), and the heart (hatred, sinful passions) and the body (eye -tongue -feeling).

Third: Faith (is it practical or theoretical, in time of trouble or in time of joy).

Hope: Does it last for the whole life long? Are there despair, negligence and perversion?

Love: to God and is clear in prayers and spiritual longing towards your relatives and is shown in giving, service and forgiving those who insult you.

(18) Glory to God in the Highest

References

+ “The effectiveness of Nativity” H. H. Pope Shenauda III

+ “Contemplations on Nativity” H. H. Pope Shenauda III

+ “Glory, peace and joy” Bishop Bemini

The Lesson

Aim

The effectiveness of Nativity in our spiritual life

Glory, Peace and Joy

This angelic song is very powerful. It is a splendid declaration of what happened the moment Jesus was born. It is very brief but expresses great joy. Thousands of heavenly angels sing this song on behalf of heaven and earth. For the first time in, their eternal history, the angels got out of their traditional silence and announced a new revolution in the universe on the Day of Nativity. They could keep silent inspired by the people’s state of unconsciousness and they started out singing a pleasant, sweet wonderful song, giving glory to God in the Highest, preached peace and announced pleasure for the people.

Glory to God in the Highest

- ❑ Great is the glory of God. It appeared in the Creation and in Mount Sinai and later in the Transfiguration and in the resurrection.
- ❑ But today we are face to face with the glory of lowliness. It is the hidden glory and the top of emptiness. The son is the bright glory of the Father and the image of His essence. We liken Him to the glorified way that comes out of the sun to shine on the people, but the Lord appeared in the image of man and shared the nature of men (except sin).
- ❑ When the Lord incarnated and came to live among us made the angels and all the peoples

of the world after that to worship the Lord and give Him glory and praise Him in the Highest: Holy, Holy, Holy the Lord of Host, His glory fills all the earth (Isaiah 6:3).

- ❑ When we come near to Bethlehem and see the Son, we feel a great love for Him so we give glory to the Father who gave us His Incarnate Son. The Son is the Divine Wisdom. He is the Logos Incarnate.
- ❑ That is why Christianity regards the weakness of the Lord as meekness and lowliness. The cross is glory (The Lord reigns on the Cross) and the manger is glory...but it is the glory of meekness.

Peace on earth

Why did the earth lose its peace? That was because of the sin which:

- ❑ Sin separated man from God.
- ❑ Deformed man's spiritual beauty and made him live in conflict with himself.
- ❑ Corrupted the family system, man ruled over woman and the woman's desire would be for her husband.
- ❑ Made people cruel. Cain killed Abel.
- ❑ This lost peace could not be restored except through the Incarnate Christ.
- ❑ Christ is the Mediator between God and man. He removes the barrier between them so that man can see God the Father in Christ, and the Father can see in Him the image of the righteous man whom He created and wanted. Thus peace between God and man will be restored. He will also be a mediator between the heavenly and the earthly beings, He will establish peace between the hosts of angels and among the simple shepherds and among all who surround the manger in one song the first half of which is in Heaven (glory) and the second half is on earth (peace).
- ❑ He makes peace between man and his brother. Peace here is different from the political concept of peace. It is peace within the frame of love and truth together. In this way Christ mends what sin corrupted inside the heart of man, and restores love and calmness to him and destroys the desires of the flesh inside him as "There is no peace, says the Lord for the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22, 57:21).

Good will towards men

It is a spiritual good will:

- ❑ In performing His will.
- ❑ In sacrificing for Him because He emptied Himself of His glory for the will of His Father, in praising His name with warm worship. God was pleased with the apostles who preached His name. He was pleased with the martyrs who endured the torments thankfully. He was pleased with the ascetics who sold everything and lived in asceticism and simplicity.
- ❑ Yes it is the spiritual concept of good will...true good will for which virgin Mary is still praying so that we may attain and she is standing in the middle of our world carrying her son in her hands, in great delight while the angels are shouting "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men".

Discussion

Mention the different ways of celebrating the feast.

Activities

Make a manger of the Nativity and invite friends to sing the Nativity songs.

Exercises

- ❑ Practice confession, receiving communion, and reconciliation with God.
- ❑ Reconcile between two friends who are not on good terms with each other so that the peace of the baby of Bethlehem may fill their hearts.
- ❑ Send gifts to the poor to please them. Pray with them in their houses.
- ❑ Study the delightful Nativity melodies.

(19) Trinitarianism and Monotheism

References

- + “Our Holy Faith” Bishop Youannis
- + “Truly we believe in One God” Fr. Moussa Wahba
- + “The Message of Monotheism and Trinitarianism” Yassa Mansour
- + “Monotheism and Trinitarianism” Fawzy Girgis
- + “We believe in One God” St. George church, Sporting
- + “God is One in Trinity” St. George church, Sporting

The Lesson

Aim

The type of the Lord’s Oneness (of three Hypostases)

Introduction

This dogma may be difficult to understand and because of this creed we are accused of atheism because they think that we worship three gods. Although it is difficult for our mind to recognize and understand the nature of God, yet the lord, out of His love to us allowed us to contemplate His divine nature and understand Him in a way that gives comfort to the soul that mainly enjoys faith, which simply believes every word written in the Holy Bible.

Our belief in One God

The problem that faces those who attack Trinitarianism is that they separate Trinitarianism from Monotheism. They think that the Christian dogma of Trinitarianism is a sort of atheism or polytheism. But we as Christians say that we believe in One God that has no partner. We do not believe in three gods. All the attacks directed to the belief of three gods have no relation with Christianity whatsoever. Christians believe in One God. The following proves this:

- ❑ “The Lord our God is One Lord” (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- ❑ “You believe that God is one; you do well” (James 2:19).
- ❑ The Orthodox Creed states: “Truly we believe in one God”
- ❑ When the Lord Christ referred to the three Hypostases He said, “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). He said “In the name” not “In the names”.

Three Hypostases - The Holy Trinity

We believe that this One God has three Hypostases. “Hypostasis” is a Greek word meaning “essential private quality or characteristic”. We say private characteristic to distinguish it from the several other qualities or attributes of the Lord such as love, mercy, justice, power...that is why we can call it the characteristic:

1. The first characteristic is the existence or the essence. Can we imagine that God is without his characteristic? On the contrary it is a must that He exist, as He is the source of existence.
2. The second characteristic is the talking intellect He created the world with, and with Him He controls the world.
3. The third characteristic is life god must be a living being, He Himself is life. God is a living wise being, self-existent, speaking by His word and living by His spirit.

The names of Hypostases

Instead of saying: the first Hypostasis, the second Hypostasis and the third Hypostasis. We give them the names that Christ Himself had given them (Matthew 28:19). Even if they are of our human language, yet they show the work of each Hypostasis to a great extent.

1. The first Hypostasis: The essence the origin is called the Father.
2. The Second Hypostasis: Because He comes out of the First Hypostasis is called the Son.
3. The Third Hypostasis: Because He is the giver of life is called the Spirit.

Because these names are our human language about the divine nature of god and his characteristics which in fact surpasses any comprehension so we have to set some precaution:

1. This does not mean that any of them is better than the other. They are distinct in the type of work and effect but they are not distinct in honor, essence and nature.
2. The relationship between the Father and the Son is not that used and referred to in the human language when we speak about human fathers and sons. The obstruct meaning of these words are used in expressions such as: The son of Egypt, the son of the Nile, we also say that fire generates heat and the mind generates ideas.
3. There is no separation between Hypostases: The son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son and the Holy Spirit is in them both. When we think our mind gives birth to a certain idea this idea may come out of your mind and goes to somebody else but this does not mean that the idea has deserted you; it is still in you i.e. in your mind.
4. The Father never precedes the son or the holy spirit in time as it is impossible to imagine God without intellect or without life at anytime, the same as when you light a candle: the light and the flame come at one time; neither of them precedes the other.

Similarities

Man

- ❑ He is an inner soul and an inner existence. This soul has a private will and a certain desire but the soul cannot work without intellect and liveliness.
- ❑ The role of the intellect is clear when man thinks of the solution of a certain problem, and

utters the solution by his mouth. At that time he says “I solved the problem by my mind”. This does not mean that his mind is separated from him. We cannot neglect the role of liveliness, which moved the tongue to speak. They are three elements that work together in a unity.

- ❑ “The energy and liveliness” of man has a role when man practices a sport. Here we do not forget how the desire began and how the mind thinks of the easiest way to win.

The Sun

It is a disc of fire (the Father) but it has two distinct tasks, which are to issue light (the son) and heat (the holy spirit). Each of them has its own effect, when we sit in the sun to read we cannot say: I read by the heat of the sun. This is a wrong expression. Although each of them has its own task that the other can do, can you imagine the possibility of their being separated or the existence of two of them without the third?

The role of the Holy Trinity in the life of man

- ❑ Although each Hypostasis has His own work and a certain role, this does not mean that He is separated from the other two: as He cannot perform His role without the others (as in the example of man and the sun).
- ❑ The Father willed to create man. He is the spring of love who did not want man to die after his fall, but He sent His Son to redeem man. He is the fatherly bosom that controls our life, draws the plan of our salvation, accepts us and receives us after we repent our sins.
- ❑ The Son is the divine intellect in whom our image was formed before we were created, with Him we were created. He incarnated the divine love to us when He incarnated and became man so that we may unite with Him and our image which sin deformed may be mended. It is He who redeemed us and became an eternal patron.
- ❑ The Holy spirit came down upon us (because of Christ unity with us) so He brought us to the divine fellowship with grace, the sanctifies our senses kindles our hearts with love to God and raises our human worship to the divine level. We can deduce the work of each Hypostasis from the following texts.

The work of the Father

- ❑ He chose us in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-4).
- ❑ He destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:5).
- ❑ He called us (Romans 8:30).
- ❑ He is God almighty the eternal creator.

The work of the son

- ❑ Redemption (Galatians 1:4, Galatians 3:13, Ephesians 1:7)
- ❑ Giving life (John 1:4)
- ❑ Forgiveness of sins (Matthew 9:6, Acts 10:43, Ephesians 1:7)
- ❑ He is the Son the word (the Logos) and the image of the Father.

The work of the Holy Spirit

- ❑ The New Birth (John 3:5-6)
- ❑ Sanctification (2 Thessalonica 2:13, 1 Peter 1:2)

- ❑ He reproves the world of sin (John 16:8)
- ❑ He is the spirit that gives life, the spirit of love the comforter, the paraclete. His shapes of forms include pigeon, the shining cloud, flames of fire, or a breathe from the mouth of the son of man.

Activities

- + Define the hypostasis that all the prayers of the canonical hours and the Masses are directed to.
- + Write a prayer of three passages for each Hypostasis.
- + Show that the three Hypostases are in one and He is our Lord One God.

(20) Study of the Coptic Church

References

- + “St. Mark the Apostle” His Holiness Pope Shenouda III
- + “The story of the Coptic Church” Part I, Iris El Massry

The Lesson

Aim

To be acquainted with the glories of the Coptic Church - Examples of the life of Saints.

The Coptic Church

Question 1: State the most important works of St. Mark.

Answer 1:

- ❑ He believed in the Lord Christ and he was one of the seventy apostles.
- ❑ He followed the Lord Jesus and his house was the first Christian church.
- ❑ The Passover was made in his house and the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples there.
- ❑ St. Mark wrote the second Gospel of he four Gospels.
- ❑ He preached in Antioch, Cyprus, Rome, North Africa and Egypt.
- ❑ St. Mark ordained the first Egyptian Bishop and that was Inianus the first one he preached.
- ❑ He was martyred in Alexandria after he had established the first school of Theology.

Question 2: What are the factors that led to the spread of Christianity in Egypt?

Answer 2:

- ❑ The Egyptian’s belief in resurrection after death and the Day of Judgment and the dogma of Monotheism since the days of Ikhnaton prepared them to believe in Christianity.
- ❑ The Egyptians welcomed Christianity as a religion of equality and freedom as a result of the violent Roman domination, which lasted for a long time.

Question 3: Speak about the dispute between Christianity and paganism and the consequences of that conflict.

Answer 3:

The dispute between Christianity and paganism was deep in spite of the rapid spread of Christianity. It included two main domains:

- ❑ The Intellectual Domain: That role was played by the school of Alexandria as a reaction to the prevailing pagan culture. This school was the most important Christian school in the world and the most famous one. It preserved the Christian faith and protected it from the heresies. Many of the bishops and Popes of the world were graduates of that school.
- ❑ The field of Martyrdom: St. Mark was the first martyr, and then a very big number of people were martyred so that age was called "The Age of martyrdom".

Question 4: Speak about the Roman persecution of the Egyptian Christians then about the Christian Emperors persecution.

Answer 4:

The Egyptian Christians suffered from severe persecutions especially in the time of Emperor Diocletian who drove all Christians out of the army, destroyed churches and looted the people's property. He aimed at the destruction of Christianity. This gave rise to the Coptic year which began in 284 AD, the year he became an emperor.

Persecutions performed by Christian Emperors

Many Emperors believed in the Arian Heresy so they sent St. Athanasius into exile, broke into the churches, drove away Pope Benjamin and appointed one of their followers (Mucawcus) who persecuted and tormented the Copts. Pope Peter the martyr is the Alexandrian Patriarch who could through his powerful prayers stop the movement of martyrdom. Examples of those martyrs: St. Mina, St. Dimyana and the forty virgins, Pope Peter the martyr, etc.

Question 5: What are the stages of the Egyptian monasticism?

Answer 5:

- ❑ The Monachism: The most famous example is St. Paul of Thebes the first hermit, and St. Anthony the Father of the monks.
- ❑ The Communal System: This system was established by St. Macarius the Great who lived as monk in the wilderness of Sheheit. He lived in isolation but the cells of the monks were near one another.
- ❑ The Coenobitic System: This system was established by Anba Pachomius. According to this system monks live in one monastery sharing in prayers and reading holy books.

Monasticism spread because of religious motivation all because of the circumstances of the country, which were very bad, and also because of persecutions. Monasticism spread all over the world and many monks were disciples of Egyptian teachers in the school of Alexandria or teachers from among the monks.

Question 6: What is the role of the monasteries in the services of society and the church?

Answer 6:

- ❑ Scientific and teaching services: This happened after the school of Alexandria had become weak because of the successive persecutions.
- ❑ The National Services: The fathers of the church were religious and national leaders facing imperialists.
- ❑ The Ecclesiastical Services: The monasteries used to select monks to be ordained bishops and patriarchs. Those were famous for their knowledge, godliness, virtue and wisdom.
- ❑ Social Services: The monks used to guide and advise people as how to face life and its problems and they used to offer living models as well. In modern times, monasticism witnesses a blessed renaissance, which started in the days of His Holiness Saint and Pope Cyril VI. The monasteries were rebuilt and there was a movement for nuns and those who devoted themselves to work in the social and spiritual domains.

Question 7: What are the factors that affected the division of the Coptic age? What are the aspects of this civilization?

Answer 7:

- ❑ The ancient Egyptian origin
- ❑ The Greek civilization
- ❑ The Christian faith

The religious aspects:

The role played by the Catechetical School of Alexandria, the role of the church in defending sound faith against heresies, the struggle of the Popes to keep the orthodox faith and the establishment of monasticism.

The Coptic Language:

The intellectual and artistic life was copied from the Pharaoh traditions and culture then its development.

Examples of the life of the Saints

St. Ignatius the Bishop of Antioch

- ❑ He was born a pagan in the town Antioch and then believed in Christ on the hands of preachers from Jerusalem.
- ❑ He was a disciple of the apostles so he is considered one of the apostolic fathers.
- ❑ He was famous for his ability to preach and teach so he won many souls.
- ❑ He was brave so he could face the Emperor Tragan and refused to worship idols.
- ❑ He attained the crown of martyrdom when he was thrown to lions in a public celebration in the city of Rome.

St. Anthony the Father of the Monks

- ❑ He was born in Quimmn El Arouss, in Beni Sweif.
- ❑ He spent 85 years in the wilderness in worship and prayers.
- ❑ He attracted many of those who wanted to live the life of asceticism and they learned how to pray and work. He used to do manual work and earn his bread in this way.
- ❑ He is the father of monks as it was he who established monasticism.
- ❑ He used to visit the prisoners and those who were sentenced to death for the sake of

Christ.

- ❑ He defended the sound creed and faced heresies.

St. Basil the Great (the Bishop of Caesarea)

- ❑ He was brought up in a religious and pious Christian family. Three of its members were ordained bishops.
- ❑ He was educated in Caesarea, Constantinople, and Athens.
- ❑ He visited Egypt and mingled with its great thinkers. He also lived in some monasteries and was greatly affected by the life of monks.
- ❑ He was chosen to be a priest so he set a very good system for pastoral work.
- ❑ He was ordained a bishop and he defended the sound faith.
- ❑ He departed in the Lord at the age of 49 after a life of long struggle.

(22) The Acceptable Worship

References

- + “The paradise of the Spirit” Part I, Bishop Youannis
- + “The acceptable worship” Bishop Bemin
- + “The perfect worship” Bishop Mettaos

The Lesson

Aim

Obedience of the Commandment in perfect and acceptable worship before the Lord

Introduction

The acceptable worship in our orthodox church has three important and essential bases. They are all according to the organization of our good Savior in His Sermon on the Mountain: alms, prayer, and fasting. He sets prayer between alms giving and fasting. Some preachers liken it to a bird as prayer means that our minds fly to God as John the Origin. This bird that is prayer has two great wings that are almsgiving and fasting with whose help it hover in the high sky without any barrier or hindrance. If the prayer lost any of its wings that are almsgiving and fasting, it becomes weak. But with the help of its strong wings, our prayer becomes strong and perfect. With this threefold worship that is acceptable; the Lord will please with us so we enjoy His blessings so we get an inheritance from almsgiving and fellowship from prayer and a blessing from fasting.

The Acceptable Alms

God demands almsgiving. The Lord Christ encourages us to give alms and shows us its benefits and blessings when He says, “Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys” (Luke 12:33). But the person who has no treasure in heavens will have no mercy in the Day of Judgment “For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy, yet mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).

The value of alms and the blessing of giving

- ❑ Almsgiving intercedes for believers and unbelievers as it opens to them the door of faith as what happened to Cornelius the centurion, whose prayers and alms rose to God so the Lord opened the door of faith to him and he received the grace of baptism at the hands of Peter the apostle (Acts 10).
- ❑ What shows its value is the effective saying of St. Basil when he warned merciless people, he said “If you keep away from mercy, mercy will keep away from you and if you reject the poor, that who became poor because He loved you, will reject you”.
- ❑ One of the blessings of almsgiving is that it protects us against evil things and diseases and gives us the feeling of inner happiness. How wonderful is that what David the prophet said in this psalm “Blessed is he who considers the poor. The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble, the Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land: you do not give him up to the will of his enemies” (Psalm 41:1,2).

To whom must we give our alms?

We are asked to do good to all without preferring any body to another as St. Paul the Apostle said, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

How should we give our alms?

The Lord looks to the giver before he looks to the alms itself “He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury” (Mark 12:41). He did not concern Himself with how much they put in the treasury so we must know how to give our alms.

1. To pay a debt: After gathering a lot of gold and silver David the prophet said, “And of Your Own have we given You” (I chronicles 29:14). Let us remember that we are paying back a debt... God has given us everything, so how don't we give Him a part of all?
2. With the spirit of love: God refuses any virtue devoid of the spirit of love. St. Paul the apostle shows the necessity of giving alms with the spirit of love when he says: “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (I Corinthians 13:3). And the writer of the songs says, “If a man offers for love all the wealth of his house it would be utterly scorned” (The song of songs 8:7).
3. With Self-denial: The Lord advises us to give our alms secretly without boasting over it, “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). We lose our reward if we give our alms before people to get their praise and admiration.
4. Generously and happily: If we are the children of God let us imitate our heavenly Father who said, “Who gives to all men generously and without reproaching” (James 1:5). As for giving with delight Paul the apostle says, “For God loves a cheerful giver” (1 Corinthians 9:7).
5. Frame the sweat of your forehead: The laws of the church state that the gifts of the evildoers should be refused as they are an offence to the Lord and St. John Chrysostom says, “The gifts should be a result of true labor and from a lawful way as God does not accept gifts that are not pure.

The Acceptable Prayer

For our prayers to be acceptable and for us to benefit from the promises of Christ, “Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13). Some spiritual and bodily conditions are necessary for the successful prayer. Of the most important spiritual conditions are the following:

1. Faith: we have to raise our prayers to God with powerful faith and sure confidence that the Lord is the Omnipotent. He answers our prayer by one of three words:
 - a. “Yes”, if what we ask is in our favor and for our benefit and the time is appropriate.
 - b. “No” if what we ask is not for our benefit.
 - c. “Wait” if the time is not appropriate. God who knows our nature knows what is for our benefit more than we know...let us have trust in Christ. In this case we find that He is loving and loyal. Let us beware of doubt and suspicion God is not a human being to lie to us. “For he who doubt is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that the double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6,7).
2. Love: We should give in the name of Christ: Lord Jesus said, “If you ask anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14). He also says “Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in My name” (John 16:23). That is why the church added to the Lord’s Prayer this expression “Through Jesus Christ, our Lord” so that all the requests included in that prayer offered to God in the name of Christ.
3. Love and tolerance: of the spiritual conditions also is love for God and the people. Paul the apostle says, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gang or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1). This means that if my prayers are devoid of love, they become like a noisy gang without spirit and not acceptable. But if I have love, I shall forgive others as Christ in His love forgives us our sins. In this way we raise pure hearts to God without anger or hatred, and our prayer would be acceptable before the throne of God.
4. Mercy: Solomon says, “Be who closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself cry out and not be heard” (Proverbs 21:13), but the merciful man who helps the needy, “Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say: Here I am” (Isaiah 58:9).
5. According to the will of God: the Apostle says, “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14). That who asks wrongly to spend on his desires such as food, drink, clothes, and self-glorification at the expense of the Lord and His gifts, that man asks but do not receive (James 4:3).
6. To know the will of God and for our prayer to be according to the will of God; we have to contemplate the Holy Bible; the word of God and the message of our salvation.
7. Importunity in prayer: Importunity is a very important condition of the acceptable prayer. A prayer in its supreme meaning is a struggle with God. As a kind father He will bring what his son wants but He does not give it to him the first time he asks to test his love... and show his need for that thing using childish words that please his father’s heart then He happily give it to him.

The Lord recommended importunity in prayer by giving two examples. The widow and the judge

who neither feared God nor did he fear man (Luke 18:1-8) and the parable of the friend of the midnight. The Lord says about the second parable, “I tell you though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs” (Luke 1:8).

Honoring our parents

“That who angers his parents attains their wrath”. Son of Sirach says, “That who honors his father atones his sins and refrains from them and his prayer is answered every day” (Sirach 3:4). In the same way, the husband who despises his wife and troubles her is advised by Paul the apostle, “Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered” (I Peter 3:7). As for the bodily conditions that help us control our thoughts in prayer and concentrate while standing before the Lord, these are:

1. Prepare a good and suitable place for prayer. We have to devote a room or a special place for prayer. We should put the icon of the cross in that room. We should look at that icon while praying. On its right we put the icon of the Virgin to ask for her intercession in our prayer. The time before prayer, which is devoted to prepare ourselves for prayer is useful as it helps, us concentrate. During that time we increase our spiritual warmth and cordial longing to Do... either by reading a text or several verses for being comforted or by singing a hymn of repentance.
2. The body should be powerful and active so that it may not fail us during standing for prayer. Let us stand erect as a soldier does when he speaks to his officer. We should raise our hands in the form of the cross. In this way we conquer the devil who fights us during prayer as what is written about Moses the prophet when the people of Israel fought Amalek.

The Acceptable Fasting

Fasting is the third basis of the three acceptable bases of worship. It has two meanings: an ascetic meaning and a spiritual meaning.

The Ascetic Meaning

Abstaining from food for a certain period of the day, then eating light food devoid of fat. The period of abstention is agreed upon with the Confessor each according to his spiritual power and circumstances.

The Spiritual Meaning

This is the golden chance to refresh the soul and the release of the Spirit from the ties of the flesh to unite with God, as God is Spirit and nothing can unite with him except the soul.

Conditions of the Acceptable Fasting

For our fasting to be acceptable before God, there are some important conditions such as:

Fasting should be connected with prayers

This makes of the fasting an effective power. As the Lord Jesus said about the most power type of demons, “However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21). And also when the prophet knew the power of the prayer that is accompanied by fasting he

advised us saying: “Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly... assemble the elders... to the house of the Lord your God and raise your voice to the Lord” (Joel 1:14, 2:5).

Fasting is accompanied with almsgiving

The Lord teaches us by the mouth of Isaiah the prophet saying, “and bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up speedily, your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer. You shall cry, and he will say here I am” (Isaiah 58:7- 9).

Fasting should be accompanied with love and humbleness

“It is not reasonable to refrain from meat and eat the flesh of your brother. Fasting does not mean that you only feel hungry but to humiliate and humble our souls before the Lord. As the profit David said, “I afflicted myself with fasting” (Psalm 35: 13).

It should be in Secret

Our heavenly father advises us saying, “But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your father who is secret; and your father who sees in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:17,18).

The Lord’s advice has a deep spiritual meaning. Washing the face means cleaning it and most of the senses of man are in his face, and these senses and their places should be cleaned of every evil and semi- evil so that fasting may be perfect, pure and acceptable, but anointing the head means the godliness of thought and the inner senses which involve the mind.

Exercises and Activities

1. Together with your Church colleagues and your teacher pay a visit some orphanages or hospitals or some families to offer your alms and show your love especially on feast occasions.
2. Let your worship be perfect, integrated and growing with the help of your confessor.
 - a. Study some parts of the Sermon on the mountain (Chapter six) and also Isaiah 58.
 - b. Copy from the Holy Bible some models of the character that offered an acceptable fasting... and also some examples of prayers written in the Holy Bible.

(22) Who is the Prophet?

References

- + “Notes on Prophecy” Fr. Sidarous Abdel Messih
- + “Christ in all Books” A. M. HO Digman

The Lesson

Aim

Prophecy between the Old Testament and the New Testament

Introduction

When we go through the history of the people of God in the Old Testament, we find that there were three main great jobs appointed by the Lord to direct the people.

- ❑ The king who has the authority to rule,
- ❑ The priest who has the authority to sanctify, and
- ❑ The prophet who has the authority to teach and warn. Each one of them receives his authority from the Lord through the anointment of the holy unction. This unction grants him the support of the Holy Spirit to perform his duty. That is why the king, the priest and the prophet were honored by the people who submitted to their authority because it was from God.

The work of the prophets was more important than the work of kings and priests in many situations. Samuel the Prophet and Ali the priest is one example: “The days are coming, when I will cut off your strength... and I will raise up for myself a faithful priest” (1 Samuel 2:31-35). The other example is Samuel the prophet and king Saul: “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord He has also rejected you from being king” (Samuel 15:23). Elijah the prophet and king Ahab is another example: “Have you killed and also take possession?” (I Kings 21:19). The prophet was called the man of God because he spoke according to the authority he received from God.

I sent you, the prophet is sent by God

- ❑ The Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush, “Come I will sent you ...that you may bring forth my people out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10).
- ❑ The Lord appeared to Samuel when he was a young boy and spoke to him and sent him to Ali the priest “And the word of Samuel came to all Israel...And the Lord appeared again at Shilah for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shilah by the word of the Lord” (I Samuel 3:20,21).
- ❑ And the Lord sent Jeremiah in spite of his young age, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations. Do not say I am only a youth for to all to whom I send you shall go and whatever I command you shall speak” (Jeremiah 1:5-7).
- ❑ God then sent the prophets and gave them a message for the people but if they uttered prophecies from themselves they would be false prophets not from God (Jeremiah 23:21-22).
- ❑ “I breathed my Spirit into your mouth” The Spirit of the Lord comes down upon the prophet to support and guide him so that he may warn and teach... the Holy Spirit grants him the gift of prophecy so he speaks the words of God. “No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20,21).
- ❑ Isaiah tells us that he saw the throne of God and the Seraphim praised God and glorified Him. The foundations of the thresholds shook and Isaiah was afraid and said, “Woe is me! For I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts! Then flew one of the seraphim to me having in his hand a burning coal, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said, Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying:

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said: Here I am” (Isaiah 6).

- Paul the apostle advises Timothy his disciple “Till I come, attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have which was given you by the prophetic utterance when the Council of elders laid their hands upon you” (1 Timothy 4:13,14).

Speak the word of God

The prophet preaches the word of God, which the Lord put into his mouth. He does not tell the future... but he warns to wake the conscience of man and lead people to the way of repentance and to warn them against evil.

- State what Jonah the prophet did with the people of Nineveh till they repented.
- John the Baptist also said to the people, “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves we have Abraham as our father. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3:7-9). For this reason the Lord Jesus bore witness to him saying, “None is greater than John” (Luke 7:28).
- The prophet is in charge of delivering the message of salvation “For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). A prophet speaks without fear as David the prophet says, “I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame” (Psalm 119:46). Amos said, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me: Go, prophesy to my people, Israel” (Amos 7:14,15).
- You can apply this verse and say to yourself “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, I am a child” and the Lord will take you and say, “Go and serve among your colleagues”. This will be a great honor to you if the Lord calls you. Work and he will give you power and support you by His Holy Spirit.

Prophecies in the New Testament

The gift of prophecy in the New Testament is a gift of examining oneself and the conscience being convicted. Grace makes use of prophets and kindles their gift of revealing the reality of our inner life and reproaching people with their evil deeds. In this way they bring the pride of the evil people to a lower degree and oppose the philosophers and atheists and any work against faith. In this way they prepare the hearts to receive Christ.

Questions

- + What is the prophet’s work and job? Apply this to Moses -Jeremiah -Paul the apostle.
- + God sends the prophet and supports him by the Holy Spirit ...He warns people... write some verses from the Holy Bible to prove this.
- + What is the difference between prophecy in the Old Testament and prophecy in the New Testament?

Recitation

2 Peter 1:20,21

Activities

Imagine one of the prophets writing to the people today asking them to keep away from evil. What would he say to young men and to the peoples of the world today? Write a short essay on this subject.

(23) God in the Book of Jonah

References

- + “Contemplations on the Book of Jonah” Pole Shenouda III
- + “Our Holy Bible and our Holy Christ” Bishop Youannis
- + “Jonah” Fr. Tadrus Yacoub
- + “The Book of Jonah” Fr. Marcos Daoud
- + “The treasures of grace” Part 4, Archdeacon Banoub Abdu

The Lesson

Aim

To get acquainted with God’s love to us, with His attributes, and to thank Him for that

God Makes the Initiative

St. Jacob the Sirougi said on the occasions of Nativity “There was a great feud between God and man when man did not go to reconcile with God, the Lord himself came to reconcile with man”. The Lord is earnest in His search for man and His search for man does not affect his glory.

Love without Evidence

In spite of His love for all, the Lord warned the people of Nineveh, made the sailors of the ship suffer many losses and punished Jonah. For each person there is a way of punishment that suits him or her but it is not suitable for any body else. The people of Nineveh were frightened before punishment befell them. The waves destroyed the good and partly ruined the ship but they did not harm people. As for Jonah, we find that he needed God’s rod and not His merciful hand to teach him.

The Lord is ready to return to us

God is patient and is ready to forget his threats but man is stubborn and prides himself on his word (Herod’s love drove him to cut John’s head because he promised and had to fulfill his promise). The Lord does not forsake His children however sinful they are. Jonah was stubborn and disobedient but the Lord gave him a chance to correct himself. The Lord showed him the right way and made a great prophet of him. Moreover Jonah was a symbol of resurrection from the dead. There is a Book in the Bible bearing his name and the Church always remembers him and refers to his name in her songs, hymns and glorification. The Lord gave the people of Nineveh a chance of forty days to repent. God’s mercy is for the salvation of all.

The Lord reasons with men

When we read chapter four of the Book of Jonah we find an excellent application to the

following verse from the Book of Isaiah “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord” (Isaiah 1:18). The Lord begins to reason with people and always begins reasoning with people. The Lord did not consider the great difference between Him and Jonah of any importance. He reasons directly with us. He wants to convince Jonah not to force him. The Lord’s intention in the Old Testament is a story of understanding and reasoning. He sent prophets and apostles to reason with people. He asks us to raise our prayers to him and reason with Him. Jacob struggled with Him till dawn. Abraham reasoned with Him before the destruction of Sodom. The Lord reasoned with the devil for the salvation of Job. Because of pride man refuses to reason with others and to understand others even the Lord.

God’s successful Provision

The Book of Jonah assures us that God’s plan of salvation will succeed although the people keep away from the Lord and in spite of their sins and stubbornness. It is a lesson to teach us to submit to God and to obey the Lord. The Lord’s plan will be fulfilled in the appropriate time whether we agree or not.

Instructions

1. Do not belittle God’s mercy and patience as they lead us to repentance.
2. Do not judge others as the sinner may repent, and the self-righteous may be enslaved to the pride of his heart so many that are first will be last, and the last first.
3. We should submit ourselves to the Lord’s hands. Let us not keep away. Let us be confined with the love of Christ as Paul (Saul) to whom the Lord said. “It is hard for you to kick against the pricks”.

Activities

- ❑ Record your impressions either in a wall Chart or in an artistic picture you paint and hang on the classroom.
- ❑ Pray for the young men who keep away from the Church so that they may not become evil men.
- ❑ Do not judge sinners, as God alone who is just and judges people.
- ❑ Invite an experienced brother to study with you the problem of evil and sin in the world.

Exercise

Always pray “Sweep me not away with sinners” {psalm 26:9)

(24) Recitations

References

- + “The Christian Family” Bishop Bemis
- + “With the Questions of young people” Kosti Bentley

The Lesson

Aim

Sound Christian Behavior

The Sound Christian Behavior

The Christian man and the Church

Question 1: How was the Church established and what are its foundations?

Answer 1:

The Church was established on the day of Pentecost. In that young Church, the foundation of the relationship between Christians and the Church was set. The most important characteristics of this relation are:

- ❑ Going to the temple to worship as Lord Christ did.
- ❑ People gather in houses for prayers.
- ❑ People are punctual in receiving the Lord's Supper (Receiving the Holy Communion).
- ❑ They feel that they are one group and members of one body and the head is Christ. In this way the Church spread in the whole world.

Question 2: What is the role of the Church in caring for the believers?

Answer 2:

- ❑ Baptism
- ❑ Spiritual care and teaching
- ❑ The structure of the Christian family
- ❑ Social welfare

Question 3: What are the Christian's duty towards the Church?

Answer 3:

- ❑ To respect the commandments of the Church.
- ❑ Punctuality of going to Church.
- ❑ Praying for the Church, its unity and safety.
- ❑ Sharing in the Church activities whether spiritual or social.
- ❑ Generous almsgiving so that the Church may be able to perform her several duties specially helping the needy.

The Relationship between the Christian and the motherland and the government

Question 1: What is the relationship between the Church and the government?

Answer 1:

When the Church was established, it was independent of the State. It remained thus till the Roman emperors became Christians and recognized Christianity as a formal Religion. The New Testament does not set a certain system of government or a way of choosing rulers but it demands obedience to the government (Romans 3:1-7, Timothy 2:1-2, Titus 3:1). The New Testament advises rulers to rule with justice...and advises citizens to perform their duties towards the State as the Lord Jesus Christ did when he was among us on earth (Matthew 17:24-27, 22:17-21).

Question 2: What are the Christian's duty towards his motherland?

Answer 2:

- ❑ He should love all the people without distinction or differentiation.
- ❑ Defending his country is a duty. He should perform the military service and volunteer in Civil defense institutions and nursing.
- ❑ He should pay taxes so that the State can set up projects and services.
- ❑ He should be honest in doing his work (Colossians 3:23-24).

The Christian and the Family

Question 1: A family has enjoyed a supreme status since the beginning of creation. Explain.

Answer 1:

- ❑ God created Adam in His image, then He created Eve to help him and the Lord blessed them. (Genesis 1:27,28).
- ❑ In the New Testament, the Lord blessed the wedding at Cana in Galilee when He attended it and performed His first miraculous deed (John 2:1-11).

Question 2: The family is the icon of the Church. Explain.

Answer 2:

In the family we have the mystery of love between God and the people. That is why the Church insists that the mystery of marriage should be fulfilled by the priests and in the Church. The family should perform the following:

- ❑ Worship: God is present in the house. He is the first and the last. The family surrounds him and he leads them in wonderful unity when they share in worship whether at home or in the Church.
- ❑ Mutual love between husband, wife and children makes life happy, safe and enjoyable "What therefore God has joined together let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6).
- ❑ Fellowship: The Lord created Eve to help Adam and share him his life with all its delights and sufferings, perfect equality, cooperation and love.
- ❑ Sanctifying Life: With the perpetual presence of God in the Christian family.

Question 3: What are the duties of the members of the family towards one another?

Answer 3:

The duties of the two couple

- ❑ Mutual love between husband and wife (Ephesians 5:22,23).
- ❑ Mutual faithfulness and loyalty.
- ❑ Cooperation and understanding.
- ❑ Care for bringing up children (Ephesians 6:4).

The duties of the children

Treating their parents well, honoring them and obeying them (Ephesians 6:1-4, Colossians 3:2).

Activities

Discuss with your teacher the problems that arise

- a) From parents: ambition of parents, impatience of parents waiting for results, distinction between brothers, lack of spiritual atmosphere in the family, or preventing children from fasting.
- b) From children: They do not understand their parents, the parents' defects, sensitivity to criticism, or exaggeration in freedom.
- c) The role of the Church in the family.

(25) The Incarnation of the Logos

A Study and Contemplation of St. John's Gospel: Chapter One

References

- + St. John's Gospel and its various explanations
- + "Titles and functions of Christ" Bishop Bemim
- + "The Godhead in St John's Gospel" Fr. Aanstassy Shafeek
- + "Why Christ Incarnated and became man" Fr. Bishoy Sadik

The Lesson

Aim

The Word became flesh.

Characteristics of the Gospel

1. The Gospel contains deep theological and spiritual interpretations. An explanation of the Incarnation of the Logos; the rebirth, the eternal life, the gift of God, the living water, Judgment, light and darkness, knowing the Truth, True worship, The relationship between the Father and the Son, etc.
2. The Gospel presents Jesus as the God of the Hebrews who saved them from the land of bondage and Jehovah who spoke to Moses and fed them with manna in the wilderness.
3. The Gospel is characterized by Christ revealing many blessed revelations about Himself: He is the Messiah (4:25) and the only Son who is in the bosoms of the Father (1:18), He is the bread of life (6:35) and the light of the world (8:12), He is the door of the sheep (10:7) and the good shepherd (10:11), He is the resurrection and the life (11:25), He is the way, and the truth and the life (14:6), and He is the true vine (15:1).
4. The Gospel draws our attention to the Heavenly Father and to the fact that Christ's life was complete obedience and submission to the will of the Father and that the Father loves us as the Son loves us. No one can go to the Son unless the Father attracts him (John 4:24, 5:19, 6: 44, 16: 27).
5. The Gospel also mentions the farewell talk to the disciples (John 13) and the prayer of intercession that the Son raised for His disciples and all the believers (John 17).

The Writer of the Gospel

- He is John the Son of Zebedee and his father was a rich man (Mark 1:20). He lived in

Galilee and owned a house in Jerusalem. He was a fisherman. His mother, Salomy, was among the women who ministered to him from their own money (Matthew 27:56).

- His brother, James was a disciple of Christ and he was the first apostle who was martyred. The Lord called these two brothers Boanerges (Mark 3: 17), because of their strong zeal.
- John the son of Zebedee was a disciple of John the Baptist and when he heard his witness to Jesus, he followed the Lord and became his disciple. Jesus loved that disciple and he was known as the disciple loved by Jesus. The Lord accompanied him together with Peter and James on special occasions. He attended the Lord's judgment and stood by the cross. It was he who took Virgin Mary to his house.
- The Lord reproached him three times (Luke 9:49-50, Luke 9:54-56, Mark 10:43-44).
- After the Pentecost he stayed in Jerusalem even after the Virgin's departure (death). He preached the Gospel in Asia Minor and established many churches there (Revelation 1:2). He was exiled in the island of Patmos where he wrote the Revelation (The Apocalypse) in A.D. 95, and he wrote his Gospel in A.D. 98 then he wrote his epistle in the last days of his life. He departed in peace when he was 90 years old and his departure was in the early years of the second century.

The First Chapter

The "Logos" (The Word)

- We must confess that the word of God is eternal and we have to imagine the existence of Christ before His incarnation and becoming man after His birth from the womb of the Virgin.
- The word of God is eternal "In the beginning was the word" (John 1:1).
- Through and by the word of every thing was created, "All things were made through him" (John 1:3).
- The word of God is the origin of life "In Him was life" (John 1:4).
- The Lord sent His Word to the prophets.
- The Lord sent his word to Moses, and then He wrote the word on a table of stone "Written by the finger of God".
- "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2).

The word became flesh

The word of God is eternal and it has been revealed to us in the fullness of time. Let us take the example of the radio and television to help us understand. Words and images are transmitted to other through different waves. These surround us everywhere and fill our houses but we cannot see neither can we feel by our senses but when we turn the set on we find that the word immediately incarnates and the image appears and what we could not perceive began to appear and, we were able to perceive... Although the simile is not of the standard yet it clarifies the whole thing in a way. The word of God is eternal but in the fullness of time, the word of God appeared to us in His body, which He took from the Virgin Mary.

Why Christ incarnated and became man?

- Man could not ascend to God and it was easier for the Lord to descend to man. The pride

of man, his ignorance and pride in his wisdom stood as an obstacle or as a veil so he could not understand the calm lowly God. The Lord is simple. He did not come to the philosophers alone. The Lord is modest. He did not come for the people of high status above. He was poor and did not come to the rich alone.

- ❑ The Lord appeared in our flesh, the flesh of the poor and the rich, the philosopher and the simple, the black man and the white man, God loved the whole world.
- ❑ The incarnate God loved all and did not reject the sinners, so He spoke to the sinners.
- ❑ The Incarnate God was meek ...so the haughty Jews rejected him.
- ❑ The Incarnate God came to bear witness to Truth... so the heretic Jews rejected him.
- ❑ The Incarnate God loved all people and hated fanaticism, so the Jews rejected him and crucified him.

He took our flesh to deliver us and redeem us

- ❑ St. James the Sirougi says, “If you want to save a man from being drowned or to heal a sick man, it is useless to give him advice. You have to take off your clothes and put on the sea costume (which the drowned man wears) and after you jump into the sea you can drag him to the shore of safety”. So the commandments along and in itself are not enough. On the contrary the Law revealed man’s sin and judged his evil deed.
- ❑ In the same way, God the word descended and emptied Himself (He took our flesh) and came to us, we who are sitting in darkness and the shadows of death. He descended to the Hades through the cross to save those who were imprisoned. He came to take what is ours and give us what is His. He descended to our world to take us up to Him, “and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).
- ❑ When a king wants to save his people of their enemies who were stronger than them, this king must take off the kingly clothes and put on the clothes of his soldiers and live like them then he leads them in their fight against the enemy, he conquers the enemy and wins victory for his soldiers, they go back in triumph and the king brings his soldiers home in victory and glory. This is our Lord, “He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7,8).

He took our flesh to help those who are tempted

- ❑ “Therefore He had to be made like His brethren in every respect so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people... for because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17,18).
- ❑ He was born in poverty. He was born in a manger. He became poor so that we may become rich “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- ❑ He humbled Himself to raise us up to Him, “He exalted those of low degree” (Luke 1:52).
- ❑ He came down to our earth to raise us up to His heaven; “I will come again and will take you to Myself; that where I am you may be also” (John 14:13).
- ❑ Although He was without sin, He stood in the company of sinners to be baptized by John

the Baptist as He shared those sinners in their sins but in the flesh that was bearing sin. He was the Lamb of God who bore the sin of the whole world. After being baptized He fasted for us and with us so He shared us our hunger and fill us.

Is Repentance Enough?

- The words of repentance indicate the feelings of regret. They refer to past events but they do not solve the problem of the expected fall in the future.
- The motivation for sin exists inside man so people always return to sin and always regret.
- The problem of Adam was not the mere punishment of the Lord to him for his sin as when he repented the Lord was kind enough to raise punishment and forgive him... Adam's problem lies in the fact that he introduced a strange element in his structure so his body was spoiled and the result was death. Will his repentance change his nature and uproot corruption from his body? If a boy threw a bottle and the bottle was broken, of what use would be the boy's sorrow? If a girl tore her clothes and she was sorry for that, of what use would be her sorrow? What is needed is that the Maker and Creator of man would recreate man.

Exercise

Open your Gospel with the spirit of prayer. Read and listen to the voice of the Lord speaking to you. You must have a measure with which you can measure your life. Am I making progress in grace? Do I bear witness for Truth in my life? You cannot benefit from the Gospel of St. John unless the Spirit that wrote it works in you and guides you... through your relationship with the Lord in your prayer.

(26) The Wedding at Cana

A Study and Contemplation of St. John's Gospel: Chapter Two

References

+ St. John's Gospel and its various explanations

The Lesson

Aim

Limits of Social Participation, Wine and Christianity

The Symbolic Meaning

This nice story has deep meanings. There were six jars of stone standing, for the Jewish rites of purification. The Jews considered the number of seven as the complete number. So number of six indicates incompleteness. Here is an indication that Jesus completed what the Old Testament was lacking in His first miracle thus declaring the beginning of the New Testament. The beloved John gives another comment. Each stone jar held twenty or thirty gallons of water. This means that Jesus offered the guests about one hundred and eighty gallons of wine. The guests of a simple rural party whatever their number was, could not consume this. Here is an indication of the rich and abundant grace of God.

Christ's Social Participation

Lord Jesus attended the wedding party at Cana in Galilee together with His disciples. He also accompanied them to Lazarus, tomb (Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep). Christian participation is not a formal one neither is it a sort of social behavior but it is a response to a cordial call as it is participation within the frame of truth. A Christian man is not prepared to participate in the works of darkness but he reproaches them. May our hearts be gentle and decent and share all the people in their feelings, in deep love and in complete obedience to truth.

Christ obeys His mother

He knew that his hour had not come yet "O woman what have you to do with Me?" (This style does not mean that Christ despised His mother because it was He who demanded that we should honor our parents, so He could not despair His mother), the word "woman" here means "Lady"... She knew that He loved her and obeyed her "Do whatever He tells you". This reveals the importance of intercession with Virgin Mary as she knew His will more than all other people and she was obedient to Him so our prayers are acceptable when we ask for her intercession.

The Problem of Wine at Cana in Galilee

The stone jars were empty indicating that the old rites of purification did not succeed in purifying man. In fact the word of God alone purifies man and when He said, "Fill the jars with water" the water brought people back to reason, as it was the word of God that worked and had its great effect on people. The word of God gave the water in the jars an abundant power. The wine, which Jesus gave, did not deprive people of their senses. The wine of Cana in Galilee refers to Christ's love "For your love is better than wine" (The Song of Solomon 1:2, 4:10).

The first miracle that Jesus Christ performed was turning the water into wine and the last miracle He performed was turning wine into his own blood. That marks the way of spiritual life that has now become clear... Water then wine then blood. This means that the normal natural life of the body (water) contacts with Christ in (wine) his love and this in its turn qualifies man to receive Christ's holy body (and blood). The good wine, which Christ offered, refers to Christ's purification of the instincts of man in the mystery of marriage.

The Christian attitude towards wine

There is nothing defiled in Christianity concerning food and drinking "Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man" (Mathew 15:11). The problem lies in the sort of that thing and the way of using it. The good wine is used in the Church to be turned into the blood of Christ.

- "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5: 18). Either we are comforted by the Spirit or enjoy the wine of this world and perish. Thus the following principles restrict the Christian man's behavior towards wine, the cinema and all social matters".
- "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful" (I Corinthians 6:12, 10:23).
- "All things are lawful for me but I will not be enslaved by anything" (I Corinthians 6:12).
- "All things are lawful but not all things build up" (I Corinthians 10:23).
- "If food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat" (I Corinthians 8:13).
- "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). Your

humane participation and help to those who are depressed and those who are happy, be careful that this participation should stem out of the heart.

- ❑ “For zeal for your house has consumed me” (Psalm 69: 9). Jesus drove out all those who sold and bought twice; at the beginning of his ministry and at the end of his ministry.

Activities

- ❑ How did Jesus regard those who believed in His miraculous deeds?
- ❑ This chapter of the Gospel must be for your benefit. You should enjoy the following: Cordial spiritual participation with man, Enjoy the Holy wine of the Divine love, Holy conscious enlightened zeal for the temple of God, inside and outside (i.e. your heart and your Church).
- ❑ Making use of films or other media means available that illustrates this miracle.
- ❑ Make a wall Chart. Draw and explain the wedding at Calla in Galilee and the stages of this event.

(27) Being Born from Above (Being Born Anew) **A Study and Contemplation of St. John’s Gospel: Chapter Three**

References

- + St. John’s Gospel and its various explanations
- + “The Spiritual values in the mystery of Baptism” Bishop Gregory
- + “The Second birth” Bishop Bemim
- + “The Seven Sacraments of the Church” Habeeb Girgis
- + “Baptism in the one Church” George Habeeb
- + “Baptism and Epiphany” Wheel Adzes
- + “The Baptism with water and Spirit” Fr Macabre Yuan
- + “The Second birth of water and Spirit” St. George Church, Sporting
- + “Baptism and Chrism (Mystery of Confirmation)” Young people Bookshop

The Lesson

Aim

The effectiveness of being born from above

Christ and Nicodemus

It was not a usual thing for Nicodemus to go to meet Christ. The Pharisees had a feeling of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency. They committed themselves to keeping the law with great care all the life long. Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish Synagogue whose members were seventy in number. This is the highest legislative Council in Jerusalem. Nicodemus came secretly at night for fear of the Jews or perhaps because he wanted to have a private talk with Christ.

How the conversation ran?

The teachers of the Jews were accustomed to teaching according to the method of question and answer. Nicodemus asked Christ about the source of His message and miracles. Jesus answered

as usual in an ambiguous way that made his listener think and deduce. Jesus said to him, “The miraculous deeds are not the case of the matter, but the most important thing is the change of the inner life of man”.

Being born of water and spirit

- The believer is born twice: the first one is the normal birth of the body from the father and the mother. This birth makes him a son to the first Adam. The second birth is of water and spirit and, this makes him a son to Jesus and the church.
- “Not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).
- Our teacher Peter the Apostle says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”.
- By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3-5).
- Our teacher Paul the Apostle emphasizes the process of the new creation and the second birth saying that it is achieved through baptism: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free” (Galatians 3:26-28).
- St. Augustine says: “We are born twice: The first birth is earthly and the second is heavenly. The first is of the flesh and the second is of spirit. The first is of man and woman, and second is of God and the Church. The first makes us the children of the world and the second one makes us the children of curse and anger and the second makes us the children of the blessing and love”.
- We must indicate that the new creation in Jesus Christ comes from Baptism, because we die and are buried with Christ and rise with him to a new life. The baptized puts on a new nature; that of the nature of Christ who rose from among the dead. Repentance means renewing the mind and keeping the grace that we have taken from baptism. That is why some saints regard repentance as an extension of the mystery of baptism.
- The human mind cannot understand these facts. For this reason Nicodemus found it difficult to understand and asked, “Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” but the Lord Jesus explained that the matter is spiritual and miraculous. He gave the example of the wind that blows but we cannot see it with our eyes but we only notice its effectiveness.

The bronze serpent and the cross

Refer to the book of Numbers (21:4-10) then contemplate the aspects of likeness, which the Lord Jesus spoke about between the bronze serpent and the cross. When the serpent “the devil” bites you, hurry to Christ who is on the cross and pour yourself at the feet of the Savior and look at him faithfully to take the power of healing and victory from him “For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). How great this verse is and how powerful are these promises! Let us stick to them.

Faith and Judgment

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18). Faith here is not the formal or inherited belief but it is the living faith

working with love. Let us determine our situation now: are we living in faith or not? “But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God” (John 3:21). Truth is deed not mere talking. It is life and whoever lives in truth lives in light and all his deeds have been wrought in God. This is the radical difference between the children of God and the children of the devil.

The Baptist bears witness to Christ

- ❑ How did the Baptist answer the Jews who wanted to arouse his anger against Christ?
- ❑ Contemplate the attitude of the Baptist, “He must increase but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Let us apply this in our practical life so that God is glorified in us and we always disappear.
- ❑ Contemplate Christ testimony of Himself: He is from above “He who comes from above is above all” (John 3:31). It is a testing testimony as that whom God has sent “speaks the words of God”. The people of the world do not accept such a testimony.

Exercise

- ❑ Let us come out of this chapter by the following:
- ❑ Renewing the promise we made at the baptism to reject the devil and all the devils kingdom and live for Christ and be for God in thinking, in heart in body and soul.
- ❑ We have to resort to the cross of Christ when the sin bites us and there we shall find complete recovery.
- ❑ We have to live in faith working with love so that we may not be condemned.
- ❑ We have to bear witness to Christ and say, “He must increase but I must decrease”.
- ❑ Paint the bronze serpent and the cross and write down your contemplations in comparing between them.

(28) Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

A Study and Contemplation of St. John’s Gospel: Chapter Four

References

- + St. John’s Gospel and its various explanations
- + “Studies and Contemplations in the Great Feasts” Part 1, Bishop Bemin
- + “How Christ dealt with the sinners” Part 1, Archdeacon Remises Nagib
- + “The Treasures of grace” Part 4, Archdeacon Banoub Abdu

The Lesson

Aim

Christ forgives us our sins and gives us a new life. References:

Let us contemplate Jesus when He sat down by the well

- ❑ He was tired out, and it was He who gave comfort to those who were tired.
- ❑ He asked for water, and it was He who quenched the thirst of all the thirsty and out of Him wells of living water.

- ❑ He needed the other and it was He who satisfied the needs of the whole world.
- ❑ He lived as a sojourner and it is He who created all and is the King of Heaven and Earth.
- ❑ He was hungry, and it is He who gives eternal life to anyone who eats Him.

Contemplate the living water that the Lord gives

- ❑ A well that never dries and it flows and will flow forever.
- ❑ He is dwelling your heart so do not seek him outside your heart.
- ❑ Eternal... begins in time but goes into eternity.
- ❑ Gives water... you need nothing in the world but Him, you become satisfied, your heart is delighted, you need nothing and you rise over everything.
- ❑ The current is hindered and corrupted by pride, worries, and weak faith and resorting to cracked wells (sins and desires of the flesh).
- ❑ Its water increases and flows through repentance, perpetual thirst for forgiveness, sitting with oneself alone in a solitary place to contemplate the sweetness of the Savior, preaching and sacrifice and estimating anything you give to others.

Let us contemplate how the Lord treated and dealt with the Samaritan's problem

- ❑ She was complaining of humiliation. He raised her humanity and destroyed the obstacles of sex, fanaticism, reputation, people's talk and he spoke with her.
- ❑ She was enslaved to the desire of the flesh and he gave her the living water.
- ❑ She was complaining of formal religiousness so He spoke to her about salvation and worship in Spirit and truth. He did not discuss with her the things she would not easily understand.
- ❑ In His service to the Samaritan woman, Jesus was a priest and a prophet... a priest praying for her and standing by her in her weakness, and a prophet revealing the darkness which is inside so that she might be free from enslavement.
- ❑ Jesus' service to the Samaritan Woman is a good example that should be followed in serving the souls that thirst for Salvation.

Let us contemplate the Savior's talk about true worship

- ❑ The place does not sanctify worship but it is the Spirit that sanctifies.
- ❑ The acceptable worship offered by the Pharisees hypocrites.
- ❑ True worship stems from within by the work of the Holy Spirit, in complete submission and love, we worship the Lord when we feel that we are weak before the glory of God (Isaiah 6) and when our souls see the Divine revelations (John 9:38)... and when we thank the Lord for a miraculous deed he performed to us (Luke 17:17).

The Samaritan Woman's Confession

- ❑ She had to confess so that her sins would be forgiven (The importance of Confession before the Lord and before the priest).
- ❑ She abandoned sin when her heart was filled with Christ (She left her jar and went away as Levi who left the place of sin).
- ❑ She hurried to call others to come to Christ (Let him who hears say, "Come"). "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the World" (John 4:42) [Christ's private Test].

Christ's Food and our food

- ❑ What is Christ's true food? Why didn't the disciples understand the Lord's words when He said, "I have food to eat of which you do not know"?
- ❑ What does the Lord ask us to do to satisfy his heart and please him?

Jesus heals an official's son

- ❑ Notice that the people of Galilee accepted the Lord, that was not the case with his natives "A prophet is not respected in his own country".
- ❑ Notice the official's strong faith, he insisted that Christ would heal his son and believed the word that Jesus said; "He himself believed and all his household" (John 4:53). This effective faith relies on the Lord's promises. It does not depend on the circumstances of man and his feelings but on believing the word and that he, who is patient enough to wait, will attain power, victory and forgiveness.

While studying this chapter try the following

- ❑ Have a meeting with Lord Jesus; talk with Him as the Samaritan woman did. Reveal to Him the secrets of your heart and confess all your sins to Him and take living water from Him.
- ❑ Let your faith be as strong as that of the King's servant who believed the work and the miracle affected his son and the child was healed. May the Lord perform miraculous deeds with you so that you may overcome your sins, sadness and problems.

Activities

- ❑ Paint a picture of the meeting between Christ and the Samaritan woman by the wells.
- ❑ Try to study a part of the hymn sung during Communion in the Lent on the Sunday of the Samaritan women.

(29) The Sick Man at Bethesda

A Study and Contemplation of St. John's Gospel: Chapter Five

References

- + St. John's Gospel and its various explanations
- + "The patient loves sickness" Nassa Hanna
- + "How Christ deals with sinners" Part II, Archdeacon Remises Nagib
- + "The Treasures of grace" Part 4, Banoub Abdu

The Lesson

Aim

Do not fall into despair. Do not go back to sin.

Verse

"See you are well. Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you" (John 5:14).

The Paralyzed Will

- ❑ The paralyzed man represents the man who wants to do good but has no ability to do that

and he makes many unsuccessful attempts.

- ❑ He looks like a bird with one tied leg, it tries to fly and through repetition of the attempt its leg breaks and it cannot fly at all.
- ❑ This patient loved sickness and because he was sick for a long time, he became accustomed to sympathy. He might have set down begging by the door.
- ❑ The problem did not lie in his inability but he himself did not want to recover.

I do not have anyone here to put me in the pool

The patient was sitting by the pool of Bethesda. In that pool people used to wash the sheep that would be offered to the temple. Sometimes it was called the sheep pool. Animal sacrifices could not purify human beings. An angel of the Lord went down into the pool and stirred up the water but the angel healed only one man each time. So the angel could not deliver souls. In the Holy Mass we say, “No angel and no archangel and arch father, and no prophet was trusted to save us”. People also do not keep their friendship for a long time especially with disabled people. The disabled elders do not receive the kindness of the people... although this is a good chance to serve them (remember the story of Ibrahim Al Gohary: when his wife became paralyzed and Mohamed Ali sent him two maids to serve him and look after him during her illness, but Ibrahim refused the present and insisted on serving himself and his sick wife by himself).

All people do the same

Personal attempts do not succeed without the help of grace. The man tried each time to throw himself into the water but he failed. We may ask ourselves “what caused that illness?” but the Savior reveals an old sin and that sin hindered the salvation of that man. Now we have the complete picture of a man who is a sinner, disabled, without hope and without company.

What did Jesus do?

1. Jesus loved that man and began to search for him and not the opposite, “When Jesus saw him and he knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him...” (John 5:6).
2. He aroused in him the desire for salvation, “Do you want to be healed?”
3. He respected the man’s freedom. He is standing at the door knocking at the door... but He does not break the door to enter.
4. He guided the man and drew his attention to the cause of the illness and the only cure...which is to attain power from the Lord himself for healing man as a whole spirit, body and soul.

Discussion

Make a comparison between the Lord’s love for this sick man who was ill for a long time and how the Lord cared for him, and the people who did not help him during the period of thirty eight years.

Prayer

O Lord, you come to me when you find me unable to do anything... and unable to come to you ...you reveal my sins but you immediately heal me...You have water and blood...the water of baptism and the blood of salvation... Help me, O Lord, to repent now and not to look back at the time I wasted through my hesitation.

(30) The Bread of Life
A Study and Contemplation of St. John's Gospel: Chapter Six

References

- + St. John's Gospel and its various explanations
- + "The spiritual values in the Sacrament of Eucharist" Bishop Gregory
- + "The seven Sacraments of the church" Habib Girgis

The Lesson

Aim

Jesus fills the hearts with the heavenly bread.

Introduction

In this chapter we see the transition from the old to the new. The old Passover stands for the Lord's Supper and the earthly manna stands for the heavenly manna.

The circumstances that preceded the miracle of feeding the multitude (John 6:5-10)

- ❑ There were no more than five loaves and two fish: The lord performs the miracle when we do not trust in material things.
- ❑ Hunger, which the people must have suffered from: this indicates that the Lord does not give Himself except to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.
- ❑ The great numbers of people: this indicates the abundant riches of the Lord and His great blessings, which can fill the whole world.

The circumstances that surrounded the miracle (John 6:10-12)

- ❑ Discipline that characterized the distribution of food: "For God is not the author of confusion" (Corinthians 14:33).
- ❑ The human aspect and the Divine aspect of the miracle: "Bring me the five leaves" the same as when he said, "Fill the jars" or "raise the stone".
- ❑ Jesus first gave thanks: This indicates the importance of giving thanks each time we eat spiritual food or normal food (Notice that the Lord's giving thanks affected the people to a great extend (John 6:14).
- ❑ Jesus takes few loaves to show you that your few gifts, which you give Him, can have His blessings and He can do a lot with them.
- ❑ Gather up the fragments left over: This indicates the importance of honoring the blessing and not looking down upon the fragments and keeping away from extravagance.

Consequences of the miracle (John 6:12-23)

- ❑ When the people saw the miracle they said, "This is indeed the prophet" i.e. The Messiah whom Moses prophesied.
- ❑ They wanted to take Him by force to make Him king...(But the kingdom of Christ is not an earthly one).

Discussion between Jesus and the people (John 6:24-31)

- ❑ Jesus shocks the people by telling them the truth, “Because you ate your fill of the loaves” (John 6:26). People’s purposes in following Christ, e.g. material aim, social and psychological aim, pure spiritual aim.
- ❑ “Do not labor for the food that is perishes but for the food which endures to eternal life (John 6:27).
- ❑ What shall we do to perform the works of God? “That you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:28-29).
- ❑ He went to His disciples across the sea and calmed the storm. He filled them and kept them safe from hunger and protected them from fear and drowning. He revealed His glory when they needed him.
- ❑ Those who live according to the flesh do not stop asking what must we do? But the spiritual man is given a Divine inspiration and guide for every thing.

Jesus is the bread of life (John 6:32-48)

- ❑ In olden times He said, “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” and in the New Testament we live by the word (Logos) Himself.
- ❑ The earthly bread guarantees the life of the flesh, and the true bread, the giver of life grants the eternal life.
- ❑ If man does not give himself wholly to Christ with the same degree of his interest in his daily bread, Christianity will not be an eternal covenant and a perpetual life with God.

The earthly manna and the heavenly manna (John 6:49-51)

- ❑ Both are miracles performed by god...Both came down from heaven but the first was earthly and the second was heavenly, the first supported the people in Sinai and the second supports people in the wilderness of the world.
- ❑ The people who crossed the red sea ate the first manna and the believes who are baptized eat the second manna. Those who ate the first manna died but those who eat the second manna do not die as they are granted the eternal life.
- ❑ Notice the Jew’s complaint and murmur and Christ’ sticking to the truth even if His disciples went away (John 6:67).
- ❑ In the early morning they find it “Those who seek me diligently find me, those who despised manna were stuck by God and the man who receive communion without being worthy of it will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord”.

The heavenly bread is the body of the Son of God in the Sacrament of Eucharist (John 6:52-58)

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him” (John 53-56). The Lord says that we eat His flesh with faith and belief that what we eat is true flesh and what we drink is true blood. It is the Sacrament of Eucharist and a unity with Christ so it is the mystery of fellowship and communion is the unity of the believes with Christ. It is also the forgiveness of sins. It is the up building and support of

the spiritual structure.

Activities and Exercises

- ❑ Study a prayer and raise it before and after eating your food to thank the Lord.
- ❑ Train yourself to follow Christ not for success and material blessings but for deep love for Him.
- ❑ Paint a picture for the people eating of the five loaves and two fish. Make a wall Chart about the blessings of the Lord.
- ❑ Write a comparison between the manna and the Sacrament of Eucharist and write down your contemplations.
- ❑ Summarize the spiritual benefit of the mystery of Eucharist, speak about the problems that make people keep away from receiving the Holy Communion and suggest solutions.

(31) The Living Water

A Study and Contemplation of St. John's Gospel: Chapter Seven

References

+ St. John's Gospel and its various explanations

The Lesson

Aim

The Lord Christ gives the Holy Spirit who satisfies, fills and quenches the thirst of people.

Verse

“If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37)

Introduction

- ❑ Notice that His brothers did not believe in Him (with His brothers we mean His cousins, the sons of His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas). Jesus said, “The world hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil”.
- ❑ Notice that the Lord Christ proves that His testimony is right and true. He does not bear witness to Himself but the Father with whom He bears witness for Him. His teaching comes also from His father who sent Him.
- ❑ Notice also that the Lord Christ prophesied His crucifixion, His death, His resurrection and His ascent to heaven when He said, “You will seek Me and you will not find Me and where I am you cannot come” (John 7:36).

The Living Water

On the last day of the feast of Tabernacles, the priests of the Jews used to go out carrying a silver jar and fill it from the water of the pool of Siloam and go back with it to the temple singing hymns and there they poured the water. This rite reminded them of God's provision for them in the wilderness and how the Lord gave them water from the rock... the people were singing some prophetess such as, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). This rite was performed and Jesus was among them so he stood up and declared that the

prophecy came true and that he was ready to give the living water without price, “Now this he said about the spirit which those who believed in him were to receive” (John 7: 39).

But the Lord said that He would give that water only to those who thirst “If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink”. The Lord himself said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”. And David the prophet said, “As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for You, O God” (Psalm 42:1). Amos the prophet prophesied this thirst and said, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land’s not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:1). And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come! And let him who hears say: Come! And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). Many of us, when they thirst, go to cracked wells that do not control water. It is Christ alone who satisfies the soul and body and he alone quenches the thirst.

One of the Christian philosophers says, “If we concern ourselves with material things our souls will suffer from separation and emptiness. Neither possessions, nor sex nor material can solve the problem of separation and emptiness. Love only can solve the problem of hunger and thirst inside the soul”.

In Christ we desire nothing and fear nothing as Augustine says:

- ❑ The Holy Spirit works in the Church through the Sacraments. He washes, purifies, fills, sanctifies and works in the Gospel to give light, kindle and send, works in prayers to give the spirit of power. God does not give in measures. So the Lord says, “Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water” indicating the abundant riches of God.
- ❑ The Holy Spirit hurries to the soul that is thirst for Truth and gives her the power to be attracted to Jesus “Let him come to me”. When the soul believes in Him as true King and as heavenly bridegroom, the Holy Spirit gives comfort, fullness, satisfaction and joy.

What follows Christ’s testimony for himself?

- ❑ Ministers marvel to Christ’s testimony but no one of the heads or the Pharisees believed in Him (Stubbornness of the heart and darkness of the eye).
- ❑ But Nicodemus, who came to Jesus at night and he was one of the heads of the people, took courage and bore witness to Jesus (We shall see him later on carrying the body of Jesus from the cross).

Questions for private life

- ❑ Do I thirst a little for the Lord or am I self-satisfied and I do not ask for him?
- ❑ Does the Holy Spirit work in me to attract me to the Lord Jesus so that the Lord may give me the faith based on the rock?
- ❑ Has the Spirit given me the springs of living water so that I may be able to satisfy myself and satisfy others? What is my testimony about Jesus’ declaration of Himself?
- ❑ With whom are you? With the ministers and the Pharisees? With Nicodemus? With His brothers who did not believe in Him? Or with His disciples who deserted everything and followed Him?
- ❑ Try to invite your colleagues who have not tasted the sweetness of grace so that the Holy Spirit may work in them? Comfort them and quench their thirsty hearts.

(32) The Light of the World
A Study and Contemplation of St. John's Gospel: Chapter Eight

References

- + St. John's Gospel and its various explanations
- + "Titles and Functions of Christ" Bishop Bemis
- + "How Christ Treated Sinners" Part 1, Archdeacon Remises Nagib

The Lesson

Aim

God's mercy and the sins of the world

Introduction

- ❑ Chapter eight of St John's Gospel gives us an effective story that shows us the Lord's great love and wisdom.
- ❑ The Son is revealed as judge, priest, Law give, physician and redeemer.
- ❑ He is the judge who is always just. He is the great priest who forgives sins and defends the guilty who repents.
- ❑ He is the Prophet who reveals the depths of the hearts and the secrets of persons.
- ❑ He is the legislator who gives a new law beside the Law of Moses.
- ❑ He is the Spiritual physician who heals the sin of adultery and cures its bad smell.
- ❑ He is the Redeemer who puts Himself in the place of the guilty and makes him innocent and saves him from death.

A Compromise

The Roman law did not allow the Jews to carry out a sentence of death except after a man is being judged before Roman Court and proved his guilt. If Jesus demanded that the woman should be put to death, the Jews would accuse Him that He is rebelling against the Roman occupation. In this way He would contradict Himself as He loved sinners and tax collectors and showed kindness to them. If He said that she was innocent and not guilty, He would challenge the Law and the Lord's commandments "He who justifies the wicked and him who condemns the righteous is alike an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 17:15). This would also be a license for committing adultery and unnecessary exploitation of the mercies of God.

Jesus Writes

Jesus wanted, not to take a rapid decision, but to give the people a lesson. He did not speak for sometime as a sort of protest against their cruelty and rashness or He may have been sad and sorry for them (The woman and the people), as they were all guilty. St. Augustine said. "The great mercy stood facing the great misery".

Law and Grace

- ❑ Jesus revealed the people's sins and showed them His new law of not judging others. Everyone should judge themselves first. He preached the necessity of the judge being pure and self-sanctified. After facing the problem of sin as a clever physician, He did not

condemn the woman at that time but He postponed the judgment and gave her a chance to correct herself.

- Jesus said to her “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more”. Jesus knew that she could overcome sin through her struggle with the help of God. Jesus also gave her the freedom of choice. She either follows her old ways or rises from her sin, struggle and change the program of her life. Grace won victory over the law but that was not the price as the Sons paid the price. Jesus bore the sin although he was innocent. His grace is without price but it was not cheap; it was dear and expensive.

Jesus condemns sin

- With this kind of attitude, where kindness and misery were face to face, we find that Jesus condemns sin through His purity and righteousness. He is the only one without sin but He did not throw a stone at her or even hurt her feelings, and Jesus came out of this crisis calm, victorious and happy “He who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (Verse 12).
- Jesus advises us to follow his steps as a soldier follows his leader in the war. A slave must follow his master to serve and obey him. A disciple also should follow the advice of his guide and follow his steps considering his example.

Jesus is Light

- Light in the Jewish concept meant the greatness and presence of the Lord Himself “The Lord is my light and my salvation” (Psalm 27:1).
- “The Lord will be your everlasting light” (Isaiah 60:20).
- The Jews refused Jesus’ testimony of Himself that He is the source of light so Jesus added the Father’s Testimony:
 - First: In the words of wisdom that He said and followed.
 - Second: In His great effect on the hearts of those who listened to Him “As He spoke thus, many believed in Him” (John 8:30).
 - Third: In His miraculous deeds that He performed.

The work of light

- It gives light and protects people from the fall.
- It delights the hearts of the people and urges them to work.
- It gives life to the plants.
- Finally it judges and reveals the secrets of darkness.
- This is what Jesus said, “I judge no one” (John 8:15). His sayings and deeds judge him as when light helps people to examine a room full of dirty things. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.
- What will the Son free us from: fear, anxiety, sin, the self, people’s talk, etc.
- Joseph’s brothers sold him as a slave but he was free. The light of freedom filled his noble soul. Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. He is the son of the devil even if he is a descendant of Abraham.

Exercises and Activities

- Paint a picture of Jesus among the people at the moment they were condemning the woman or a picture of the Church tower with the seven lamp-stands and the Lord Jesus

stands before it.

- ❑ Write down on a piece of paper the works that make you walk in the light, on the other half write down the things that make you walk in darkness. Put this piece of paper in your room.
- ❑ Discuss with the minister how to attain true freedom in the light of the Divine, verse “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free”.
- ❑ Be keen not to judge others. If you do not forgive others their sins, your heavenly father will not forgive you your sins.

(33) I was blind and now I see

A Study and Contemplation of St. John’s Gospel: Chapter Ninth

References

- + St. John’s Gospel and its various explanations
- + “The Sunday of Baptism” Bishop Gregory
- + “Studies and contemplation’s in the Great Feasts” Part V, Bishop Bemin
- + “The Treasures of grace” Part 1, Archdeacon Banoub Abdu

The Lesson

Aim

The Christian loves the Spiritual test and faces the world with it.

Introduction

The Coptic Church reads this chapter on the Sunday of Baptism. The Church believes that the Holy Baptism means enlightenment. Isaiah prophesied about this work by saying, “Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped” (Isaiah 35:4,5). We notice that Christ used the same way of the first creation. He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man’s eyes with the clay. Then He completed the creation by using the method of the new creation “Go to Siloam and wash”. So it has become clear that it was Christ whom first created and creates anew in Baptism.

The dialogue between the blind man and the Pharisees

We notice the following:

- ❑ The blind man’s parents were afraid to bear witness to the truth so that the priests may cast them out of the synagogue. Of course anyone who bears witness to Christ he must come out of the synagogue of the world “They cast him out”.
- ❑ The growth of the spiritual enlightenment in bearing witness to Christ gradually increased in the story of the blind man: First he told what happened. After that he said that he was a prophet. Then he said, “If this man were not God, he could do nothing”. Then he believed in Him as the Son of God and worshipped Him” (verses 13-15,17, 33, 38).
- ❑ God leads the soul in the obedience of confession and bearing witness to Him in soberness, calmness and splendid spiritual growth.
- ❑ The world sees that the believer’s fellowship of Christ is a cause of shame “You are His

disciple” (Verse 28). In fact this relationship and fellowship are a fellowship of glory and pride. Every young man should prepare to accept and receive insults from the people of the world when they notice his Christian behavior as if he is afraid of them or fears what they say he will be like the parents of the blind man from his birth.

- When the man who was born blind was cast out, Jesus appears to him. If we sacrifice a job, property or people for the sake of Christ, He will appear to us and lead us to confession and bearing witness for Him, and He will give us a deeper Test.
- When we contemplate the miracles performed by Christ we find that He either offers spiritual healing first then He heals the flesh as what He did with the paralytic who was carried by four men, or He heals the flesh first then offers the spiritual healing as what He did to the blind Man from birth and the sick man of Bethesda. What Christ aims at is to heal our diseases so that His Holy name will be glorified in us.
- How miserable is the soul of the Pharisee that lives in her blindness and spiritual pride. Her sin will remain forever and will never recover but those whose hearts are pure will see the Lord. O Lord help me to see my sins and weaknesses that the mercy of Christ may rest upon me.

I was blind and now I see

- We were blind before being baptized with water and spirit. Baptism gives us enlightenment and insight. Do we preserve this insight or do we weaken it when we keep it away from God and make it see shameful things?
- The Lord says, “Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear”. Let us make our inner eyes see the Lord Jesus and keep our outer eyes pure and simple so as to keep our hearts pure.
- The repentant person can test what Augustine, Moses the Black, Martyr the Egyptian, Pilagia and all who repented tested. They were blind but now they see...Let this test be yours.

Questions

- Why does the Church read this Chapter on the Sunday of Baptism?
- What does the Lord mean by saying, “Night comes, when no one can work” (John 9:4)?
- Show that the Lord gave the blind man insight besides the power of seeing.
- What does the Lord mean by saying, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see and that those who see may become blind” (John 9:39)?
- Whom did the Lord reproach by saying, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘we see’ your guilt remains” (John 9:41)? Let us be on guard so that we may not be like them.

(34) Jesus is the Good Shepherd and the Gate of the Sheep **A Study and Contemplation of St. John’s Gospel: Chapter Ten**

References

- + St John’s Gospel and its several explanations
- + “The Titles and Functions of Christ” Bishop Bemini

The Lesson

Aim

Following the Savior and trusting His promises

Introduction

The word “Good” in Greek means “beautiful”. This explains that our Shepherd has the sweetness of the heart and is radiant with beauty and delight. That is why we see that the Christians Churches have put the picture of the Good Shepherd since the beginning of the second century. In that picture we see the Shepherd as a young man radiant with the grace of youthfulness and beauty.

The “Good Shepherd” title reveals a lot. It indicates that our Shepherd is good and that our fellowship with Him is full of beauty and sweetness. It also indicates His perpetual liveliness and everlasting youthfulness.

- ❑ Jesus is the good shepherd.
- ❑ He is the gate of the sheep through which they enter to their heavenly Father.
- ❑ The sheepfold is the Church and the sheep are human souls.
- ❑ There are sheep that are not Jews...they are coming from pagan nations (Gentiles).
- ❑ Jesus is in charge of the souls that are outside the Church.
- ❑ The doorkeeper is the Holy Spirit.
- ❑ The hireling is the dishonest servant.
- ❑ The thieves are the false Teachers.

Jesus is our Shepherd

Jesus is “the chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4) and “The Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25). Dr. Thompson, in his Book, “The Land and the Holy Bible” wrote about the Palestinian Shepherds who used to gather the sheep by night in open places as the sheepfolds had no gates or fences and shepherd had to lie at the gate after counting the sheep. So the sheep could not go out except by jumping over the Shepherd’s body and the wolf could not enter the sheepfold to steal a sheep unless it killed the shepherd first and tore his body. The meaning is now clear: Jesus is the Gate of the Sheep.

Qualities of a good Shepherd

1. He knows the way: Jesus came down from heaven and went up again, so He is the only one who knows the way.
2. He walks before them: His preaching was not theoretical but He practiced work, fasting and prayers to be an example to follow.
3. He knows His sheep: The knowledge of Jesus includes the whole world and all generations and it is private knowledge.
4. He knows the pastures: He is the spring of sound teaching and the God of peace.
5. He carries the rod and the staff: He guides and teaches the believer.
6. He gives Himself for them: His clothes torn on the cross. He wounded and the thorns went deep into his body. He was thirst. In spite of all these sufferings He called the thief on his right and led him to the pastures of paradise.
7. He always protects them: He went down to Hades and brought back Adam and his children and saved them from the mouth of the devil.

Exercise

- ❑ Let us walk behind the shepherd and follow him.
- ❑ Let us listen to His voice all the days of our life.
- ❑ Let us enjoy the warmth of the sheepfold and the blessing of the fellowship, satisfaction, safety, freedom, and peace.
- ❑ Let us value the sacrifice of our Shepherd and let us sacrifice our life for our brethren.

Activities

Paint the famous picture of the Good Shepherd and write your comments.

Make a wall Chart and write your contemplation's on the Good Shepherd and His sheep.

You invite the members who are keeping away from the Church so that the sheepfold may be full of the blessed sheep.

(36) The Power of Resurrection

References

- + “Glory be to You in Your resurrection” Samir Kamil
- + “Proofs of the Resurrection” Bishop Moussa

The Lesson

Aim

The Power of Resurrection as a revelation of the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Christ's resurrection differs from any other resurrection. He is called “The first fruits of them that slept”. So we notice that:

1. The Lord is only one who rose from the dead and his resurrection is followed by no death. He is living forever, and death did not and will not dominate Him.
2. Christ is the Lord who rose from the dead by His own power without any prayer from his disciples or the intercessions of anyone... such as the case with Lazarus or the widow's son whom Elijah brought back to life.
3. The Lord said, “I am the Resurrection and life”. The power of resurrection was within Him and not outside Him... so the verse “God raised Him from the dead” does not mean that He rose by Himself with His own power, as He and the Father are one. The Father raised Him because He is His only begotten beloved Son and He did not leave Him in the Hades. He rose with His power and by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Three Hypostases are one essence as we said before “and designated. Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). This means that the Holy Spirit performed the Resurrection, as He is the Spirit of Resurrection.

His Divinity and His Humanity: Never Parted

Godhead is the Divine Nature and manhood is our human nature that the Lord took from Virgin Mary. The Lord died on the cross and the human soul parted the flesh. Yet His Divinity and His Humanity never parted and He Himself never parted His body or His soul.

- The body that was in the tomb was the body of the Son of God. The body did not decompose or suffer corruption although it remained in the tomb for three days. He rose with great power and an active body and healed wounds after the body had attained a new bright nature.
- When His soul went down into the Hades the devil did not arrest her. On the contrary, the Lord went down into the Hades, broke its iron gates and copper trenches... and raised Adam, his children and the prophets and brought them back to Paradise.
- The Lord was powerful even when He was in the grave. Death could not have power over Christ's human soul that united with the Logos (the Word). Death could not enslave that soul neither corruption could humiliate him. Although death separated the human soul from the body yet corruption dares not approach any of both.

The flesh of Resurrection

- When the Lord rose, He was not weak. He did not need anyone to untie Him of His clothes as the case was with Lazarus, or eat to have power as the case was with Jairus' daughter.
- But He rose and the stone put where it was the clothes were and the guards were standing. That who entered the room while the doors closed, can go out while the stone blocked the grave.
- The Lord rose with the same body he took from Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit but there was a difference...that body glorified after passing through death. So the body became a spiritual body that had powers and transparency the same as that which the believers will put on after death. So it was not a dim material body but it was a spiritual body radiating with light. Mary Magdalene could not touch that body as she used to do. In spite of this it was a real true body and it was not an image or a spirit. "For a spirit have not flesh and bones as you see that I have... He took it and ate before them" (Luke 24:39-43).

Christ abolished death

- The Lord Christ had to suffer all what the ordinary man suffers so He suffered death. Death was the natural destiny of man as Adam parted from the Lord. God was Adam's life so when sin separated Adam from God, Adam had to die.
- What does the word "death" mean? It means anti-life, life means that man enjoys his unity with God (As the television set that functions well as it connects with an electric source). Death means that man keeps himself away from the light of God with all what that light radiates in him, warmth because of his existence in the presence of God who created him. Death is the state of affliction, worry, suffering and distress. This is what the sinner has chosen for himself when he wanted to part from God "I took to myself the issues of death" (The Gregory Mass).
- What did the Lord do? The Logos united with manhood that is our human nature and He gave it what it had previously lost. He had to suffer death to redeem us from the

consequence of sin “Through death He abolished death” and He granted those who were in the tombs the eternal life.

How to prove resurrection as a historical event

- ❑ The gospel gives us the story of resurrection, the appearance of Christ. The gospel always tells the truth.
- ❑ Resurrection was the core of Peter’s sermon immediately after the coming of the Holy Spirit; his listeners witnessed that event. If the resurrection had not taken place many would have opposed the apostle but the opposite was what happened when they heard they asked Peter “what must we do?” (Acts 2:37).
- ❑ He left the shroud that stuck to His body because of the blood that came out of the wounds. He left the shroud arranged as it was in the tomb.
- ❑ This shroud is kept up till now in the Church of St. John the Baptist in Torrent in Italy. Scientists examined it and found the marks of the nails and wounds printed on the cloth (Refer to the Book “The Shroud” Al Minya Diocese).
- ❑ It had been a legend or a superstition, the disciples and the apostles would not have believed it and lost their life to prove it.

Exercise

1. Give proofs of the power of resurrection for unbelievers and quote some verses to support your proofs.
2. Remember the power of resurrection in moments of weakness; despair, intellectual fights, fear, anxiety...
3. Resurrection is rising up against sin and overcoming it “Awake O Sleeper, and arise from the dead and Christ shall give you light” (Ephesians 5:14).

Prayer

O Lord, allow me to live with You in the victory of resurrection and give me the power to submit my desire and sin under your feet.

Activities

Show films about the Shroud of Jesus Christ.

(36) The Titles of St. Mark

References

- + “St. Mark the apostle: the Beholder of God” H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- + “The story of the Egyptian Church” Part I, Iris Habib El Massry
- + “St. Mark” Fr. Bishoy Kamil

The Lesson

Aim

Developing the Spirit of pride in St Mark the Apostle and the preacher of the Egyptian See.

Introduction

Any prayer in the Coptic Church must include the name or the picture of St. Mark glorification, intercession or a request for his blessing. He is her establisher and her protector with his blood and intercession. By the end of the intercessions, the priest says “Through the intercessions and supplications of our lady, the Queen of us all, the Theotokos, the pure and Holy Virgin St. Mary and through the Beholder of God the Evangelist Mark the pure apostle and martyr”.

The Beholder of Christ

- ❑ St. Mark received his service, not from a human being but directly from the Lord. He saw and heard Him and became His disciple. He served and entertained The Lord Jesus in his house. The Church, by giving him this old title to refute those who tried to belittle him by saying that he was a more disciple to St. Peter.
- ❑ He is one of the seventy apostles who followed Christ and was nearest to Him. St. Mark saw the Incarnate God with his heart and not through the eye of the body as Judas or the Pharisees did.
- ❑ This title is an invitation to us to live the life of St. Mark; first to have a new inner vision of God in his personal life.

The Evangelist

- ❑ St. Mark was an Evangelist even before he wrote his gospel. He lived the gospel he preached and wrote what he saw and heard “The kingdom of God is coming with power” (Mark 9:1).
- ❑ The gospel of St. Mark is older than the other three gospels although it is the second according to its place in arrangement. It was a result of seeing everything. An evidence of this is the events and miracles he alone related in his gospel and did not refer to in the other three gospels. For example: the healing the deaf mute man (Mark 7:32-37) and the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida. His gospel is the gospel of the splendid powerful works of the Lord.
- ❑ The gospel is characterized by its simplicity, precise expressions, rapid rhythm, that is why the expression “And immediately” is repeated many times as if it had been written to busy people or people in prison or those being persecuted. He concentrated on the Lord Christ’s personality, how He is powerful and how He made the miraculous deeds that attracted people and excited the Romans to whom he wrote his gospel. For this reason the symbol of this gospel is the Lion. It is an invitation for us to live with the gospel in the power of God and to be ourselves a living gospel. Reading the Gospel of St. Mark is what must be done by anyone who begins a study of the Holy Bible. It excites the zeal and clearly relates the story of the Lord’s suffering and his resurrection.

The Apostle

- ❑ St. Mark preached in all the following places: Jerusalem, Antioch, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, Barqua, and Colossi in Asia Minor, Egypt, Libya and Kairawau. He was St. Paul’s companion in his prisons in Roma. He preached Venice. He also preached the Jews and the Pagans.
- ❑ We believe in him as an apostle and contemplate his works and wonder. He bore light in his character and in his hand. He gave it as a bishop, an apostle, a priest, and servant of the mysteries of God. He was honest and faithful. He bore witness of what he saw and

heard.

The Pure

- ❑ He is the virgin who rejected the glories of the world. He toured the world's three continents, without a staff, without a purse, without a pair of shoes. He went everywhere carrying the helmet of salvation, the sword of the word of God and the shield of faith for the sake the Gospel of peace. His spirit was in asceticism, poverty, chastity and purity, in prayers, in labor, in honor, piety and reverences as an apostle of Christ in suffering and persecution and as a martyr.
- ❑ Holiness satisfied his life, each seed he sowed was successful, and his works bore witness to him. Paul the apostle bore witness to him "He is truly useful and benefits for the service".
- ❑ A young person as he may be attracted to the glories of the world, but all his pride was the cross.
- ❑ The noble motivations moved him. He devoted his life to God whom he loved and he gave himself for the service.

The Martyr

- ❑ We cannot write a complete life history of the saint. It is a heart offered by the Spirit of God who of us can describe him to people? We go around the outer frame but the true picture is the holy of holies.
- ❑ St. Mark imitated his master so he watered the tree of faith that he sowed with his blood. He exposed himself to perils while preaching such as beasts of the wilderness, disease, travel by sea serving with St. Paul, prison and was martyred nearly at the same time as St. Peter and Paul.
- ❑ He attained the crown of martyrdom in AD 68 one year after their martyrdom. The honor of apostolicism, the honor of virginity mingled now with the crown of martyrdom and the mark of blood.
- ❑ He lived as a stranger and wanderer and died in Egypt. The members of his body torn out and dispersed on the land. His soul departed among the songs of the angels to sit in the place of comfort with Christ whom he loved and served.
- ❑ These were terrible moments indeed but he endured them for Christ and for the glories he would attain. The seed of grain fell on the ground and there it is bringing a lot of fruit now.
- ❑ Pray for us O beholder of God St. Mark the pure apostle and martyr that He may forgive us our sins.

Activities

Paint a picture of St. Mark. Write a research of ten pages about the life of the saint and his journeys.

Exercise

Intercede with St. Mark in your daily prayers.

References

- + “The Holy Bible” Pope Shenouda III
- + “The Holy Bible is the Book of all ages” Bishop Gregory
- + “The Holy Bible is the word of God” Mahaba Book shop
- + “The Impossibility of the Bible being perverted” St. Dimyana Church, Al Haram
- + “The Impossibility of the Bible being Perverted” St. George Church, Sporting
- + “The Infallibility of the Holy Bible” Yassa Mansour
- + “The Stones speak” Dr. John Alder, translated by Dr Ezzat Zaki
- + “The conformity between Modern Science and the Holy Bible” St. George, Church, Sporting
- + “A book for all ages” Fr. Tanios Zakhary
- + “Lectures delivered in a conference devoted for the Holy Bible” St. Minas Church, Fleming
- + “An introductions to the Gospels and Acts” Bishop Moussa

The Lesson

Aim

Refuting the doubts that occur to young people concerning the correctness of the Holy Bible.

Introduction

The Holy Bible is the group of the holy books written by the men of God and saints inspired by the Holy Spirit and under His guidance and inspiration in different ages. The Holy Bible is to announce the will of God and emphasize His commandments and promises to teach and guide people to salvation.

- ❑ These books are different in their themes and style.
- ❑ The Holy Bible contains history, autobiography, laws, rules, philosophy, poetry and prophecies. In spite of this variety, the parts of the Holy Bible integrated in a comprehensive unity. These Books were written by various prophets, in different forms, in a period of 1500 years. Yet they are all in one complete whole in spirit and meaning. They all refer to one person, our Lord Jesus Christ. So all are been collected in one book called the Holy Bible.
- ❑ Our teacher Paul the Apostle gave a definition to the Holy Bible by saying: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

How did it reach us?

This eternal word that was from the beginning is been preserved by God to reach us through the generations. It is an established word because its source is God Himself with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change, but the word of man is changeable. The word reached us through severe events and miraculous deeds.

The original copy of the old books was written by hand on papyrus, then on skins of animals. They used to stick the two ends on two Cylinders so as to wind the paper on them and it can be rolled. The Scribes copied the Old Testament in Hebrew. These formed a category of their own and their work was regarded as sacred. They were very precise and very careful in this work to

guarantee, the correctness of the copy. They counted the alphabetical letters in every copy to verify its correctness, but if the numbers were different, the copy would be burnt. They were strict in the rite of bodily purification before writing especially when one of the Divine names of God was mentioned.

The Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Greek in 80 BC to carry out the order of King Ptolemy. This was called Septuagint because those who translated it were 72 of the highly learned Jews in Alexandria.

The New Testament was written in Greek during the first century. Later on the Books of the two testaments were translated into Syrian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Latin and then to all the languages of the world.

The Books of the Holy Bible

The Holy Bible is of two Darts:

1. The Old Testament: involves the call of the Hebrews, their history and law, and references to the Messiah.
2. The New Testament: involves the announcement of the spiritual kingdom of God, which includes the whole world, and the fulfillment of redemption by Jesus Christ.

Parts of the Old Testament

1. The Pentateuch (Five Books of Moses called Torah): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Torah is a Hebrew word that means law or Nomos but sometimes it refers to the Old Testament as a whole.
2. Historical Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First Samuel, Second Samuel, First Kings, Second Kings, First Chronicles, Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, First Maccabees, Second Maccabees, Tobit, and Judith.
3. Poetic Books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiasts, Song of Songs, The wisdom of Solomon, and The wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach.
4. Prophetic Books: (Major and Minor Prophets)
 - a. Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel.
 - b. Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Johan, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Baruch.

Parts of the New Testament

1. The Four Gospels that tell the life of Lord Christ; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
2. The Acts of the Apostles: It tells the life of the Apostles and the establishment of the Christian Church.
3. The teaching books: They are epistles which the apostles sent to teach the churches. They are 21 epistles in total. Fourteen epistles written by St. Paul and seven by James, Peter, John and Jude.
4. The Revelation (Apocalypse): It is a prophecy of the victory of Christianity over the devil and its hosts.

These books were written in the language of the writers who wrote them. The inspired writer wrote according to his style under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Some of them were brought

up in the palaces of kings (Moses, Isaiah, etc.), some were Shepherds (David), reapers of figs (Amos), philosophers (Paul), those of fine feelings such as Jeremiah and John, the fisherman, the poet, the physician ...but First of all you must understand this that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 20,21).

Apocrypha: the Second legal books

“Apocrypha” means “secret” or “hidden”. They are among the books of the Old Testament that were written after Ezra. They were written in the Jewish Synagogues. They were regarded of the Holy Books according to the Church tradition and the decisions of the Councils. Some chapters of them are read in the Church especially in Lent and the Holy week. These are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Jesus the Son of Sirach, and First and Second Maccabees. Then some passages were added to the books such as: The song of the three young men, the prayer of Manassas, and the prophecies of Daniel.

Perversion of the Holy Book is Impossible

1. It is difficult to pervert the Old Testament:
 - a. Because the people keep it and preserve it. There were certain people appointed to write it (the Scribes). They wrote it in great care and preciseness and very strict laws. Why do they agree with us to pervert them and they killed Christ?
 - b. There is no copy of the Old Testament that differs from the Old copies preserved in the museums of the world (The copy of the Vatican, the Alexandrian copy and the copy of Sinai).
 - c. There are more than 300 prophecies about the details of the life of Lord Christ whom they refuse up till now, written in the Old Testament. If it had been perverted, they would have perverted these events, which contradict their beliefs and also the weaknesses of their prophets.
 - d. There is an agreement among the prophets in their prophecies in spite of the long period (1500 years) bearing in mind the variation of their culture and jobs. The infallible spirit is one.
 - e. The testimony of Christ himself. He said “you search the Scriptures ...it is they that bear witness to me” (John 5:39).
2. It is difficult to pervert the New Testament:
 - a. Because the disciples lived with Christ three years and they saw everything including the events of crucifixion, resurrection and ascent, then they toured the world preaching these facts in spite of all the obstacles they faced. It was impossible for them to endure all these hardships for wrong things.
 - b. There was no benefit for the disciples as they suffered a lot and endured death for the sake of the gospel. They were preaching Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23).
 - c. Moreover, the Holy Bible is known all over the world and it has been translated into 1500 language and dialect.
 - d. It has a great and powerful effect in reproaching the evildoers and sinners and renewing them.
 - e. Modern sciences bear witness to them (Archaeology, geology, geography, law, astronomy, biology, anatomy, etc.).
 - f. There are very ancient copies some of them were written in the fourth century.

Verses that prove the correctness of the Bible and the impossibilities of perversion

- “I am watching over my word to perform it” (Jeremiah 1:12).
- “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matthew 14:35).

Instructions and Activities

- Study the Books of the Old Testament and New Testament and their symbols.
- Write a research about the Holy Bible and put it in the library for the benefit of others.
- Keep away from argument and foolish discussion and dispute concerning the text.

(38) The Authority of Scriptures

References

- + “Christ in all the Books” A. M. Ho Digkim
- + “An Introduction to the Holy Bible” The Monastery of St. George Harf
- + “An introduction to the Holy Bible” Dr. Maurice Tawadrous

The Lesson

Aim

The Church preserves the Gospel and the Gospel preserves the Church and gives her authority,

Tradition and the Holy Bible

First: The sayings of the Fathers

The fathers do not fear exaggeration when they speak about the Holy Bible and say that it the paradise of the eternal life and the spring of the Holy Spirit and the field of the kingdom. It is a paradise none beautiful than the earthly paradise which the Lord established in the hearts of the believers in all parts of the world.

St. John Chrysostom beautifies that who sits near the spring of the Holy Bible and always drinks of its waters and receives in Him, the dew of the Holy Spirit.

St. Gregory knew that the Bible is the word of God and His revelation of Himself. It is the icon of the Church as another saint said. One of the saints said “we receive the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist but we also receive them when we read the Holy Bible”. St. John Chrysostom says that reading the Bible with reverence purifies the soul and washes the self in the river. There is mystery that has its effectiveness when we read the Gospel; it is called the mystery of the Bible. The Lord Jesus said “you are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). Origen says “Neglecting reading the Bible and not reading it daily with due respect is a crime no less serious in degree than disrespect of the body and blood of the Lord”.

Second: The authority of the Holy Bible

The Orthodox Church is the Church of the Gospel. Since the beginning she has a wide concept of the gospel, i.e. the good news and the verbal teaching handed by the apostles, side by side with

the written Gospel. The Church receives her daily life from the Gospel. She reads it daily in each prayer of the canonical hours. Through it we hear the voice of the bridegroom till He comes. We read it also in the morning and evening raising of incense and in the masses. We interpret it and preach it. We live by it and with it as a spiritual meal preparing us to receive the mystery of Incarnation, Eucharist, and the body and blood.

The Church believes that interpreting the Holy Bible is very important but it should be interpreted with the spirit of the fathers and their experience and tests and not by void mental analysis. The Gospel in the Orthodox Church is inseparable of the daily life, which the son receives from his father and the Church...so the Gospel and the Tradition are one thing, one truth, one life the source of which is Christ and for one end that is Christ the Savior.

The Gospel receives power from the Church, i.e. the teachings of the fathers...this power is for guiding us to walk in one way when the bishop or the priest reads it with the authority of Christ and the Spirit of the fathers, the grace of Christ rests over the people.

The power and the Authority of the Word in our every day life

“And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:7). That who submits himself to the voice of God and obeys the commandment will live and attain the mystery of holiness, piety and the new life.

Man receives a new power from the word of God and its authority. This new power enables man to be free of passions and desires and all what hinders him to attain the life of holiness in Jesus Christ. The Holy Bible leads us gradually in the stages our training and spiritual growth. It becomes gentle with us at the beginning then a powerful food according to our needs and our spiritual stature.

1. At first you read the Bible: you find the words like light rain on a barren land so it paves it to man. At first the soul is stony and stubborn not ready to understand but the soul begins to enjoy it and find in it wisdom of behavior and excellent social virtues such as Joseph's chastity, Moses' meekness, Job's patience ...
2. The Soul then reads to listen to the Divine voice so the test is directed to the soul in particular as if Christ Himself stands before her and says, “Do you believe in the Son of God. I believe Sir”. Reading becomes a prayer: “O Lord make haste to help me... The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...” Here the test penetrates our hearts and stands firm in our souls and guides us -the Bible then faces us, reveals our hearts and reproaches us and the souls begins to feel that she is sinful in the presence of God and the Holiness of the Lord.
3. The soul soon attains the joy of Salvation and her understanding of the Bible increases and in this case she sees in the history of the people of God her own private history. She lives its events as stages of her life. She lives and suffers with Jacob in his struggle with God and suffers with Abraham in the fight of his faith and in her living tests with the men of God, she attains all their victories and tests all their tests.

The Holy Bible and Modern Problems

The world today is indulged in desperate currents coming from its prominent parts of civilization and science as existentialism. Marxism, Rationalism, utilitarianism and materialism are making a god of human mind and enslavement to science and the like of modern intellectual currents, which sweep the world and dominate the mind of educated youth and block the way leading to God. There is no way out for a believer except to arm himself with the word of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4,5).

Activities and Exercises

- ❑ Study some verses from the Bible and some parts of it. Also study some psalms and pray with them in your heart.
- ❑ Read the Bible with the Spirit of prayer to take of it practical training to correct your behavioral life and to be acquainted with the will of God through the text of the Bible.
- ❑ When you suffer from any problem or encounter any of the modern social problems, try to find a solution for it in the Holy Bible with the help and guide of your confession father so that you may enjoy the promises of God that are revealed in the Holy Bible.

Recitation

Psalm 119:9-16

Prayer

Before you read the Holy Bible raise your heart to God” “O Lord grant me that I find you, teach me, help me to understand, train me, guide me, open my eye so that I may see the wonders of your Law”.

(39) Ascension and Our Spiritual Life

Reference

- + Essays and lectures of Pope Shenouda III
- + “The Divine Ascension” Bishop Bemim
- + “Studies and contemplation on the great feast” Part 2, Bishop Bemim
- + “The Feasts of Ascension” Dictionary of Ibrahim Gabra
- + “Glory be to You in Your Ascension” Samir Kamil

The Lesson

Aim

To raise our hearts towards the glory prepared for us.

Introduction

This story took place when one of the Caesars ordered that a certain person be put to death in one of the resolutions. Bells were ringing declaring the death of one of the victims. The wife of that man went up and hid in one of the big bells. When the appointed time came the bell rang and destroyed the wife’s hands and made no sound. When the guard went up he saw the blood flowing from the hands of the woman. So he brought her to the king. She was weeping and in

great distress. She asked the king not to kill her husband by the right of that blood. The king forgave the man because of his wife's great love.

Doesn't this story remind us of what the Lord Jesus did when He went up to heaven and the marks of the nails were in His hands to intercede with and for the guilty people? We have to remember that great love all the time. We have to honor that love and always live under the protection of this precious blood.

Looking up

Michael Angelo was a famous artist. He was painting a beautiful ceiling of a certain building. When he completed his work he found that he was accustomed to looking up. Later on he could not read anything or contemplate a painting except after raising it up. He used to raise his eyes up towards the things above him for a long time so it was difficult for him to look down. This reminds us of what Jesus did when he rose up to heaven as he attracted the sight and the eyes of the apostles and the church. That is why the apostle advises us saying, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1).

Our life, after the Ascension, should be a state of waiting for the Second Coming of Christ. The Ascension directs our sights, longing and concerns and treasures to the heavenly affairs where our head went and from where he will return.

He made us sit with Him in the heavenly places

The Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ raised us up with Him to make us sit with Him in the heavenly places. He blessed our nature and glorified it and granted us to sit with Him. Although we are now on earth, poor and suffering, yet we took the guarantee of glory in the kingdom of our Father. We can reign with Him now. If we suffer with Him and wait for Him, we shall also be glorified with Him.

The Anchor of our Hope

When the anchor of the ship reaches the port, the crew blows the trumpets of joy even if the ship itself did not reach the safe port or harbor. In this way Jesus went up into the Holies and this is an honest mark of hope. He himself will guide the ship to the happy shore of eternity. He rose up before us. The Ascension is the basis of our hope, and hope is the basis of our joy even in the midst of suffering in this world "Rejoice in your hope". We say to every tempted youth or a young person who is suffering despair "Raise your eyes to heaven".

Heaven is our Count

We are heavenly humans. Heaven is our country. We are not of this world. We do not belong to this world. But we are sojourners in it "But our commonwealth is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). The Lord who went up to heaven will come again and will take us to it. We have to live the heavenly life on earth.

The preaching responsibility

Our duty towards ascension is to preach the gospel everywhere, not only by words but also by being good models. The Lord gave this commandment to his disciples a few moments before His

ascension. This is the duty of the Church. He gave them peace “I give My peace to you... Authority and miracles follow believers”. He raised His hands and blessed them. He also blessed their life and their service before he departed from them with the flesh. Our duty then is to live in this blessing and move it from the Mount of Olive to the world.

Ascension and our practical life

- ❑ That who practices the test of ascension, must go outside Jerusalem, as it is noisy and go up the Mount of Olive with his heart and mind. But that who remains in the earthly concerns and worries, will not see the glory of ascension or the glory of heaven and the Holy of Holies.
- ❑ That who believes that Christ entered the Holies must struggle on a firm basis where the Lord entered for us.
- ❑ That who believes in the Divine Ascension feels the greatness of the glory, which our human nature attained, in the glorified character of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:8-10).
- ❑ We have to go up with him with our minds refusing and rejecting every hope and desire in the things of our time. We have to look up to heaven.

Exercise and Prayer

O Lord whose ascension to heaven was necessary for our salvation, and who gave us safety and comfort by your ascension because you revealed to us the eternal life. Give us a pure mind in your Holy Spirit. Give us a share with You in Your glory and the glory of Your Father.

Activities

- ❑ Take part in the procession of the ascension Icon on the Ascension Feast.
- ❑ Make a wall Chart about Ascension and its circumstances and consequences and its effects on you and the Church.
- ❑ Comfort those who grieve and direct their eyes to heaven.

(40) Pentecost and the Birth of the Church

References

- + The essays of H. H. Pope Shenouda III and his sermons on the Holy Spirit
- + “The Church in the days of the Apostles” Bishop Youannis
- + “Studies and contemplation on the great feasts” Part 2, Bishop Bemin
- + “The Father’s Promise” Virgin Mary’s Church, Fagala

The Lesson

Aim

The work of the Holy Spirit in the Church

Introduction

The disciples lived with Jesus and the great hopes filled their mind. They were waiting for the day when Jesus would reign over the earth and establish an earthly kingdom. When they saw the multitude surrounding Him, they believed that their hopes would soon be achieved. The Palm

Sunday witnessed the summit of their joy but soon their dreams faded when Jesus was taken from them to be judged, crucified, and to die on the cross. They were obliged, because of this, to escape and hide and when they wanted to meet, they met in secret in an upper room and in their grief and distress they forgot what Jesus used to say to them that He would leave the world but this did not mean the end of His work among the people. On the contrary it means the beginning of completing this work on sound basis, and that His going does not mean defeat but the beginning of victory for the kingdom of God in this world. They forgot that He had said, “And I will pray the father, and He will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, but the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:16,26).

The Glorious Resurrection then Ascension

Then came the glorious resurrection, and Jesus appeared to them many times but He appeared in the glorified flesh of resurrection. The form and image is exactly the same but He entered their room and the doors were closed. He entered suddenly and disappeared suddenly. Later on they knew that their teacher was the Eternal Son of God. Their old feeling which was full of love and respect mingled with reverence, awe and worship. After forty days the disciples witnessed the departure of their beloved calmly. We expected a great grief and sadness, but after His ascension to heaven, they went back to Jerusalem in great happiness. They knew that although He went up to heaven, yet He would be with them forever.

The Day of the Pentecost

The Pentecost was near. It was a great feast in Israel. It came after fifty days from the Passover. It was also a harvest feast, which was celebrated with joy. Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims coming from all parts of the world to share the joys of the feast. In the middle of these celebrations, there was a small group of men and women gathering in the upper room speaking of their memories and what happened in the near past and they were waiting for the promise of Jesus. They were praying all the time. The day of the Pentecost came and the small group was still in the upper room, and suddenly something splendid took place “And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them” (Acts 2:2-4).

The pilgrims gathered before the temple asking about the cause of the sound they heard. Among those people stood the disciples speaking to them about Jesus and giving proofs that He was the Messiah whom their fathers were waiting for. It was strange that each of them heard the disciple speaking his own language all the people wondered and said to one another, “What does this mean? But others mocking said: They are filled with the new wine” (Acts 2:12,13).

Three thousand believed

Here Peter stood up among the people. He was filled with courage and zeal (Acts 2:14-36). Peter who denied Christ seven weeks before and said to the maid “I do not know him” stood now without fear before thousands of people announcing his faith in Christ and calling them to believe in him. This was the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that gave courage to him and it was he that gave the disciples the gift of speaking several languages without knowing them before. It is not Peter that spoke neither were the disciples. It was the Holy Spirit that spoke

in them. That is why the speech was effective. The Scripture says, “They were cut to the heart and said what shall we do? And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” they received His word with joy and they were baptized and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:37-39).

The fruits of the Holy Spirit

The day of Pentecost was a glorious day in the history of humanity. On that day the Holy Spirit rested on the disciples their eyes opened and they were filled with heavenly power that was not in them before. They no longer worked but the Spirit of God worked in them and with them.

1. The Holy Spirit gave them courage: On the day when Lord Jesus was crucified, they were frightened, each one of them ran away and hid himself in a certain place. They met in secret far away from people but now they speak in public and face the multitude with courage and they held the people responsible for crucifying Christ. Was that a result of incidental courage? No, but God was there in them. The Holy Spirit worked in them and gave them the words they spoke to people, chiefs and kings. Wasn't this what Jesus said to them? “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8).
2. The Holy Spirit filled their hearts with love: Another change occurred to all believers. Love filled their hearts towards one another. Selfishness disappeared and they became one heart “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32). That was strange people of all classes joined the Church; rich and poor, educated and ignorant but all those were filled with love and became one thing. The Holy Spirit filled their hearts so they loved one another. That who had gave that who had not. No one thought of himself; each one thought of the others, “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and laid at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to each as any had need” (Acts 4:34,35).
3. The Holy Spirit filled their life with joy: They were happy to have that new life of fellowship in the Holy Spirit who united them in one group “And day by day, attending the temple together, and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:46,47). In fact, the day of Pentecost a glorious day in the history of the Church. It was its birthday indeed. The spirit worked, taught, established and supported “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). The Holy Spirit inspired them with the Spirit of testimony, and preaching in the whole world. They bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead and called for repentance and preparing the hearts to receive the kingdom of God and waiting the second glorious coming of Christ.

Recitation

Acts 2:42 -47

Questions and Activities

- Why do we call the day of Pentecost the Church birthday?

- ❑ Why did the Holy Spirit, rest on the disciples fifty days after the resurrection?
- ❑ Why didn't the day of Pentecost events take place every year up till our present day?
- ❑ Why didn't people restore the one language all over the world as the case was before building the Tower of Babylon so that each one can understand the other in his language?
Answer: Because the language of understanding between people is now the language of love, Love is the language spoken by all and understood by all.
- ❑ Jesus had told His disciples about the heavenly power...the Holy Spirit that would rest on them and would teach them and strengthen them. Quote the following verses then put the word Jesus in one side and evidences on the other side: Acts 3:6-8, Acts 2:3,4, Acts 2:33, John 14:16,17, John 14:12,13, John 15:26. Just arrange the texts opposite to each other.
- ❑ Pick up the following verses and write the proofs that were in Peter's sermon in Chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles: Joel 2:28-32, Psalm 16:18-11, Psalm 132:11, Psalm 110:1.
- ❑ Try to choose verses, situations and evidence to show the following attributes of the Church of the Apostles that was established on the day of Pentecost.
 - It is a Church of prayer, fasting and worship.
 - It is a Church of fellowship, brotherhood and oneness of the heart.
 - It is a Church of rejoicing and peace.
 - It is a Church of Truth and righteousness.
 - It is a Church of suffering and persecutions.

Instructions

- ❑ The servant tells his children that the Holy Spirit rested on the disciples because they were together with one spirit. Study the question of the unity of the heart and the danger of schisms in the Church and the family.
- ❑ The servant tells his children that the spirit gave the disciples power in their service, warmth in preaching and effectiveness of preaching and that we are now in great need of the effectiveness of the Spirit.
- ❑ How can we attain this effectiveness? Through prayers, unity, obedience of the commandment, holiness, practicing the sacraments with the spirit of godliness...

(41) One Church of God

References

+ "Marks of the Church" Bishop Bemini

The Lesson

Aim

How can believers be one body?

Introduction

Adam and his children sinned and they all deserved death, but through the Divine love the Lord Christ incarnated, became man, shared our flesh and blood and lived among us... then He was crucified and paid the price of our sin. He rose to live in the new body that is His Church. The Church has become the body of Christ. He is the head of the Church. He lives in her and she

lives with Him.

A wonderful relationship

What a wonderful relation that is between Christ and His Church. He is not a God that keeps away from His Church in heaven. He is not that sort of king who is haughty among His people but He is the head and the Church is His body. We believers form this body. We are no more individuals tied by religion. We are members of one body.

Many members

There are many members of each body. Although they are numerous they form the body; each one of them has its benefit but the life of each member depends upon its relation with the body and the relation between the body and the head. In this way we who are many are members of the one body of Christ. Each one of us has his job and his benefit and the life of each of us depends on his connections with the Church and the relation of the Church with her head. This is not a symbol or a simile as Christ lives in every member indeed “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

How?

When a member is fixed to the body and lives on it the member does not represent itself only but it represents the whole body; it affects it and is affected by it. If one finger is suffering it causes the whole body to suffer and the head also suffers (1 Corinthians 12:26). If one member rejoices, the body rejoices with it and the head also rejoices. The same case is in the Church. We all share in suffering and honor and Jesus is also with us.

Saul persecuted the Christians “But Saul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). On his way to Damascus the Lord appeared to him and said “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He did not say why do you persecute my Church or my disciples? So Saul’s persecution to Christians was persecution to Jesus himself. For the suffering of the members on earth meant suffering to the head of the church in heaven, “In all their afflictions He was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9). On the great Day of Judgment he will say to those on his right, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:35-40).

A great army

A very great Church, an army without number: It includes all the churches in our district, our town and our country. All the Orthodox Churches in the whole world; of all races, color and country. It includes all believers in Christ, the Incarnate God, the Redeemer those who have the sound belief. It includes all the believers who departed to heaven and fought with Christ, give their prayers and sing songs to the Lord who sits on the Throne for us all the time.

Various gifts

Many members of one body... two eyes, two ears, two legs, two feet, bones, flesh, skin, we need a lot of time to count them all but the body needs them all. It cannot do without any of them for a very important reason: their variety where each has a function that is different and essential for the body to survive.

1. Each member serves the body in performing its function the eye is for sight, the ear for

hearing and the foot for carrying the whole body.

2. Each member integrates the function of the other members, the eye integrates the work of the ear and the hand completes their work.
3. Each member is concerned with the other members, the hand cares for the eye and the leg serves the body and the members cannot do without one another.

In the same way we find that the Church has many members: priests, teachers, ministers, people rich or poor, scientists or illiterate people. Each member serves the body in performing its function. Each member cares for the other members (Romans 12).

A great love

The great love involves all the members. They work together and keep the form, the function and the qualifications of each member.

1. The hand that cares for the eye deserves to be called hand. In the same way, the believer who struggles and works for preserving the gift of his spiritual brother in the Church of God, the body of Christ deserves to be called a believer.
2. The eye that refuses to harm the hand or to deprive it from her work and service deserves honor. In the same way, the believer refuses to harm a weak brother in the Church.

But how shameful it is for us to speak about tormenting -jealousy -envy -among the members of the believers in the body of Christ who loves us all. How miserable is the Church whose eye despises the hands or the legs (I Corinthians 12:21) and the rich man who despises the poor man and says to him “You stand there” or, “ sit at my footstool” (James 2:3). How shameful it is for the members when they refuse to perform their function and the legs do the work of the hands or the works of the eyes, that is, those who need teaching teach and those who need repentance work as pastors.

I am responsible

I as a member of the body of Christ whether an eye or a leg,

1. I am responsible for myself. I have to keep myself pure with the grace of Christ because I am no longer myself but I belong to the whole body of Christ “Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute” (I Corinthians 6:15).
2. I am responsible for the whole Church in the domain that the Lord appointed for me, even my labor and effort should be exerted for the body of whom I am a member. It is always for building. The blood of those who were tormented, persecuted and martyred was not in vain. They were positive members of the body of Christ. They completed the work that Christ started on the Cross. That is why Paul says; “Now I rejoice in my sufferings, for your sake, and in my flesh. I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the Church of which I became a minister” (Colossians 1:24).

Questions for Discussion

1. Show how the Church of the apostles was one integrated body (Refer to the first chapters of the book of Acts).
2. There are various types of services in the Church, mention some of them.
3. There are some members in the body of the church, which seem better than the other parts as there are eyes, hands and feet in the body though they are all necessary and

indispensable show to what extent the Church needs different types of members, gifts and energy and how all these integrate as one body.

4. How can you perform the instructions of this lesson and apply them in your family, Church and social life?

Activities

Visit the members of your class who keep away from the Church.

Homework

Read (I Corinthians 12) and write three verses of it that refer to the Church the body of Christ.

(42) The Body and the Temple

References

- + “The brotherly love” Fr Tadrus Yacoub
- + “My Church is a mother that gives birth to many children” Dr. Ragheb Abdul Nur

The Lesson

Aim

God sanctifies the human soul by uniting her with Him.

Introduction

In the past the Tent of Meetings and then Solomon’s Temple were the places of the Presence of God among His people. The Ark of Covenant was in the Holy of Holies and a blue silk veil separated the Holy of Holies. The veil stood for the blue sky, and the Holy of Holies stood for the Heaven of Heavens where the Throne of God is. The veil stood for another veil that separated God from man because of the sins of man. That veil was torn when Christ was on the Cross.

The House of God

In his epistle to the Ephesians our teacher Paul the Apostle wrote a description of a holy temple where the believers are one building and Jesus Himself is the corner stone: “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the house hold of God, built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22). The Lord sanctified the human nature when He united with it in His Incarnation. The body of Christ has become the Church and the new tent and the invisible secret temple where the believers gather and where they unite together.

The body of Christ lives on earth as He lives in heaven, as a very great Temple, a temple of flesh and blood in those who believe in His name, of all races, colors, and languages under heaven and the Lord who used to appear among His people, lives now in each of them and the temple is no more a building of hard bricks and alabaster pillars but it is now made of living stones, hearts of flesh, souls of light, pillars of faith that perils cannot shake.

The Living Church

The Lord established His Church on earth in a temple inside the believers. He separated them from the world and the Holy Spirit rested on them and completely sanctified them. The priest raises his prayer in the holy mass saying “He granted us the birth from above from water and spirit, and made us a united people ...and made us pure with your Holy Spirit” (The Liturgy of St. Basil).

In this way our bodies are places for the dwelling of God as our teacher Paul says, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s Temple is holy, and that temple you are” (I Corinthians 3:16-17). In our life as believers and as people separated for the Lord, God reveals Himself to the world, is glorified in us, each member that joins the believers is anointed first by the holy unction in the mystery of Chrism after being baptized and then he becomes for the Lord, as the case is when the temple is dedicated or when the Church is dedicated, it becomes a house of God. It becomes holy for the presence of God and the believers because holy temples of the Lord and their bodies compose the living Church.

Care and Struggle

I have to struggle to keep myself pure and sanctify my life for the Lord for the pure clean religion necessitates “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God ...and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27). My body and members, which are sanctified for the Lord, must not be used as tools for committing sins, but should be tools of righteousness for the Lord “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never” (1 Corinthians 6:15). Why should we not be true members of His Holy Body if we receive His Holy Body from the altar and also His Holy Blood so that we may unite with the Holy Body and breathe with it, and in this way we are sharers in the Divine nature. But that who commits sin offends his body and his baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity and his anointment with pure Chrism. He also offends the flesh and blood of Christ, which dwell in him “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are Gods” (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). Let’s remember these verses and contemplate them.

- “Build yourselves up on your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life ...hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 20-23).
- “That according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:16-19).
- “To equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12,13).

Questions

1. What did the Lord mean when He said, “I will destroy this temple, and in three days I

will raise it up?”

2. Show how the raised body of Christ replaced the temple of Jerusalem.
3. The temple is no more a building of hard stones and alabaster pillars but it is composed of living stones. Explain.
4. How does a believer regard his body and his members?
5. How did the Lord sanctify the human nature?

Recitation

John 2:19-21

(43) The Bride of Christ

References

+ “The Lord is my Paradise” St. George Church, Sporting

+ “Christ in the Eucharist” St. George Church, Sporting

The Lesson

Aim

The Church (the body) is bound to Christ (The head) and we are bound to both head and body.

I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine

The relation between Christ and the Church is a relation of great love, united and union. Paul the apostle likens this relation to the relation between a bridegroom and his bride. The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is a profound one and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5:23-32). Through this relation the Church prays to her Lord a prayer of love in the Song of Songs: “I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine” (Song of Songs 6:3).

A Chaste Virgin

Each faithful soul in the Church has chosen Christ to be her heavenly bridegroom. She sanctified and purified herself of all what happened in the past so that she may proceed in godliness and purity to her bridegroom who is the Holy God “I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband” (2 Corinthians 11:2). That is why we should lead the life of godliness and purity, which is suitable for the state of unity between the heavenly bridegroom and us. We have to keep our bodies pure for Him and adorn the soul with virtues in holy adoration and be prepared to meet the bridegroom when He comes in His great glory.

The Wedding of the Church

St. John speaks about the heavenly joys and the glorified Church when offered to her bridegroom when he said “And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls... and spoke to me saying: come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb,

and in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:2,9,10). And Holy Jerusalem is a symbol of the triumphant Church.

In the wedding celebrations we notice that:

- ❑ The white clothes of the bride refer to purity and godliness and refer also to glory and brightness in the new life.
- ❑ The crown on her head represents her as a queen in her new kingdom. The Church is the kingdom, which David prophesied in his psalm “At your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir. Hear, O daughter, consider, and incline your ear; forget your people and your father’s house and the king will desire your beauty. Since He is your Lord, bow to Him” (Psalm 45:9-10).
- ❑ The ring on her finger stands for being tied to the Covenant all the life long so long as the bride agreed to devote her life to her husband she commits herself to the Covenant of Loyalty and eternal sincerity.

A Comparison between the Church Similes

The bride and the Flesh

The bride unites with her bridegroom and the two become one body. They are no longer two but one body. The same case is with the Church, which is the body of Christ and she is an integrated part of His body. Christ is the head and the Church is the body. Christ lives in the Church and suffers when she suffers and considers what happens to her as if it happens personally to him “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

Temptation -Submission -Obedience

There is a harmonious relationship between the body and the head as all members submit themselves to the orders and provisions of the mind and thus we see the bride responding and submitting herself to her husband in complete obedience...this is the faithful soul that lives the life of obedience to her redeemer. To him obedience is better than sacrifice.

The Bride and the Temple

- ❑ The temple is dedicated and sanctified for the Lord to dwell in it, and the bride is wholly dedicated to her husband and joined with him under law.
- ❑ The temple is devoted to the Lord. It is wrong to use it for any other thing. The bride is now married to her husband and it is wrong to betray him. Betrayal is not allowed.
- ❑ The Church is the people of God separated for Him so that He may be glorified, in their life on earth, “You are God’s temple and God’s Spirit dwells in you. If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are” (I Corinthians 3:17).

Instructions

- ❑ The Servant tells the stories of saints who lived in chastity for Christ such as Boutamina the Chaste, Theodora the Chaste, St. George and his reputation as a Chaste...
- ❑ The Servant discusses with his children the idols of modern times, the idol of greediness, collecting money, materialism, enslavement to the desires of the flesh, science and pride in technology, etc. They study how a Christian practices all the graces of God without

being enslaved to materialism. He blesses and thanks the hand that gives these good things to be used for the glory of God.

- The Servant explains how his children are dedicated to God with the mystery of baptism and the mystery of Chrism. That they are members of the body through the mystery of Eucharist. In spite of this they are not separated from the world. They do not despise others where we live in the world but the world does not live in us.

Activities

Try to collect the symbols and similes that refer to the different images of the Church. Quote texts from the Bible to prove that.

Recitation

Romans 22:17

(44) Attributes of the Church of the Apostles

References

- + Lectures on the Coptic New Year Day in Keraza Magazine, Pope Shenouda III
- + “The Church in the age of the Apostles” Bishop Youannis
- + “They did not love their life” Bishop Bemin
- + “The Early Church” Dr. Gamil Nagib

The Lesson

Aim

Developing the apostolic Spirit among the children.

Introduction

The Church of the apostles is characterized by the following attributes:

1. The leadership of the Holy Spirit in the Church:

- He gave the preaching its power and effectiveness.
- He was working in the words as he worked and arranged everything that we can call the Book of Acts, the Acts of the Holy Spirit.
- He was the effective power in the miraculous deeds. He was the lamp that revealed the attempt of the world to creep into the Church. He united the believers into one integrated complete whole. He strengthened the Church in time of trouble and agony.

2. The Pure Christian Life

- They lived as Christians before they were called Christians. They obeyed the Commandments of the Lord and practiced them in their life with great care “And they developed themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all who believed were together ...and day by day, attending the temple together” (Acts 2:42-46). So they prayed together every day.
- Christ was the secret of the life of their faith. He was the core of their life, prayers and

love. The secret of their unity lay in receiving the Holy body and blood. They cast out selfishness and individuality. The spirit granted them godliness and simplicity of the heart and abolished from among them individual and social differences. They loved one another with pure heart.

- ❑ Their love was of action not of words; “Now the Company of those who believed were of one heart and soul and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his won, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32).
- ❑ No one of them needed anything. The practical love characterized them all “And great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).
- ❑ No one of the apostles took money for himself “As having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (2 Corinthians 6:10). Preaching bore the evidence of its truth. The power of the Lord’s resurrection lay in the fact that they won victory over themselves and kept away from the glory of this world.

3. Clarity of Vision in their Service

- ❑ The vision was clear without obscurity when believers grew in numbers and the scope of service became wider. The apostles did not neglect their main work, which was prayer and serving the world. They did not allow themselves to be busy collecting money, distributing or concerning themselves with administrative work and all ways of investment and financial development to satisfy the needs of the Church. They decided that this would be the deacons’ task.
- ❑ Those deacons were not keeping away from the spiritual domain. On the contrary, those deacons were of good repute, full of Spirit and of wisdom “Stephen did great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8).
- ❑ One of the signs denoting the clarity of vision was Peter’s refusal to take money from Ananias and Sapphira, as it was sacrifice mingled with lies and self-motivation devoid of purity and godliness, which are essential in the society of believers.
- ❑ The Church also had a severe stand against Simon the magician “Your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter for your heart is not right before God?” (Acts 8:20).

4. The Power of Testimony

- ❑ The Lord called the apostles and the disciples to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). They lived their life bearing witness to that whom they tested his great love and he called them from darkness to enjoy his wonderful light “With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Christ” (Acts 4:33). They preached in public without fear. Refer to Peter’s attitude towards the paralyzed man at temple, which is called (Acts 3:6). Our teacher St. Peter said, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
- ❑ The Church of the apostles suffered many persecutions. They were threatened, killed and tortured, but the apostles insisted on hard work and growth so that preaching may attain its ends (Acts 8:1).
- ❑ “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word” (Acts 8: 4).

Instructions and Activities

- ❑ Let these attributes be spiritual exercises for the children to live with in their small

society so that they may develop according to the model of true apostolic life.

- ❑ You can show the children the film of “Quo Vadis” or any film about the persecutions and tortures that characterized the apostolic age to emphasize the power of the Christian firm stand in that.
- ❑ Children take the exercise of bearing witness to Christ in their life and in their daily talks.
- ❑ Children make a wall Chart or a pamphlet printed in offset about the apostolic life. This can be distributed as a model to be followed by all.

(45) Different Kinds of Soil **The Parables of Jesus Christ (Matthew 13:3-22)**

References

- + “A Sower went out to sow” Fr. Bishoy Abdel Messih
- + “The parables of Lord Christ” Dr. Maurice Tawadros

The Lesson

Aim

Hindrances to the Spiritual Development

A Sower went out to Sow

Great crowds gathered about the Lord Jesus on the Beach of Galilee Sea. The Lord told them many things in parables. One of these parables is the parable of the Sower. A Sower went out to sow and as he sowed some seeds fell along the path, on the rocky ground and upon thorns and on the good soil which brought forth grain, some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty. Then His disciples came and said to Him “why do you speak to them in parables?” and He answered them “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given”.

We wonder why was this preference. Was it because the disciples were more prepared to receive the word? Or because they were more ready to receive, comprehend and understand? Or because they were chosen? The Lord Jesus beautified their eyes because they saw and their ears because they heard and He said to them “Many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it” (Notice that these verses are repeated and prayed by the Church in the Intercession of the Gospel to show us our status before God when we listen to the Holy Gospel and obey His word that He grants us.

Types of Soil

The Lord Jesus explained to His disciples the four types of soil. You can read the Gospel in Matthew (3:3-23) to study these types. It is of our benefit if we observe ourselves and measure and examine ourselves in the light of what the wisdom of God has given us in this parable (Read the text with the children and discuss every type with them). The Lord Jesus showed that the sown seeds are the words of God that never vanish (I Peter 1:23). The sower is the Lord Jesus Christ, either in person or through His ministers. The people are the work of God and the ministers are working with God (1 Corinthians 3:9). Preaching the multitude is sowing seeds and

the soil in which the seeds are sown is the hearts of men which vary according to their type.

The Path

1. Why did the Lord Jesus call this soil the path?
2. Why is this type of soil dangerous?
3. When can our hearts be like the soil of the path?
4. How can we cure our life if this type of soil appears?

These questions are for you to answer in your contemplation and prayers during your study of this type of soil and remember that those who listen to the word of God without understanding or they listen but neglect it, the word gets out of the other ear without leaving any effect and become an easy prey for the devil who seizes every message thrown on this soil.

Exercise

Did you notice that absent mindedness and the inability to concentrate and indifference deprives the word of God in the heart of due care and guard? If it is so, let us bow in worship and offer repentance and raise prayer out of the heart praying the Lord Jesus to surround the heart with a strong fence, strengthen the will, deepens care, concentrate, thinking so that we may say with David, "I have laid up Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11).

The Rocky Places

How can the hearts of flesh be like stones? When the materialistic spirit fills the heart and replaces mercy and kindness with cruelty and roughness and judgment of others. Here listening to the word does not lead us to heaven, even if we receive it with care and joy. It is not enough for the heart to be affected with the word at the moment but it is important that the heart dissolves with it. Starting the way is not the main goal. It is very important to continue, persist and bear patience as it is written, "But he who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:22). Let us ask ourselves:

- ❑ Do I have firm principles, strong determination, and ready will?
- ❑ If an affliction takes place, do I refrain from worship, desert the spiritual atmosphere and complain against God?
- ❑ If the Lord assured me that the soil of my heart is of the stony type; let me have and practice these exercises:
 - Crush the stones and destroy pride through repentance, contrition, thanksgiving and endurance.
 - Pouring tears of repentance to soften the cruel heart.
 - Carefulness in all types of behavior through perpetual prayers and reading the Bible.
 - Abstaining from listening to evil words, useless talk, seeing evil sights, perpetual confession so that the heart may be kept pure, alive and sensitive.

The Thorny Ground

Thorns grew up...this means that it was not in sight the time the grains were sown. It is thorns that choke the seeds. What are the choking thorns?

- ❑ Worries of life, increasing concerns, care and bitterness of heart, the conceit of the rich (Danger does not live in the wealth itself but it lies in the conceit of the wealthy man and

dependence on the wealth and being deceived by it), desires for all things...

- If the Lord reveals to me that many thorns are there in the soil of my heart: Let me practice this exercise: Purify the heart and examine it, confess to the father of confession, confess every care, anxiety, concern, conceit, dependence on property or talents...

The Good Soil

What distinguishes this ground from the others? Contemplate the Lord's saying, "By this my father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples" John (5:8). Notice that this good ground was not free from stones or thorns. The same case is with the saints who are not free from the remains of sin, but they are only free of the domination and authority of sin. Let us ask ourselves:

- Do we hear the word and understand it?
- Do we obey the word in the spirit of modesty?
- Does the word bear fruit in our life for the glory of God and the extension of his kingdom?
- If saints differ in the extent of bearing fruit, let us aim at the maximum so that we may bring forth grain a hundredfold as the Scripture says, "bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10).

Suggested Activities

- Try to study hymns and melodies about devoting and dedicating your life to the Lord.
- Let this parable benefit you in your spiritual life especially in your confessions in the light of the word of God and the types of soil.
- Record your impressions by painting an artistic work if you have the gift and hang the picture on the wall of the Church.
- Show films about the parables of the Lord Christ.

Recitation

Matthew 13:23

(46) The Forgiving Father **The Parables of Jesus Christ (Luke 15:11-33)**

References

- + "Guide to Confession" Bishop Bemin
- + "Help me O Lord to repent" Fr. Youssef Assad

The Lesson

Aim

God's love compared with human love.

The Bosoms of Love

The Lord Jesus told us a parable in which He explained the Bosoms of the Divine love. This is

known as the Parable of the Lost Son. A young son deceived by the world attractions and the desires of young age. He saw happiness in being free from the traditions and strict rules of his family and saw enjoyment in satisfying the desires of the flesh. He asked his father to give him his heritage to spend it as he wished. We wonder as we see his father answering his demand and giving him freedom to do, as he liked with his lot.

- ❑ Why is the behavior of this son wrong?
- ❑ Why is the father's attitude regarded as an expression of extreme love and release of freedom?

The younger son gathered everything and traveled to a far away place and there he became extravagant and spent all his money. Here we ask ourselves:

- ❑ What is true freedom?
- ❑ What is true happiness?
- ❑ Is freedom the liberation from authority and control?
- ❑ Does happiness lie in satisfying one's lust and the desires of the flesh?
- ❑ Why is the sin of keeping away from the Divine fatherhood regarded as serious sin?
- ❑ Can we see the relation between Adam's sin in Paradise and the sin of the lost son when he deserted his father's house and rebelled against his family?
- ❑ What are the dangerous consequences of rebellion in our spiritual life?
- ❑ How important is obedience in the life of Christian virtue?

How miserable is the man who lives far away from his father's house? He deprives himself of the bosom of fatherhood with all its riches, love and sacrifice. How miserable is man when he becomes self-centered and selfish! Is this case different from hell? to be far away from God, captured within myself. Aren't' heaven and eternal happiness the freedom of the glory of the children of God and enjoying sonship with all its dimensions?

Living in a far country

This young man thought that he could live a life of satisfaction and enjoy himself but now he began to see the bitter fact, which he could not see on that day. He became poor needy and unable to follow that life so he went and lived with one of the inhabitants of that country but the man sent him into his fields to feed swine. Feeding swine refers to the lowest degree of life which man lives when he keeps away from God. That country did not have any other work to give to the rebels who were attracted by the deceptive luxury of the world. Such people deserved that defiled humiliating work.

The son could not endure the bitterness and cruelty of life. He came from a rich family. He remembered the blessings of his father's house. He said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare but I perish here with hunger?" Can the son forget the blessings of his father's house? The dew of grace falls upon the complaining heart to water it, soften it and refresh it and lead it to repentance. The grace of God does not desert the complaining heart. It will always seek to attract it with the ties of love. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He moves the stubborn heart and drives it to regret and repentance and confession.

Are we to ask ourselves?

Where are we? In our Father's house, in the membership of the Church that grants blessings and

the gifts of the Spirit and the riches of sacraments and the goodness of grace, or have we deserted these bosoms and followed the Counsel of ourselves and our friends who are evil and deserted the spirit of obedience and resorted to rebellion, and false complaining.

The Good Return

Repentance is not only regret; neither is it bowing under the heaviness of guilt. It does not mean a sense of guilt in bitter grief and heart agony; it means a new vision of the bosoms of fatherhood and a firm stand in directing oneself towards these bosoms. It is a hearty response to the movement of love. It is the response of the heart to the call of the Spirit working in us. The clever son rose, decided to return, he resisted all the difficult circumstances that surrounded him; he rose, left everything and went back to his father.

Contemplate this type of repentance. Contemplate the repentance of Zacchaeus, Levi the tax Collector, Moses the Black, and Mary the sinful. Repentance is a change of form renewal of mind and heart, a change in the direction of life. Have I tested, in my life, that test that made me give my back to the world going forward to my beloved Jesus who is my way and my life? If I had not tested that life let me bow at the feet of the Lord and pray, praying for the test of true repentance with the Prodigal Son, with the sinful woman, with all those who gave true repentance without return or hesitation.

The Father's Rejoicing

He was waiting for a long time the return of his Son and his heart was filled with hope (Jesus was nailed to the cross to give us confidence. He is waiting our return and his heart will never be closed before us). When he saw his son, the man hurried to meet him. How deep your love is O Lord. You are all mercy and kindness. You hurry to us, you always come to me but I did not even think of coming to you. O Lords grant me the grace that I feel your great love. He did not blame him...he did not reproach him. The son wanted to be a servant but the Father refused to listen. He only listened to the pulses of his heart which was full of joy. He kissed him. O Lord, how great your love is to all who come to you. What did his father do then? The best robe, the fatted calf, and the ring...what do all these symbols stand for?

The Envious Brother

The brother should have rejoiced for the return of his brother. But the brother was angry and did not want to share the happiness of his father. In so doing he was like a stranger in his father's house...the place of the man who lives with the spirit of the servant instead of the spirit of the loving son. That is why he feels the heaviness of service, he feels the need for the justification of his work and boasting over himself, "Lo these many years I have served you and I never disobeyed your command". How dangerous self-righteousness is and how fatal false religiousness is we should have shared the heavenly beings their rejoicing for the return of that who was away.

Do we welcome the return of the sinful young man or do we reject him when he enters the Church? Do we feel happy when we find that the young sinful man has received care from our teacher or the priest of the Church... or do we become angry?

Questions

- ❑ Show how the prodigal son did not understand the meaning of freedom.
- ❑ What is meant by the concept of true repentance?
- ❑ What do you think of the behavior of the elder brother? Why?

Activities

- ❑ Invite the young people who are keeping away from the Church so that they may come back to the Church and heaven receive them with joy.
- ❑ Hold a prayer meeting with your brethren to bring the sinners back from far countries to the bosom of the father.
- ❑ Under the supervision of your teacher, act the play of The Prodigal Son. It should be shown to the people in an effective spiritual way.

Recitation

Luke 15:18,19

(47) Dedication of All **The Parables of Jesus (Matthew 13:44-46)**

References

- + “The Hidden Treasure” Fr. Bishoy Abdel Messih
- + “The Parables of Lord Christ “ Dr. Maurice Tawadros

The Lesson

Aim

Submitting our whole life to God (body, mind and feelings)

We all seek happiness

Each young man seeks happiness, seeks pleasure and seeks joy. Life should be successful. The Lord gave us two parables in this respect. He said: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field”. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:44-46). People imagine happiness in material matters... what are these things that the people seek and run after? (Money- health -status jobs -reputation)... All these things, as the Bible shows us are means not an end. We can deduce from the above mentioned parables that:

Christ is the treasure and He is the precious pearl

The gospel says about Him, “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). He is the true happiness...anyone who possesses Him receives the true peace “Since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

If the Lord Jesus is the treasure, what does the field in which the treasure is hidden refers to?

Do you think that it indicates the Bible with its two testaments Old and New? Do you see that all those who search for the Savior through this Book unite with him and get His complete and perfect peace? Or do you see that it refers to the Church, which is the vessel of faith and all members are those who enter it and join its lively membership and will soon discover her bridegroom and Savior in whom we find all fullness...

If the case is thus, are we living members?

Do we have this essential discovery in our spiritual life tests or are we still living in the superficial life far away from true fullness? The most precious treasures lie in the depth of the earth. So we cannot attain the treasure of grace, which is hid for us in Christ unless we go deep into life without applying the superficial look and reached the depth of prayer, the depth of the Church the depth of the Holy Bible, and there we will meet Him and there we shall sell every thing for Him.

Necessary commitments

- ❑ The parable of the treasure says: “In his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field”. The parable of the pearl says “On finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it”. Those who see the treasure in the field and those who see the valuable pearl must get them. This holy zeal is the fruit of spiritual discovery as David the prophet says, “Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice” (Psalm 105:3). Since every process of buying must be accompanied by some commitments, the same is true to spiritual life, which necessitates true complete dedication and complete commitment to the greatest goals.
- ❑ The principle that says “A time for your heart and a time for your Lord” is dangerous. Why? If the Lord Christ is our true bridegroom, his bride must be completely dedicated to him. If the Lord gave up Himself for us we must love Him as He loves us. As the Scripture says, “That those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:15).
- ❑ We must get rid of our sexual and bodily desires.
- ❑ We must get rid of our defects, and weaknesses.
- ❑ We must get rid of our pride in our dignity and the pride of our thoughts, the haughtiness of our hearts and souls.
- ❑ We must get rid of our worries and cares, which are without number so that we may devote all our time to the Lord as Mary did and choose the good share.

Domains of True Dedication

- ❑ Through prayers and offering your whole life to God you can recognize the following:
- ❑ Dedication of the body: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2). What must we do concerning instincts and bodily motives?
- ❑ Dedication of feelings: “Love one another earnestly from the heart” (I Peter 1:22). What must we do concerning our feelings? How can our feelings be sanctified? Remember that St. Paul the apostle suffered this wonderful test “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (I Corinthians 2:2). He who sees Christ in all the people, how can't he love them? The body needs desire and anger but grace needs

love without price.

- ❑ Dedication of the Mind: “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). How can we think through Christ? How can we overcome evil thoughts? Do we train ourselves on praying Jesus’ prayer? Do we submit our will? Do we control our thoughts, senses and concentrate on what is pure? There is also the dedication of the will, time, future, and destiny. You can contemplate how can you offer all these to God.

Questions

- ❑ What is true happiness?
- ❑ Why can’t pleasure satisfy man?
- ❑ “He went and sold everything” Explain.
- ❑ Give examples from the Holy Bible and the History of the Church of people who sold everything and spent their life dedicated to God.
- ❑ Is it necessary to desert the world without having the desires of the world in our hearts?

Activities

- ❑ Raise a prayer and pray the Lord to grant you to be dedicated to the Lord and devote all that you have to God.
- ❑ Apply the previous Exercises and investigate them. Discuss these topics with your Confessor and guide.
- ❑ Study the life of a monk or a preacher or a minister who dedicated all his life to the Lord and show the points of power in his life.

Recitation

Luke 12:33,34

(48) I am Responsible

The Parables of Jesus (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-26)

References

+ “Moral Responsibility” Bishop Gregory

The Lesson

Aim

Discovery of our gifts and making use of them for the glory of God

Freedom Involves Responsibility

God created Adam and gave him freedom. One of the prominent signs of freedom is responsibility, which God gave to him in keeping the commandment and working in Paradise. The more freedom man gets the more responsibility he has. The more talents he has the more commitments he has. In the parable of the five talents (Matthew 25:14-30) “The Lord shows how each one of us is responsible for what he does and what he does not do.

This parable shows that man is in a state of work. It explains the necessity of hard work in our service and responsibility. It urges us to give ourselves for the glory of God and the good of others. The Lord shows us that all that the people received have been received from the Lord. Of themselves they are nothing, they cannot pretend that they own anything. The purpose of our talents is that they are tools of service and sacrifice and for the glory of God “As good stewards of God’s varied grace” (I Peter 4:10).

The Lord gave some people more talents and to the others less talents. This does not mean partiality as if He gave the owners of the little more talents, they would be a heavy burden for them and the Lord does not demand us to do more than we can do.

Work is the Law of Life

The Lord created Adam and ordered him to work, and he who does not work must not eat. Work involves happiness because he who works with joy, satisfaction and hard work gets the fruit of his work. In the life on earth “what man sows, is that he reaps”. The same is in spiritual matters...what we sow of asceticism, struggle, godliness, love and sacrifice; we get it in the form of heavenly eternal rejoicing.

The Behavior of the Three Servants

Two of the servants did well, what aroused your admiration in their behavior?

- ❑ Hard work and honesty.
- ❑ Making use of their talents and enjoying their potentials.

When we apply this attitude in our practical life of what importance is hard work and honesty in studying, worship, sports, making use of our leisure in practicing hobbies and making use of our health and serve our families and the Church?

The Reward

A great compliment “well done, good and faithful servant”, more authority, more responsibility and perpetual joy “Enter into the joy of your master”. How happy is the man who lives in perpetual happiness? Their characters were accepted, their services were accepted, and they received the eternal joy.

The Lazy Man

What annoyed you in his behavior? His laziness and negligence, his scorn of his talent, or his fear of work and the risk of trade... If we benefit from this subject in our spiritual life, why is laziness dangerous in worship, in studying, or in the Service? Despising our little talents is dangerous. Why? What is our duty toward what the Lord is given us of time, health, intelligence, knowledge... however little this is?

Settle accounts with the lazy

Follow up how the accounts were settled with the lazy servant. We notice the following:

- ❑ He gives excuses...
- ❑ His great confidence in his argument “Here you have what is yours”.
- ❑ Indifference to his sin “I hid your talent in the ground”.
- ❑ He judged his master “I knew you to be a hard man”.
- ❑ The Spirit of slavery and fear: “I was afraid”. Nothing hinders performing our duty

towards God more than the Spirit of fear among servants fear is against perfect love.

When the master wanted to settle accounts with the lazy servant he accused him of two charges:

- ❑ “You wicked and lazy servant”: He who does not do good deserves severe blame. That who lives for himself does not deserve to live. Refraining from doing good is sin that leads to judgment, and laziness paves the way to evil and when man sleeps the enemy sows thorns.
- ❑ Contradicting himself (No. 26,27): “You knew that I reap where I have not sowed... Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers”.

On the Day of Judgment the evil lazy people will find no excuse...all false weak excuses will fade away and every mouth will be shut.

Judging the Lazy Servant

- ❑ The lazy servant was pronounced guilty.
- ❑ He was deprived of his talent (No. 28,29): “So take the talent from him, and give it to him who ... For everyone who has more will be given, and he will have abundance... but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away”.
- ❑ He was cast into the outer darkness, there men will weep and gnash their teeth. This verdict shows us the dangerous results of laziness in life.

Questions

- ❑ What do “talents” mean?
- ❑ What are the talents of young people of your age?
- ❑ Why did the Lord give talents to man?
- ❑ Why did the Lord distribute talents among people on different levels?
- ❑ How were honest servants rewarded?
- ❑ What was the charge against the lazy servant and why was he judged?

Activities

- ❑ Hold up a debate to study the potentials of the members of the class and the different ways of making use of there in the domain of practical service.
- ❑ When you confess your sins tell your father of confession how honest you are in using all your energy. It is not enough to relate your weaknesses, sins and excuses.

Exercise

Recognize all the talents and try to invest them for the glory of God.

Recitation

Matthew 25:23

(49) The Final Judgment **The Parables of Jesus (Matthew 13:24-30)**

References

+ “Interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew” Translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud

+ “The parables of Lord Christ” Dr. Maurice Tawadros

The Lesson

Aim

How to behave in the midst of offences

Introduction

Sometimes we ask ourselves: How was evil found and established in the world? Why do evil people exist? What is our attitude towards evil people? Must we resist them? Do we have to remove them from the world?

The Lord Jesus in a simple parable answered these questions when He talked about the kingdom of God and how He compared it to a field that his owner wanted to sow good seeds in it. While people were asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain then the weeds appeared also, and the servants of the householder came and said to him, “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds? He said to them, “An enemy has done this”. The servants said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them? But he said “No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn”.

How was evil found in the world?

God did not create evil but He created man to live in eternal happiness. Evil is keeping away from God and resisting His will. Satan is the source of evil. Satan is the enemy of good, he is complaining against our brethren day and night. The devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. It was he who envied man and tempted him to commit the sin of rebellion in Paradise. With the fall of man, sin came into the world through the envy of the devil (as the Church prays in the Divine Mass) -the enemy sowed the weeds -and the enemy is the devil as the Lord Jesus explained. But the sower of the good seeds is the Son of man, the Lord of Harvest who went up to heaven and gave gifts. The world is the field of Christ as the Father gave everything to Him. The good seeds are the children of kingdom and they bear good fruit for the glory of God. The weeds are the children of the evil and they are good for nothing, they destroy the good seeds and they creep into the fields of wheat.

Why are the evil people found?

The Lord allowed the existence of good and evil in this world. Good and evil mingle together. So the good people can do good with their free will and refrain from evil. The evil people suffer punishment and bear judgment with free will. God created us and gave us freedom. He gave us freedom of will either wheat or weeds. God does not want us as slaves but He wants us to be free sons. He does not want to drive us as sheep but to lead us as free people aware of His good will.

What is our attitude towards the evil people?

As our duty to resist them, what is our attitude? The existence of sins and offences causes grief to the children of God. They also arouse God’s wrath. But hindrances and temptations are these:

good must mingle with evil, hypocrites with the faithful in the Church domain, etc. Our duty is not to neglect the field. Let us not forget the weeds so that they may not spread. We have to spend our night working and to uproot them as James and John said, “Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them” (Luke 9:54). The Son of man came to deliver not to destroy. He is patient with people but when He comes everything will be put right and every body will be judged (Revelation 20:12,13). Each one will be given according to his work. Angels will proceed to gather the weeds and all offences...corrupt teachings and false worship will be burnt. All atheists, the greedy, murderers idolaters and hypocrites will be destroyed... and all those who shared them their sins will share them their shame and suffering. All those who shared the saints in godliness will be glorified with them so that we may pray with David “Sweep me not away with sinners” (Psalm 26:9).

What is Hell?

Hell is not the horrible and severe avenger from God but it is the feeling of torture and torment that fills everyone who has refused God. In hell men will weep and gnash their teeth and suffer great pains. This is the fruit of the absence of the light and glory of God when the Lord comes the evildoers will not complain or murmur against Him as they know that they chose that type of life out of their free will, and they resisted light, they loved darkness because their works were evil.

What is the kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is the glory expected to be declared in the saints the children of God. Our teacher St. Paul the apostle said that Christ “who will change our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power which enables Him even to subject all things to Himself (Philippians 3:21). John the Beloved emphasizes this by saying “But we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:21).

St. Macarius the great says “On the Day of Judgment the glory of the Holy Spirit will come out from within adorning and covering the bodies of saints with the glory that was hid in their souls. The bodies of saints will radiate with light and brightness after the resurrection.

St. John Chrysostom says “The bodies of the saints that the spears of persecutors tore up and the swords cut will be raised by God and they will be given complete rest. Their heads which were cut off will wear crowns and their members which were cut off with saws will be adorned with glory and brightness, and will shine as the sun, giving light as the moon as righteousness will be like a white robe and holiness will make them bright and shiny. They will be washed with the blood of Christ in the best appearance.

Questions

- Did God create evil?
- How was evil found?
- Why does the Lord allow evildoers to remain in the world?
- What distinguishes the good from the evil here in this world?
- What is the good believers' attitude towards the evil people?
- How does God correct everything in the end?

(50) The Titles of St. Mary

References

- + “The Second Heaven” Bishop Bemim
- + “Mary the Virgin” Fr. Youssef Assaad
- + “The Intercession of Saints” St. George Church, Sporting
- + “Mary the Virgin in the Orthodox Creed” Fr. Sidaros Abdel Messih

The Lesson

Aim

Developing the attitude of intercession with St Mary in our everyday life.

The Mother of God (Theotokos)

The Lord Christ, the Incarnate God was born of her (The Divinity and humanity united in one in her womb). She did not give birth to manhood only but she gave birth to God the Son who appeared in the flesh “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel which means God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Elizabeth said to her “why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me” (Luke 1:43).

Although she is His mother, she also worships Him “Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father’s house, and the king will desire your beauty, since He is your Lord, bow to Him” (Psalm 45:10,11). She said to the angel. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

Perpetual Virgin

We believe that Virgin Mary was of perpetual virginity before, during and after the Divine Conception and also after the birth of Christ. This is the miracle of the mystery of the Divine Incarnation “The Lord Himself will give you a sign, behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). In her virginity the Father chose her to conceive and give birth to the Logos, the Son of God. In her conception, and when the Holy Spirit rested on her, she was the virgin and the mother at the same time. When she bore Jesus Christ in the flesh. The conception showed her virginity.

Ezekiel the prophet prophesied the sealed womb of Virgin Mary “Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces east, and it was shut and he said to me: This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it” Ezekiel 44:1,2). Ezekiel the prophet cries saying that he had seen a gate, which faced the east, marked with a wonderful seal. Only the Lord of hosts entered through it. He entered and went out but the door remained marked as it is ...the door is the Virgin who bore our good Savior and she remained a Virgin even after giving birth to Him.

Our teacher St. Luke says, “And Joseph also went up from Galilee from the city of Nazareth to Judea to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed who was with Child” (Luke 2:4,5). She was

regarded as a wife to Joseph according to the angel, and she remained engaged to him and remained a Virgin all her life. That is why she wondered when she heard the angel as she intended to remain Virgin all the days of her life.

As for Jesus' brother whom the Bible mentioned, they are his cousins, his mother's sister's Sons. In the east they call the relatives brothers (Refer to Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:40, John 19:25). They are the Sons of Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary's sister who was also called Mary after the name of her sister the Virgin who went to the temple as a Nazarite.

The Saint and Pure

She is a saint as the Holy Spirit sanctified her. She is holy as she was sanctified in heart, body, mind and spirit. She dedicated her life to the Lord. She gave birth to the Holy whom the angels praise "Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord of Hosts".

The Faithful Mediator

The Church believes that the Virgin has a special status. She is the Lord's mother and she is our mother so she deserved to be the Faithful Mediator, as she knew our needs and His intentions. We have no excuse for our sins. Through you we ask Him who was born of you. O Mother of God, the Virgin as your intercession is powerful and acceptable (Refer to the third Hour prayer). That is why Christians put her picture in their houses, and pray for her intercession before her only son. The Bible emphasizes the fact that Jesus is our only Mediator and Advocate "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (Hebrews 7:25, 1 John 2:1). But this intercession is for the forgiveness of sins, but the intercessions of the Virgin and the angels are requests for God's mercies (Give examples from the Bible). One of the most prominent evidences of the Intercessions of Mary the Virgin is the miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-5). Her intercessions are mentioned in the daily melodies of the month of Kiahk and the prayers of the liturgies.

There are many other titles for Mary which the children can pick up from the Bible and the prayers and hymns of the Church such as: The Mother of Light, The radiating unchanged flower, The Mother of Mercy and Salvation, The true Vine carrying the fruit of Life, The Fence of our Salvation, etc.

Instructions and Activities

- ❑ Paint an Icon for the Virgin and put it in your room to intercede with her in your prayer.
- ❑ Study the hymns and melodies about the Virgin.
- ❑ Quote from the New Testament the verses that emphasize the status of Virgin Mary.
- ❑ Who are the Lord's brothers? Study this subject and refer to the four Gospels.
- ❑ Write about the different types of intercessions. Give examples and quote verses.

(51) A Cloud of Witness

References

+ The Life of the Orthodox Prayer

The Lesson

Aim

The feeling of the presence of saints with us in Church

Introduction

When we look around us we see that the icons of saints surround us and we have a feeling that we live moments of holy worship in a fellowship with saints and that one kingdom involves us all, which is the kingdom of God. When we look upwards, we see the sights of the domes of our Churches in the form of a sky adorned with stars and clouds and full of the angels of the Lord. The Church teaches us that heaven is near to us with all her powers and hosts and through prayers heaven is at hand and dimensions of time and place disappear. This holy fellowship gets us out of this material world to the indefinite world of spirit where the invisible hosts of angels and saints dwell.

The Spiritual World

We may remember Jacob's dream in which he saw a ladder on the earth and its top was in the sky and the angels of God were coming down and going up. The Lord was standing and began to say to him, "I am with you. I keep you safe wherever you go. I shall not leave you". When Jacob got up he said, "The Lord is in this place and I did not know?" He was afraid and said, "this is the House of God and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:15-17). He built an altar and called the place Bethel i.e. the House of God. After a few years, Jacob met with God's angel on his way to Bethel and he struggled with him till dawn. He said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Genesis 32:26).

One of the visions of heaven, which Daniel saw, that vision and sight which he described by saying, "Thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat. His garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool, his throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him, a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him, the court sat in judgment and the books were opened" (Daniel 7:9,10).

John the Beloved wrote in the Book of the Revelation "After that I looked and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and people and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands... And all the angels stood around the throne" (Revelation 7:9-11).

A cloud of Witnesses

Thus refers St. Paul the apostle to those hosts of saints and makes us feel their presence. "Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1). We get rid of all hindrances that hinder our prayer and things that occupy our mind and disperse our thoughts to be far away from God. We shall feel the presence of all the saints with us.

Questions

When you pray, do you feel the presence of the saints during worship in the Church?
What does Paul the apostle mean by saying: We have a cloud of witnesses?