

Sunday School Program

Grade 8

Class of St. Athanasius



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First Week of September

(1) Types of Martyrs

References

- + “Martyrdom in Christianity” Anba Youannis
- + “The Spiritual Values of the Nyrouze” Fr. Tadros Yacoub
- + “Many books about martyrs of both sexes” Issued by Sporting, Al Mahabba Bookstore

The Lesson

Aim

Motives for Martyrdom in Christianity

Introduction

The Martyr is the true Christian who dies to the world in his lifetime and when he dies he lives forever. He is a unique heroic model that we should follow.

Before Martyrdom

These people died to social status and love of money. Such things did not have power to tempt them. They abstained from mortal earthly matters and realized that they did not belong to this world. Comfort, living in ease and luxury or earthly joys did not appeal to them or attract them. They died to passions and desires and crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts thus they were able to shut the lions’ mouths that were outside because they defected the hyenas, which were inside (we mean the desires of the flesh which fight the self). But the proud and the greedy could not make resistance in the area of martyrdom.

Martyrs for Keeping Faith

Emperors not only wanted to kill Christians but they also decided to destroy Christianity. So they put Christians to the torture to compel them to deny their faith (Examples from the church history: St. George, St. Mina of the miraculous deeds, St. Mercurius Abu Seifein, St. Dimyana).

Examples of those attempts

1. Threat.
2. Promises of false earthly glories.
3. Torture and repeating promises.
4. Resorting to psychological oppressions and compelling parents and relatives who were faithless to make attempts to convince the martyrs to deny faith out of pity especially by tormenting children in the sight of their mothers.

But Martyrdom was the only desire of those saints. Nobody could honor them and nothing could move them. St. Polycarp, Bishop of Izmir, when commanded to deny Christ, said, “I have been serving this Master for sixty eight years and he has been kind to me, so how can I blaspheme my king who saved me?” The Emperor ordered his soldiers to burn him but the fire surrounded him and did not harm him. A soldier stabbed him and the blood put out the fire. The people were astonished at what they saw and glorified God for the firmness of those martyrs.

Martyrs for the Creed

Persecutions continued during the fourth century owing to internal schisms inside the church. I The Arians stirred a fierce storm of persecution against the Orthodox people. George, the Arian Bishop prearranged with Sepertian to make a great massacre in Alexandria After the Arians took possession of all the Orthodox Churches, the people renowned them preferring to pray in the tombs. This heretic bishop besieged the congregation who were praying and set fire around the place. The women were slapped in the face till their faces became swollen. Men were beaten with palm leaf stalks that were full of sharp thorns. Many men died, others took a long time to heal. After the new schism in Chalcedon, Anba Macar, the old Egyptian bishop of Phau, one of the three saints Macarii, was martyred. When the king's messenger ordered him to sign the documents of the erroneous creed (the Tome of Leo), he refused to sign and encouraged the other faithful people to keep firm in faith. The messenger kicked him with his foot so violently that the man fell down dead owing to his our age. Pope Discorus was deposed and exiled. His beard was depilated and he was struck on the mouth until his teeth broke. He collected his teeth and hair, put them in a bottle, which he sent to Alexandria with a letter in which he wrote, "See how I endured for faith!"

Martyrs for Chastity

Martyrs preferred to die then to lead a defiled life. We read about a young man whom they tied to a bed and induced a woman to tempt him to sin. The young man bit his tongue and spat in her face. Seeing the blood the woman ran away in horror. We also read about St. Potamina when it was decided to porn boiling water over her naked body. She pleaded the governor saying, "By the head of the emperor whom you fear, do not allow them to strip me of the clothes but to let me got down into the fire step... by step, little... by little so that you may see the power of endurance given to me by that whom you do not know.

In the story of Perpetua's martyrdom, historians refer to the purity of those martyrs. When they threw this saint to a wild ox, which attacked her so fiercely that she fell half dead on the ground but even, in this case she did not forget to cover her body with her tom cloak.

There is an interesting story about a virgin who lived in the eighth century. The soldiers looted a convent near Akhmim in Assiut. The girl could deceive them when she said that she had a sort of oil which had magic power; it could protect them from strikes of the sword when they did not believe her, she spread some oil on her neck and asked the strongest of them to strike her neck with his sword When he did so, the soldiers realized the trick when, to their surprise, saw the girl's head cut off. It was clear that the virgin martyr insisted that she would not defile herself. The blessings of their prayers be with us all. Amen.

Activities

- Make a research about one of the martyrs. It would be better if the martyr were your church advocate or your o advocate.
- Visiting their churches, glorifying them, and drawing their icons and lighting candles before them.
- Drawing a picture of one of the heroic stories you listened to in this lesson.
- Preparing a play to be presented in the Nyrouze Celebration.

Learn the Following

- Some verses of chapter eleven of the Epistle to the Hebrews.
- The Hymn: My Coptic Church, the Church of God.

Second Week September

(2) Who are the Fathers of the Church?

References

- + “St. Ignatius” St. George, Sporting
- + “The Roman St. Clement” Fr. Tadros Yacoub
- + “The Apostolic Fathers” Translated by Bishop Ilias Moawad

The Lesson

Aim

To be familiar with the heritage and Spiritual experience of our Fathers

Prayer of the Congregation of Fathers and Saints

In the Mass we remember the names of the church fathers. The Priest says, “Graciously, O Lord, remember all the Saints who have pleased You since the beginning; Our holy fathers, the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Preachers, the Evangelists, the Martyrs, the Confessors and all the spirits of the true believers who perfected in their faith...” The church remembers her fathers in every Mass, celebrates their feasts, reads their stories from the Synaxarium and seeks their intercession. They played a heroic role in building the church and offered their life as a living model for a holy Christian life. To make the study easy, we shall divide them into categories:

1. The Apostolic Fathers.
2. The Fathers of Councils.
3. The Monk Father (e.g., Anba Anthony the Father of the Monks, Anba Pachomius founder of the Coenobitic System).
4. The Founders (The Great Teachers of the Church).

1. The Apostolic Fathers: They are the fathers who were contemporary with the Apostles and were their disciples. Among them was St. Ignatius, the bearer of the Divine, the Bishop of Antioch and St. Polycarp whom John appointed as Bishop of Izmir. Polycarp was tortured and in the end he gained the crown of martyrdom St. Clement the Bishop of Rome helped St. Paul in his preaching.

(a) St. Ignatius

It is said that when he was a child, Jesus put him in the midst of the disciples as a model of meekness. When Ignatius grew up, his love for the Lord Jesus and his faith and zeal grew and he preached the name of Christ. The apostles appointed him Bishop of the Church of Antioch.

His Zeal and Struggle

This father was known for his zeal for the church and the salvation of his people. He wrote letters to encourage the churches to stand firm in the Christian faith, which he saw, heard and received, from the apostles themselves. He could, through his good reputation, attract many heathens to the Christians faith.

His bravery and strong faith

Emperor Tragan was on his way to fight the Persians. He met Bishop Ignatius in Antioch and the following conversation ran between them:

- Are you then Ignatius the Theophorus?
- Yes I am.
- What does your name mean?
- The bearer of the Divine.
- Don't we carry our gods to grant us victory in war, too?
- How can these idols void of life be called gods?
- Do you blaspheme our gods?
- O King. Let it be known to you that God is One, the Divine Trinity. The Father who created heavens and earth, the Son of Jesus Christ who incarnated and became man to save us, and the Holy Spirit working in us. If you believe in Him you will be happy.
- Forget these words now and do what pleases me to save yourself. Offer a sacrifice to my gods and you will be granted a high status and you will be the greatest among the priests.
- May the Lord increase your riches. I am the servant and priest of my Lord Jesus Christ and I offer Him a sacrifice every day.

The king got very angry and ordered his soldiers to tie him to chains and take him to Rome where he would be thrown to the beasts in the arena to amuse the public. When the believers heard of that decision, they hurried to him to see him off with tears. On his way to Rome he went through Izmir where he met the Bishop of the city. The congregation of the churches in the vicinity came to him and asked for his blessing. He blessed them and wrote an epistle to them. The following are extracts from the epistle:

“Let your good conduct be a teaching to the hypocrite and the wicked. With love and justice you can overcome their hatred and injustice and through patience and prayers you can overcome their slander; “by being firm in faith you can overcome their unrighteousness. For Christ’s sake you should endure every loss and insult. For his sake I don’t worry about bonds but I prefer these bonds to all the treasures of the earth. Remember me in your prayers so that I may live with Him. I like to suffer for His sake so pray for me so that I may gain comfort in the House of Grace”.

Before he left for Izmir he wrote the following to the Romans:

“I am tied with chains for my love for Jesus. I do not want your love for me to cause me harm. I don’t like you to save me from death. If I am deprived of martyrdom now because of your love, gaining martyrdom later may be difficult. I desire martyrdom to show myself a Christian not in words but in action.. Let me be food for the beasts and wild animals. I pray to God and plead that

these wild animals will leave nothing of my flesh on the ground so that the remaining parts of my body may not cause suffering to anyone”.

Bravery in Martyrdom

The saint left Izmir for Rome. When he arrived in the City of Rome, the believers surrounded him. They were pleased to see him but felt sad for his martyrdom. He stretched out his hands and blessed them and prayed for the church. When he ended his prayer, the soldiers took him to the arena and threw him before two lions. The lions tore up his body and only his bones remained which were gathered by the Christians and sent to Antioch. The blessing of his prayer be with us. Amen.

Sayings to Learn

The following are some of the last words of St. Ignatius

- I am the wheat of God so the teeth of wild animals should grind me so that I may become pure bread for Christ.
- I desire martyrdom to show myself Christian not in words but in action.
- I am tied with chains to Jesus. No creature whether visible or invisible can separate me from Christ.

(b) St. Clement

He was born in Rome. He was one of the nobles. He completed his education and training in Greek. He knew Christ at the hands of St. Paul. He was contemporary with the apostles so he wrote the life history of the apostles and their struggle and what befell them at the hands of kings and governors. He preached in many cities and many people believed and received faith at his hands. Then he was ordained a Bishop of Rome. He preached the Romans and brought many people to the faith of Christ. Clement struggled for the church not only in Rome but also in all the Dioceses in the vicinity.

His Epistles

He wrote many epistles to preach people and establish them in faith, which he received from the apostles themselves. Once he heard about the schism that took place in the city of Corinth. He wrote the following to them “Modesty was your prominent virtue. You were subject to one another listening attentively to the preaching. You were keen to listen to the teaching. You used to pray for all the people forgiving one another. But now I see envy, disorder and persecution. Thus righteousness and peace are no more among you as everyone laid aside the fear of God and led the life of sin”.

Preaching in exile

King Tragan heard of him so he ordered him to be brought before him:

- Clement, do you still worship the crucified.
- Yes.
- Leave Him and come and worship our everlasting gods.
- This will never be. Can these gods of yours protect themselves if anyone thought of stealing and robbing them?

The Emperor got angry and wanted to torture him but he feared the people of the city so he ordered him to be sent into exile, to the Black Sea. When he arrived at the place he found that he Christians in exile were about two thousands. They were happy to meet him. He comforted them and established them in faith. Water was a long distance away. He prayed and the Lord guided him to a rock with a spring of water. They all drank and thanked the Lord. This made all the people there believe in Christ. When the Emperor heard of what happened he sent a letter to the governor with orders to torture the saint and kill him. The governor tied his neck in an anchor and threw him into the sea. Thus he gave up his pure spirit and gained the crown of martyrdom. The blessing of his prayer be with us. Amen.

Questions and Activities

1. How can we bear witness to Christ? Give quotations from the epistles of St. Ignatius.
2. Which virtues do you admire in the life of St. Ignatius?
3. Clement was able to glorify the Lord before Emperor Tragan and in exile. Explain.
4. Write an essay on St. Ignatius and St. Clement. Concentrate on the following points: (a) The time when each one appeared and lived, (b) The place of his service and the place of his martyrdom, (c) One of the famous sayings of each.
5. Draw a picture of St. Ignatius or St. Polycarp during martyrdom.

Third Week of September

(3) The Fathers of the Councils

References

- + “Athanasius the Apostolic” Anba Macar Monastery
- + “The Life of Athanasius the Apostolic” St. Mina Church, Shubra
- + “The Story of the Coptic Church” Part 1, Iris El Masry

The Lesson

Aim

The Role of Athanasius the Apostolic in keeping faith.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic Defender of the Orthodox Creed: His childhood

Athanasius was born in Alexandria in AD. 289, of heathen parents. His father died when he was a child. His mother brought him up. She sent him to a Christian School. One day the children were gathered to play on the seashore. Pope Alexander was watching them. The boys were acting the rituals of baptism. Every boy played his part quite well. The Patriarch called them and asked them, “What were you doing?” “We were performing the rituals of baptism. We put the suggestion of our colleague Athanasius into practice”. The Pope looked at Athanasius and realized the Spirit of love for the church in Athanasius and felt that the boy longed to be Christian.

When Athanasius was fifteen years old, his mother accompanied him to Pope Alexander and declared her desire to be baptized so he baptized her. Athanasius became a disciple to the great

scientists of that time and excelled in the church science. The Pope ordained him deacon and then archdeacon. He used to consult him about solving the theological problems. When the heresy of Arius appeared, he opposed it and fought it with faith and courage that etched his name into history.

The Heresy of Arius

Arius was a priest in Alexandria. His teaching was strange to the people. He claimed that the Son was created and that He was not the same nature of the Father. When we say that the Son of God was born before all ages, we mean that He existed before all ages and that His existence had no beginning, and that He is One with the Father in Essence, and His birth is a divine birth. His birth is likened to the rays, which are born of the sun. Begetting in God differs from human begetting because God is Spirit. In the fullness of time, He took perfect and complete manhood and appeared to us. He was born of the Virgin. Although His birth in flesh was at a certain time, His Hypostatic birth of the Father was before ages and has no beginning as St. John the Evangelist says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:1,14).

What did the Church do to Arius?

318 bishops assembled in the City of Nicene in Asia Minor in response to an invitation directed to them by Emperor Constantine the Great, to clarify and set the foundations of the sound Orthodox Faith. Discussions were held between Arius and Athanasius, the Deacon. Athanasius dumbfounded Arius by his sharp, clear and sound evidence about Godhead. Then the Orthodox Creed was set and Arius was excommunicated because he denied the Godhead of the Son.

Athanasius the Patriarch

When Athanasius attended the Council of Nicene, he was a young Deacon and was an assistant to the Patriarch. This shows that grace filled his life. After the departure of Pope Alexander to Paradise, his disciple and deacon Anba Athanasius was seated on St. Mark's chair. Peace spread in the church for a short time. Arius was able to convince the Emperor to accept him. The Emperor sent a message to the Pope bidding him to readmit Arius into his communion. St. Athanasius refused the Emperor's demand saying, "The man who has been deposed by an ecumenical council cannot obtain absolution unless another ecumenical council permits that absolution after the members of the Council become sure of his true repentance and his sound creed". The Emperor was very angry with the Pope so the Pope met him without delay and informed him of what really happened and the emperor was convinced.

A Struggle between Truth and Falsehood

The Arians were still making trouble. They conspired against Athanasius and convinced the emperor that Athanasius should be banished. They assembled a Council against Pope Athanasius. They accused him of false charges. They said that he was not loyal to the State and that he had killed Bishop Arsanius. The Arians asked Bishop Arsanius to hide himself and not to appear in public but the Bishop's conscience awoke so he met the Emperor's deputy and informed him of the conspiracy. The Council assembled and as soon as the session was held, one of them stood up and showed the audience a human arm accusing the Pope of murder. Suddenly Athanasius was a murderer?

The wicked struggled bitterly against Athanasius because he stuck to the truth and never submitted to the evil powers. The Arians tried to defame the Pope in several Councils and bring several accusations against him. They accused him of interfering with the shipment of Corn from Egypt to the Emperor. The emperor was filled with anger and banished Athanasius to Treve. He received a hearty welcome and many people became his friends. The time of his exile was a suitable chance for him to preach to the Europeans who through him knew the Egyptian Monasticism. In Treve, St. Athanasius wrote the story of St. Anthony.

Arius returned to Alexandria but the people of Alexandria refused to meet him and were about to revolt against him. To avoid the people's revolution, the governor of Alexandria sent Arius back to the Emperor in Constantinople hoping that the emperor would force the Pope to readmit Arius. The Pope prayed to God. He prayed that God would keep Arius away from the Church of God so that he might not see Arius the heretic praying inside the church. When the day came for Arius to enter the church, he was suddenly taken ill and his illness was so fatal that he died at once "Evil shall slay the wicked; and those who hate the righteous will be condemned" (Psalm 34:21).

This event changed the Emperor's attitude towards the Pope, so when the Emperor was on his deathbed, he recommended that the Pope would return to his throne. When the people of Alexandria heard of the return of their Pope, their happiness was beyond description. They rejoiced at seeing him and the Pope received a warm welcome. The Arians were not pleased with what happened so their grudge, spite and intrigues against Athanasius did not come to an end. Athanasius fought them and suffered a lot in his struggle for the sound faith and when they said to him; "The world is against you, Athanasius" he replied, "And I am against the world".

After a long hard struggle for the faith, the Arians were weakened and before his death, Athanasius saw the fruit of his suffering and struggle. All matters were settled, people became quiet and the foundations of faith were established in the churches. All this was the result of his sweat, tears, struggle and pains. Athanasius the Apostolic was a chosen vessel for bearing witness, so he deserved to be called "The Apostolic" as he bore witness for Christ in the same way as the saintly apostles did. The writings and sermons that Athanasius left for the church are so important that they are considered a valuable treasure for the church. The most important of his writings is his Apology Against the Heathen and the Creed, which we recite in our churches and a great number of dogmatic writings, some of them have been translated into Arabic and the other writings are still read, in foreign languages in a group of books under the title "The Fathers of Nicene".

Questions and Activities

1. Imagine what would have happened if Arius had succeeded in spreading his teachings and preaching.
2. Speak briefly about the conflict that took place between Athanasius and the Arians.
3. Make a wall sheet about the Defender of the Faith and draw his famous picture.

Exercises

1. Let this saint be your intercessor in your daily prayers.
2. Train yourself to be firm in bearing witness to truth and do not be afraid of people when

you defend truth because the Lord Christ says, “for this reason I came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth”.

3. Refrain from telling lies and from desire and fear, which are against faith, because they weaken the Christian when he bears witness to truth.
4. Show how St. Anthony affected St. Athanasius the Apostolic.

Fourth Week of September

(4) The Great Teachers of the Church

References

- + “St. Discorus” Anba Gregory
- + “St. John Chrysostom” Fr. Minassa Yohanna
- + “St. John Chrysostom” Fr. Tadros Yacoub
- + “The Story of the Coptic Church” Part 2, Iris El Masry
- + Other books about sermons of St. John Chrysostom, his comments and interpretations of the Bible.

The Lesson

Aim

Being acquainted with the pillars of the Christian Theological Thought.

Introduction

The following are the life history of four great saintly church fathers. Their life and teachings played a vital role in the church growth. These saints are:

1. St. John Chrysostom the Patriarch of Constantinople.
2. The three great fathers:
 - a. St. Basil the Great
 - b. St. Gregory theologian
 - c. St. Discorus.

1. St. John Chrysostom (347-407)

St. John Chrysostom was the Patriarch of Constantinople was famous for his sermons and wonderful teachings so he deserved the title of “Chrysostom” (Golden Mouth). He was born of a rich family in the city of Antioch. After his father’s death, his mother brought him up. She taught him the holy Scriptures and instructed him in sciences and he grew in grace and virtue. He spent two years in the legal profession defending the oppressed with great skill and proficiency. When he was twenty-five years old, he went to one of the monasteries. He lived as an anchorite in a cell. As an ascetic he led a life of severe self-discipline and the result was that he was taken ill so he went back to Antioch and there he began to preach with rare eloquence. People came in great numbers to listen to him and called him, “Chrysostom”. Then he was ordained a Patriarch. He was a good example for his people. He was an ascetic who used to wear rough clothes and distribute his money among the needy and visit the sick people and those who were in prison. He

established hospitals, houses for strangers and many orphanages.

Because of his courage, gallantry and boldness in bearing witness to the truth he reproached Queen Aphdokia for her evil actions so her heart became filled with anger, and hostility so she conspired against him to get rid of him. The Emperor sent him into exile. When the natives heard the news, they were deeply excited and filled with anger. Some of them delivered fiery sermons saying, “Waves attacked us and a dangerous hurricane struck us, but we are not afraid, let the waves rise up to the sky for they will never break the ship. Let’s have a firm belief. Let’s stand firm without fear because God is with us. He is my staff, keeper, guard and shelter; if the whole world is against me, my heart will remain with my savior”.

After he had left the city, an earthquake took place so the empress shook with fear and she sent him back. After a short time she sent him into exile in Mount “Kukaz” where he suffered from a lot of pains but his zeal for the church remained inflamed and he wrote to one of his priests saying, “If you see the Sea of Persecution in a state of agitation, keep calm and do not neglect anything that you have committed yourself to; destroy the pagan buildings and establish the church and be concerned with the salvation of the souls”.

Because of the bad treatment he received from his guards, he died in his exile leaving a wonderful heritage of sermons and sayings to the church.

Thirty-one year after his death, his bones were carried to Constantinople in a splendid procession.

The characters of this great saint is characterized by his wonderful enlightenment in interpreting the Holy Scriptures and his rare talent in preaching and teaching. He is distinguished among the hermits, the worshippers and the ascetics who refrain from the pleasures of the world His character is like a high mountain in the way he bore witness, in his great courage and commitment to the truth before any person whomever he is. He was a man who never feared and never desired anything.

2. St. Basil The Great

St. Basil the great is the writer of the Liturgy of St. Basil. He is one of the three leading Cappadocian Fathers. Basil was born in Caesarea in A.D. 329. He pursued his classical studies in the institutions of Caesarea and Athens. He was endowed many certificates. In Athens he met with his intimate friend St. Gregory the theologian who led the same life of asceticism. He organized the monastic life by setting rules for prayer, work, study and guidance so that his companions might follow them. He formed groups of nuns under the leadership of his sister St. Macrina.

He made a masterful defense against Arianism before Emperor Valens. He used to leave his solitary spot for Caesarea to resist the teachings of Arius. He established a charity institution to help the poor, healed the sick and comfort travelers and the poor. When he became famous, he was ordained Archbishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia. Christians at that time suffered from afflictions and persecution, which were aroused against them by the Arian Emperor Valens. St. Basil remained firm. He encouraged his people to remain firm in faith and heroically defended

the Orthodox creed. The

Emperor threatened to confiscate his possessions, to send him into exile, to torture him and murder him. The Saint replied that none of these threats could frighten him as he had nothing to be confiscated except some of his clothes and some books... As for exile, the saint said that, to him, all the land was a house of sojourn. As for torture, he said that it could not frighten a body that had already died. As for death, he said that it was a friend, which would come to accompany him on his final journey to the true homeland. The emperor sent him into exile and arranged that the order should be carried out by night to avoid the danger of the people's revolt. A carriage was waiting for him at the door and suddenly the decree of exile was annulled because Valens' only son was suddenly taken ill and his illness was serious. His mother believed that his illness was because of sending the saint into exile so she sent a letter to the saint asking him to pray for the child. The Saint prayed for the child and the child restored his health.

In 370 he was heard while raising his prayers to God saying, "In your hands I place my soul" and soon that great soul departed. The voice of the people weeping was louder than the religious hymns. The saint was buried in Caesarea and joined his fathers. The saint wrote many important books, the most important of them all is the liturgy known as the Liturgy of St. Basil, which is used in our churches.

1. St. Gregory

St. Gregory, the Speaker of Divinity, is the writer of the Liturgy of St. Gregory, which is sometimes used in our churches, the whole of it or some parts of it... He is one of the three famous and leading Cappadocian Fathers. This saint was born in Cappadocia. He came from a rich, pious and religious family. His mother was a good example of piety. When her son was still in her womb, she devoted him to God. Gregory was brought up in a Christian family from which he received the principles of the sound Orthodox faith.

In Athens he led the life of fellowship together with his intimate friend Basil. They were partners in the unity of the soul. It was said that they were one mind in two bodies. The saint said that when he was a young lad he saw two beautiful maidens in white in a dream. One of them said to him, "I am chastity" and the other said, "I am wisdom". Then the two girls said that they were Perpetually standing before the throne of Christ. When the saint awoke he felt a great love for chastity and that love was deeply rooted in his heart and remained with him all his life. St. Gregory is a good model for the ascetic worshipper and wonderful example of the minister who is filled with grace. At the same time, he is a wonderful pattern of a saint who experienced two types of life; the life of contemplation and reclusion and the life of religious service in the world. When he became well known, he was ordained bishop. Arianism spread in his time so he went on preaching and teaching. He struggled hard till the banner of the Orthodox Creed was hoisted high. He played a vital role in confirming faith in the Holy Trinity.

Through his capacity, love, purity and modesty he showed people how important the life of holiness is. He was given the title of "Theologian" because of his unique ability in interpreting the Holy Trinity. He left us a valuable treasure of writings about Theology and they are characterized by preciseness and spiritual depth. The most important of them all is the Liturgy of St. Gregory.

4. St. Discorus

He was the Patriarch of Alexandria and one of the leading heroes of faith. The name of this hero has a sweet sound as his name is accompanied with holy zeal for the Orthodox faith and sticking to the Father's Creed. He was St. Cyril's disciple. St. Cyril was known as the pillar of the sound religion. St. Discorus was chosen to be Patriarch of Alexandria in AD 444 after the death of St. Cyril. It was a troublous period because of the spread of heresies especially the heresy of Nestor.

Emperor Theodosius asked him to assemble a council in Ephesus in AD 449 to look into the complaint submitted by Eutyches who made a petition to the emperor that his case should be re-examined after the Patriarch of Constantinople had excommunicated him because of his heresy. St. Discorus presided the Second Council of Ephesus to discuss and judge Eutyches who claimed that the divine nature absorbed the human one in the Incarnate Christ and manhood was totally lost. Eutyches gave up his heresy before the Council so the members of the Council accepted and readmitted him, but once more he preached his heretical ideas so the saints excommunicated him.

The Roman Bishop, Leo had sent a letter with his deputies to the Bishop of Constantinople. The letter was known as Leo's Tome. In his letter Leo wrote, "Indeed, Christ came, God and Man, the first fascinated us with miraculous deeds and the other was despised". This letter was not read to the council. So the Bishop of Rome began to attack Discorus because his letter was not given due consideration. He made many attempts to assemble a council and at last he could assemble a counter council in the days of Emperor Marcianus. In this Council the deputies of Rome demanded that Leo's Tome should be read but Discorus refused their proposal because Leo's Tome was full of heretical ideas. They rebelled against him and demanded that he should be banished. The sessions of the Council were postponed and the Roman deputies held a session. In that session they planned to prevent Discorus from attending the session by force and put him in custody. They decided to excommunicate him and send him into exile.

The emperor exiled Discorus in Gangra in Paphlognia on the southern side of the Black Sea where he suffered from ill treatment and persecutions. He sent letters to his bishops saying; "We should bear all this with courage for the sake of the sound Orthodox Creed and faith". The people remained firm in the Orthodox faith and suffered from the brutal military force of the empire, which took the form of a series of bloody massacre where many were martyred for their Orthodox faith and St. Discorus died because of the cruelty and violence he suffered in his exile.

Activities

1. Make a wall chart and write in it the wise sayings of the great teachers of the church as well as a summary of their life and works.
2. With the help of your teachers investigate why the Orthodox Church opposed the Eutychean creed.
3. Study by heart some prayers from the Liturgy of St. Basil and the Liturgy of St. Gregory. Ask the church Psalmist to hand you the most important hymns of each mass.

First Week of October

(5) The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist: The Commandment of the Lord

References

- + “The Spiritual Values in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist” Anba Gregory
- + “The Seven Sacraments” Archdeacon Habeeb Girgis

The Lesson

Aim

Emphasizing the Importance of this Holy Sacrament and being well prepared to receive it.

Introduction

At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry he paved the way for people to accept the Bread of Life. After He had performed the miracle of feeding and satisfying five thousand men with five loaves and two fish and after the people had been filled with admiration for that miraculous deed, the Lord wanted to draw the people’s attention to the true miracle for which he came, died and rose from the dead so he said to them, “Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for the meat which endures into everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give to you for him has God the Father sealed “ (John 6:27).

The Jews began to murmur against him because he said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven” and said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, I came down from heaven” (John 6:42). But the Lord Jesus had previously emphasized that He is the Bread of Life and “If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever and the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51).

This started an angry argument among them “The Jews therefore strove among themselves. How can this man give his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, “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 that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him” (John 6:54,55).

Many of His disciples, when they heard it said, “This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? After this many of His disciples drew back and no longer went about with him” (John 6:60,66).

He gave them the Order during the Last Supper

On Maundy Thursday when the Lord made the Passover and after making it, “He rose from supper, laid aside His garments, and girded Himself with a towel. Then He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet” (John 13:4,5).

St. Paul tells us about what he received from the Lord about His Divine Commandment, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said: This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also the cup, after supper,

saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me for as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

This commandment was given to the apostles to practice this Divine Sacrament and all the believers should partake of it so that Christ would be our salvation, our life and our resurrection. The person, who does not obey the Lord's Commandment and refrain from receiving Communion for a long time, cuts himself off from the holy fellowship and the Holy Communion and becomes disobedient to the Commandment of God who gave that Sacrament to all believers.

Why did the Lord give His Body and Blood?

1. *With the sacrament of Eucharist we attain forgiveness of sins:* The Lord Himself said about His Body, "This is my body, which is broken for you and is given for you for forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, 1 Corinthians 11). He is the unlimited expiation of the cross, which exists and extends through the ages.

In the prayers of the Holy Mass, the priest prays: "Permit, O Lord, that this sacrifice for the sins and ignorance of your people will be acceptable unto You"... and after bowing down and the invocation of the Holy Spirit (The Epiclesis) the priest prays: "Permit, O our Master, that we shall be worthy to partake of Your holy Body and Honored Blood for the purification of our souls, bodies and Spirits". The first sin of Adam, which we inherit, is forgiven through baptism and the sin that we practice with our own will or in our weakness is forgiven through repentance and through our being united with the glorified sacrifice of the Golgotha set on the holy altar.

2. *Through the mystery of Oblation We Unite with Christ and attain the power of His death and resurrection:* Through the Sacrament of Eucharist we unite with Christ; we eat Him and He abides in us and we abide in Him. and as the branch of a vine is joined to the tree by the juice coming to it from the origin (the trunk), the same is true with us, when we receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, we abide in Him and unite with Him. The more a believer receives the Holy Communion, the more he receives the gift of unity with the Lord according to the Lord's promise: "We will come to him and make our home with him". Step by step, the heart glows with bright light and the Lord reveals His glory and reveals Himself to the believer who unites with His Body and His Blood and through this unity, the believer feels the power of the Lord's resurrection... according to the words of Paul the apostle: "I have been crucified with Christ" and rise with him according to the words of the apostle of Struggle: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of the God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem said: "Through Communion we become one body and one blood with Christ. In this way we bear Christ in us as His Body and Blood go through our members and fill them and thus we become partakers of the Divine Nature as Peter the apostle says (2 Peter 1:4).

Questions

1. How did the Lord Jesus prepare the minds of the apostles for receiving the Holy Eucharist?
2. Why were the words of Christ about his Holy Body and Blood too difficult for the Jews

to understand?

3. What did the Lord say on the night of the last supper?
4. What is the relation between the mystery of Eucharist and the remission of sins?
5. "Through the Holy Oblation we unite with the Lord" What does this statement mean?
6. How can we attain the power of the Lord's death and resurrection?
7. Why is one who does not receive communion mistaken?

Discussion

- A non-orthodox young man may ask you and say: "It is better for us to feed on Christ through the Gospel and prayers only", what will you say to him according to your study of the Lord's commandment concerning the mystery of Eucharist?
- Try to read the Coptic Liturgy to increase your knowledge of the spiritual blessing granted to us in the mystery of fellowship.
- Go to confession and receive communion once every two weeks so that you may grow in grace and become a living member in the church of God.

Activities

- Quote all what is written in the Liturgy about the benefits of the oblation and contemplate the meaning of each benefit.
- Go to the Holy Mass with these spiritual meanings, which you read and record your contemplations later on.
- Accompany some of your colleagues to the church and urge them to go to confession and to receive the Holy Communion and tell them that the commandments of the Lord should be obeyed. Isn't it a shameful conduct to play leaving the Holy Sacrifice of the Lord when it is offered to us?
- Be prepared to receive the Holy Communion. Go to confession. Examine yourself. Prepare your heart to receive this mystery.

Recitation

+ 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

Second Week of October

(6) The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist: The Heavenly Congregation

References

- + "The Spirituality of the Liturgy" Anba Mattaus
- + The Holy Liturgy and hymn books
- + "The Epsalmody and the Psalms of Canonical hours

The Lesson

Aim

Feeling the presence of the Congregation of Saints in the Divine Mass.

Introduction

The mystery of Eucharist is a fellowship between the visible church and the invisible church between those who still struggle and those who have been perfect in faith...If we believe that the Lord Christ is present in person on the altar, we have also to believe that the angels and the archangels are standing around Him. There are many mass prayers that refer to the heavenly fellowship.

- In the Liturgy at St. Basil, the priest addresses the Lord by saying: “Around You stand the Cherubim full of eyes and the six winged Seraphim, praising continuously without ceasing saying: Holy, Holy, Holy, is Lord of hosts heaven and earth are full of Your Holy Glory”.
- In the Annual Espasmas Watis, the deacon says: “Blessed is he who comes unto the Lord to sing praises with angels and archangels saying: Holy, Holy, Holy, Verily You are O Lord Halleluiah, Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. With the Cherubim we send our praises and hymns: Holy, holy, holy, verily You are O Lord Halleluiah... The heaven rejoiced and the earth was glad and the Cherubim extended their wings and shouted three times: Holy, holy, holy verily You are O Lord, Halleluiah”.

Taking Part in Commemorating the Saints

In the Divine Mass: There are prayers that show the fellowship of the believers and those who departed and all the spirits of true believers who perfected their faith. The church raises the prayers of the Mass to seek the Lord’s mercy for those who departed. The church intercedes with the Lord on their behalf and entreats Him to show mercy to them for any remissness or negligence on their part as human beings and to forgive the small sins they committed in their weakness (1 John 5:16,17).

In the veil prayer of the Liturgy of St. Gregory, the priest says: “Grant that I may be worthy to stand before your holy altar without being driven into condemnation, and offer You the reasonable, bloodless sacrifice with clear conscience for the forgiveness of my sins and pitfalls and the ignorance of your people. Grant our fathers and brothers who departed in the Orthodox faith... repose their souls in the paradise of Delight.

In the Commemoration prayer in the Liturgy of St. Basil we read: “As decreed by Your Only Begotten Son, O Lord, we ought to take part in commemoration of Your saints. Graciously, O Lord, remember all the saints who have pleased You since the beginning. Our Holy fathers, the Patriarchs, the prophets, the Apostles, the Preachers, the Evangelists, the Martyrs, the Confessors and all the spirits of the righteous who perfected in the Faith. Be mindful also, O Lord, of all those who departed and reposed in their priesthood and those among the laities. Vouchsafe, O Lord, to repose all their souls in the bosoms of our saintly fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... Those whose names we mentioned and those whom we didn’t mention, each one separately; those of whom each of us thought and those who are not related to us; those who departed and reposed in the Faith of Christ... Those whose souls You have taken to You, O Lord, repose them in the Paradise of delight, in the region of the living forever, in the heavenly Jerusalem, and in that appointed place”.

In the mystery of Eucharist: the existing fellowship of the living and the departed is

emphasized. After the priest raises the Commemoration prayer, he raises a prayer with humbleness and contrition, feeling that the militant church carries out the commandment of Christ when she intercedes for the departed saints... but we feel that we are not worthy of that fellowship. The priest says: "Lord, we are not worthy to intercede for their blessedness, but that they, standing beside the judgment seat of Your Only Begotten Son. May in their turn intercede for our weakness and our misery. Forgive our sins for the sake of their holy petitions, and for the sake of your blessed name".

Thus heaven and earth are joined in one harmonious unit and unreserved fellowship.. In heaven, the hosts of angels sing hymns and our fathers who perfected their faith pray for us to that we may perfect our faith. The militant church intercedes for them as she intercedes with their prayers. In the middle of this holy unit, the church specifies a unique place for the Lady Virgin the Mother of the Lord, St. Mary as her name is mentioned in inaudible and public prayers and certain passages of hymns sung in the church are specified for her. The priest offers incense before her icon. This he does several times during the Divine Mass... as he has grace in the eyes of the Lord God and it is He who chose her and filled her with every heavenly gift, the Holy Spirit rested on her, and purified her, and the Son, the Word descended and took flesh through her. She is like us. She knows that we are weak so she raises supplications and intercessions to her beloved Son for us all.

Contemplation and a Topic for Study and Discussion

The militant church joints with the triumphant church through:

1. Prayers that are raised by the believers for them.
2. Prayers in which the believers intercede with the prayers of the heavenly dwellers.
3. Melodies and hymns through which they honor the heavenly hosts and the righteous saints.
4. Icons that are put in a certain place in the church that can be seen by all and incense is to be offered to it.
5. Raising incense then mentioning their intercessions indicating that their prayers are the sweet smelling incense, which John saw in the Book of Revelation before the Throne of God and His holy altar.
6. Reading their history in the Synaxarium, holding masses in the days bearing the memory of their departure or martyrdom, and devoting certain days each month for Angel Michael and Virgin Mary (The 12th day of each Coptic month is Angel Michael's Day, and the 21st of each Coptic month is the Day of St. Mary the Mother of God).

Activities

1. Light a candle before the icon of Virgin Mary and another taper before the icon of the church saint.
2. Interceding with saints and angels during the Holy Mass and in private prayers.
3. Attend the church celebrations specified for the saints and attend those masses.
4. Remember your neighbors and relatives who departed and entreat the Lord to grant them comfort. Write their names for the priest to put them on the altar and mention them after the Commemorations prayer.

Questions

1. Why does the church mention the names of the departed during the mass?
2. Why does the church mention the names of angels and archangels and the saints especially St. Mary the Virgin, in her prayers and liturgies.
3. Where does the church honor saints and pray for them in the Divine Mass?

Recitation

1. Study the Intercession for the deceased.
2. Study the prayer: “May their holy blessing be with us” in Coptic and in Arabic.

Third Week of October

(7) The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist: Praise and Thanksgiving in the Eucharist

References

- + “The Spirituality of the hymn of praise” Anba Mettaus
- + The daily hymn and the psalms of the hours

The Lesson

Aim

Concentrating on hymns as a preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist

Singing hymns and preparing the soul to receive the king

The church has been established on earth to praise her King, Savior and Bridegroom. We give thanks for His grace. We remember his good things that he gives us. We glorify his holy name... Since the apostolic age, the believers have been accustomed to gathering as one soul to raise hymns of praise to the Lord joyfully and with a heart full of rejoice. Singing hymns of praise has been connected with practicing the Sacraments especially the Sacrament of Eucharist since the time of the early church. The church spent most of her time singing hymns and raising prayers to prepare the souls to receive the power of grace that lies in the sacraments.

Because of the important and great place of the sacrament of Eucharist, the church is spiritually prepared for it one day before it is practiced by reading the texts of the evening, the psalms and morning readings and hymns. Our fathers the saints used to spend the whole night from evening prayer till the morning the next day in prayers and thanksgiving. In the early morning, those who were inflamed with the spirit of prayer and hymns were qualified to participate in the prayers of the Divine Mass.

This hymn singing is the service performed by angels and heavenly hosts and through it we are considered heavenly humans or angels on earth... It is this service of praise that will remain with us in Heavenly Jerusalem so it is important to prepare ourselves for that.

Hymns of Praise in the Sacrament of Eucharist

- When St. John was taken up to heaven to see the church of the first fruit, he heard the

hymns of praise and the service that is practiced in Heaven: “Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures, and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice: Worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying: To Him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever” (Revelations 5:11-13).

- This pleasing fact that John had seen and heard is the Eternity, which we shall live when the Lord grants us to rule with. As the Eucharist sacrifice is the visible image of the Heavenly Celebration and the Heavenly Service, the church arranged that the prayers of the mass should be filled with spiritual and warm hymns. There is the evening hymn, which the people sing sweetly (Psalm 116). There is also the fourth “hose” (a Coptic word meaning singing hymns) where the church sings Psalms 148, 149, 150: “Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise Him in the heights. Praise Him all his angels. Praise Him all His hosts. Praise Him sun and moon. Praise Him all you shining stars. Praise Him you highest heaven... etc”. There are many sweet and beautiful hymns (Review the Book of the Holy Psalmody and study these wonderful hymns with your teacher. They are sweet in weir tunes and deep in their meanings).
- There is also the midnight hymns, which starts with: “Rise O Children of light. Let us praise the Lord of Hosts so that he may grant us the salvation of our souls”.
- There are the long hymns of the Mass such as Holy...Holy, Rejoice O Mary, O Lord the God of Hosts, The Cherubim Worship You, The Psalm of the Holy Communion, Praise God in all His Saints, etc.
- That who enters the church and sees the deacons singing hymns of praise with one soul and one heart in the church feels that his heart is taken up to heaven “When we stand to pray we are counted with those standing in heaven”.

Thanksgiving in the Eucharist

- The Sacrament of Eucharist is the Sacrament of praise and the deep love for God. It is also called the Sacrament of Thanksgiving because when the Lord Jesus took bread in His pure hands, He thanked, blessed, divided and gave...
- And because the believers, regardless of how holy they are, they are not worthy of becoming servants of God, but the Lord made them His beloved children, He gave them the right to partake of His holy body and blood.
- This rich grace (abundant grace) is the greatest gift granted to man by God. That is why this sacrament is called the Sacrament of Thanksgiving.
- There are many Thanksgiving prayers in the holy mass (refer to the Euchologium “Liturgy Book” to select them and recite them in your prayer). We refer to the prayer of Thanksgiving, which the priest begins, the Holy Liturgy: “We thank the beneficent and merciful God”. There is also the prayer of fraction and also: “Let us give thanks to God, Almighty the Father of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. For He has made us worthy, to stand in this holy place and raise our hands and serve His Holy Name. Let us ask Him also, to make us worthy to share and offer His Divine and immortal mysteries”.
- We thank God because it is He who, through the sacrament of Eucharist, gave us:
 - Abiding in Him and being united with Him: “He who eats My flesh and drinks

- My blood, abides in Me and I in him” (John 6:56).
- Growth in grace and the eternal life: “He who eats this bread will live for ever” (John 6:58).
 - He grants us the guarantee of life and the glorious resurrection, “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54).

For this reason, the priest in his inaudible prayer after the communion says: “Our mouths are filled with joy and our tongues with rejoice after partaking, O Lord, of Your Holy and Immortal Sacraments. We thank You O Lord for all Your gifts... you are worthy of every glory, honor, and grandeur forever. Amen”.

Questions

1. Show the importance of praise as a preparation for the mystery of Eucharist.
2. Show the importance of singing praises through the practice of the Sacrament of Eucharist.
3. Why is the Sacrament of Eucharist called the Sacrament of “Thanksgiving”?

Activities

- From the Euchologium quote the prayers of praise and the prayers of thanksgiving and contemplate them and recite some of them.
- Prepare yourself for receiving the Holy Communion by prayers and praising the Lord so when you enter the church you can sing praises with those who sing hymns inside the church.
- Keep away from literal forms, suspicion and routine when you sing hymns of praise. Always lift up your heart to God in praising the Lord with the spirit of thanksgiving and internal rejoice.

Fourth Week October

(8) The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in everyday life

References

- + “Christ the whole universe” Anba Bemin
- + “How to benefit from the Divine Mass” Anba Mettaus
- + “Interpretation of the rites of the Coptic church mass” Fr. Marcos Daoud

The Lesson

Aim

Being prepared for attending the Divine Mass and preserving the grace granted in it.

Prepare yourself during the week to attend the Mass

Meeting a great king needs great preparations. The same thing is true in the Sacrament of Eucharist... our meeting with the Lord needs a great preparation. The church arranged many long

prayers starting from the previous night to prepare man to practice the Thanksgiving sacrament. A believer must be aware of the importance of that preparation. His heart should be kept in a state of continuous thanksgiving prayer singing hymns of praise, worship and repentance and in doing this, he will deserve the revelation of God to him in the Divine Mass. The question the priest directs to the people at the beginning of the Mass is, "Lift up your hearts (Where are your hearts?)" and the people shout saying: "They are with the Lord". This questions and this answer needs preparation on the part of the believer for the whole previous days so that he may be able to tell the truth when he answers the priest.

Dangers of Individualism

- The Divine Mass is the practice of the unity of believers and supporting the membership of every member in the One body so through communion the egoism in each individual is no more and all melt in one crucible to take on new form... the body of Christ: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are on body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17).
- Each believer is a living member in that Body. He has his character and characteristics and all the members work together in harmony and conformity without contradiction or conflict "As it is, there are many parts, yet one body... If one suffers all suffer together, if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:20,26).
- The Divine Mass is the only church stronghold which grants her unity of the soul, thought and heart and the love of which the Savior speaks, which, in its turn, is the only stronghold against heretics and deviations of mind and body and partialities. The believer needs to re-examine himself before he goes to mass lest he should not be on good terms with any one: "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mathew 5:23,24). And lest he should be selfish keeping away from the spirit of the believers not sharing them their hymns, prayers and interest... Such individuality hinders testing the Eucharist in the heart of the believer as the Sacrament of fellowship and holy unity and a person with a defiled body cannot share this fellowship.

Rejoice in the Lord

The first fruit of the Holy communion is the internal rejoice. Believers in the Apostolic age were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit because they continuously broke bread and kept praying, lived in fellowship and listened to the preaching of the apostles. This joy fills the hearts of the believers and is revealed by their faces. If a believer is keen to keep joy and internal peace in his heart, the effectiveness of Eucharist will work with him and in him all the daylong.

Keeping the Promise

- In the Divine Mass, the priest recites the words of the Lord Christ to His disciples when He gave them the Holy Body and Blood, "For every time you eat this Bread, and drink of this cup you proclaim My death, confessing My Resurrection and remembering Me till I come back".
- A true believer always keeps this covenant and keeps the promise he undertakes in the church when he says with the people, "Amen, Amen, Amen Your death, O Lord, we proclaim. Your Holy Resurrection and Ascension we confess. We praise You. We bless

You. We thank You, O Lord, and we entreat You, O our God”.

- Continuous preaching in the Name of Christ whether through our meek behavior or our service of others confirms the effectiveness of the Sacrament in us, the confession of His Holy Resurrection in our behavior, and through Christ and with His help we can overcome our instincts and sexual desires.
- Christ granted us power with which we can overcome our instincts and sexual desires. He granted us power with which we can overcome the desire of the flesh and this indicates the effectiveness of the Mass in us.
- Thus live the believers who always attend the masses, who always long for coming of God and who always expect His coming. Perpetual spiritual longing and looking up to heaven and the expectation of His coming to us or our going to Him are all signs on the road that emphasize the truth of the effectiveness of the mass in us. The more we eat of the holy banquet the more we change and renew ourselves... so that we may live the life of Christ who is risen from the dead.

Prayers of the final blessing

The priest raises these prayers after the communion for the continuation of the work of the Holy Sacrament in them and in their daily life: “Dwell, O Lord, in them; walk among them, aid them in every vile and earthly thought. Grant them to live and think of what is pertaining to the living and understanding of things Divine... May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us. O Lord save your people...bless your heritage...care for them and support them forever. In this way the effectiveness of the sacrament extends in us to renew our life and behavior in our daily life.

Questions

1. How should I prepare myself for attending the Mass?
2. How can I keep and preserve the grace of the mass in my life?
3. What is the relation between the mass and my personal life?
4. What is the relation between the mass and my social relations with others?
5. What are the signs that the grace of the mass works in me?
6. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ in me”. Explain and show how I can test this through the Mass.

Activities

1. Explain the self in the light of the meanings mentioned especially holiness, love, resisting individuality, rejoice in the Lord and waiting for and expecting his Second Coming.
2. Train yourself on preserving the grace of the mass.
3. Spend the night before going to the Divine mass in seclusion as much as you can especially during holidays.
4. Make a chart or a poster full of contemplations, pictures, and tests of the spiritual meaning of the Sacrament of Eucharist in our life. A group of colleagues can take part in it.

Spiritual Exercises

1. Receiving Communion and true repentance. Always do that.
2. The effectiveness of the mass should be reflected in your daily life: Love for all purity of

- the members, praise and holy hymns, worship and thanksgiving to the Lord.
3. Keeping away from bad company. Do not imitate them in their behavior or customs as a proof of the effectiveness of the mass in our life.

Recitation

One of the intercessions of the mass or one of the hymns of the mass.

First Week of November

(9) The Coming of the Savior

References

- + “The Divine Incarnation” St. George Church, Sporting
- + “The Word Incarnation” Translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud

The Lesson

Aim

The blessing of the Incarnation.

Question: Why did Christ incarnate and what are the blessings of the Incarnation?

Answer: The Lord Christ was born of the Holy Spirit and of St. Mary the Virgin to remove the fall of man and abolish the punishment and because the sin is indefinite, so for man to be delivered there must be a limitless ransom. Therefore, the blessing of Incarnation can be summarized as:

1. The Incarnation of Christ shows God’s love for man: “For God, so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
2. Through Incarnation the Lord became closer to man (Emmanuel = God with us). God became in us and we in Him. God is no longer far away from man but He is light dwelling in man: “If a man loves me, he will keep my word and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23).
3. Incarnation defined the nature of man. The Lord came down to the earth to lift us up to heaven. We no longer live according to the fallen nature (The Ancient Man) but according to the New man granted to us by the second birth; i.e. through Baptism.

Questions: Speak briefly of Christ’s nativity and His childhood.

Answer: The angel brought good news to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph in the city of Nazareth and she accepted the good news saying: “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word” (Luke 1:38).

1. The virgin hurried to serve Elizabeth and there she said her famous hymn: “My soul

magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior..." (Luke 1:46-55).

2. In those days a decree went out that all the world should be enrolled, so the virgin was obliged to travel to Bethlehem...and there the birth pains occurred to her and she gave to her baby in a manger. The heaven rejoiced because of this great event and the angels brought good news to the shepherds saying: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).
3. Wise men from the east came following the star thinking that Christ was born in Herod's place... but the star guided them to Bethlehem and the humble baby, so they offered him gold, frankincense and myrrh.
4. On the 8th day, the virgin offered her baby to be circumcised and on the 40th day she entered with Him to the temple to offer a sacrifice... and Simon the elder took the baby up in his arms joyfully and said, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to Your word; for mine eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:29,30).
5. The Lord's angel ordered Joseph to take the boy and His mother and flee to Egypt from the face of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Out of Egypt have I called my Son" (Matthew 2:15).
6. When Jesus was twelve years old, the virgin found Him among the elders asking them and answering their questions and they were amazed, and Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52).

Question: Speak about the mission of John the Baptist.

Answer: Zechariah the priest was John the Baptist's father. John's mother Elizabeth was barren. The Baptist was born by a promise and he was filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb. His mission was to prepare the way for Christ and to urge men to repent for the forgiveness of their sins: "Make straight the way of the Lord" and to make ready for the Lord and people prepared.

1. John baptized people in the Jordan for the forgiveness of sins and he said: "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none". He said to the tax collectors and the soldiers: "Collect no more than is appointed you. Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:11-14).
2. John came to bear witness to Christ. He said: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Question: Why is the Epiphany Feast called the Feast of the Divine Appearance?

Answer: On that Day the Holy Trinity revealed Himself. The Father from heaven says: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mathew 3:17). The son is standing at the river and baptized in the water and the Holy Spirit appears like a dove and alighting on him.

Question: What is the difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ?

Answer: John's baptism was with water for repentance... but Christ's baptism was with the Holy Spirit for sanctification and the new birth.

Question: Why did Christ choose His disciples and what type of people did He choose them

from?

Answer: Jesus chose His disciples to be with Him, to see His miraculous deeds and to prepare them for the ministry then to send them to the whole world. He chose them from among ordinary simple people. Peter, John, Andrew and James were fishermen and they listened to God's voice "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Mathew 4: 19). But Levi was one of the tax collectors whom Jesus healed saying: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Mathew 9:12, Mark 2:17, Luke 5:31).

Question: How did Christ prepare His disciples for the ministry?

Answer: (1) He accompanied them wherever He went. (2) He used to take them to open places for prayer and He interpreted everything for them. (3) He sent them to the surrounding villages to preach His name and gave them power to perform miraculous deeds in His name. (4) He advised them to take nothing for their journey; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts and not to think of means of support. (5) After His resurrection He charged them to go to all nations and preach His name after they received the Holy Spirit and were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost.

Activities

Read the Bible where you find Incarnation, Nativity and Baptism. Select some verses and write them in the contemplation exercise book to comfort yourself through them. Invite your friends who do not go to Church and those who do not attend Sunday Schools to accompany you. Give their names and addresses to your Servants so that they may visit them. Remember that Christianity is not a subject to be studied but it is Spirit and Life and apply what you study to your life.

Second Week of November

(10) Tapers and Incense in the Church

References

+ The life of the Orthodox Prayer.

The Lesson

Aim

+ The church rites help us to offer sincere worship.

Introduction

- The candle is a precise image of a worshipper standing in the presence of God. It is clam in appearance but it is burning in heart with burning fire that burns its cool body and melts it and pours it as tears that flow leaving a circle of light behind it, that pleases anyone who contemplates it or walks under its guidance.
- Its nature without the work of fire is trifle and useless the same as the nature of man

without the work of grace but it burns with fire and in this case it gives light because of the fire uniting with it.

- One candle lit in the House of God is an invitation to quiet, burning and shining worship. The candle is like the worshipper. It does not give light by itself but when it is lit, it burns and shines and in this case it lightens the darkness around it and gives forth heat and warmth to those who surround it.

What does the use of candles mean?

- In the early church candles were not used for merely giving light as they were used during day time, especially on feast days and different occasions. On those occasions the altar appeared bright and beautiful.
- Examples: Celebrating the Holy Saturday, Passover Day where all the people participated joyfully in celebrating the light of the resurrection, etc. Believers still bring the light from the Holy Tomb in Jerusalem on that night every year and take it to all parts of the world.
- Candles were lit by the baptism font as a sign of enlightenment and the new shining nature worn by the baptized person. The new baptized persons used to go around inside the church after the mass and after receiving the Holy Communion. They put golden crowns on their heads and girded them with the girdles. Candles were in their hands as a sign of rejoice and joy for the new birth.
- Also when the Holy Bible is read, we see a candle in the hand of the deacon as a sign that the Gospel's light fills the universe and that the Gospel is man's lamp and the light of his way and that he who lives according to the (Bible) Gospel lives in light, walks in light and becomes the son of light and the son of resurrection.
- Also on the Saints days candles are lit before their icons indicating that they "Shine like the brightness of the firmament" in the kingdom of God"... This honor urges others to follow the example of those saints and imitate them till the end.
- As for martyrs, people used to light a lamp before their icons, and each lamp was lit day and night. The remaining oil in them caused several miracles. We hear about a lame man who entered the church of St. Stephen and anointed his leg with the oil and was healed immediately. The man lit a candle and left his crutch as a present to the saint and it became as a shrine for people to visit.
- Candles were used in funerals where deacons walked before the departed of the righteous and pious people and put candles over their bodies.
- In the Mass prayers there are two lit candlesticks set on the two sides of the altar referring to the two angels who were by the tomb of Jesus at the time of His resurrection. The lamp set in the eastern side of the church refers to the star that drew our attention to the child Jesus.
- The candle lit before the Icon of Christ declares that Christ is the Light of the World "That was the true light which lights every man that comes into the world" (John 1:9).
- The candle lit before the Icon of the Virgin declares that this is the Mother of Light.
- The candle lit before the Icon of the Saint declares that this is the lit decorated lamp that is put in an upper place in the house to give light to all those living in it.
- Let us practice this rite and remember that the wise virgins who were ready to meet the Bridegroom had oil in their vessels and they lit their lamps when they met the bridegroom. Let us practice this rite in godliness and submission, and deep contemplation. We should be purified of sin. We should not be defiled. We have to lift up

our eyes to the heavenly glory where the dwelling places of Light exist.

The use of Incense in the church

- St. Ephraim of Syria says, “I made a church of myself for Christ. The toils of my body burn as incense inside it”. Incense was used in the past in the Old Testament each morning and each evening according to the commandment that the Lord gave Moses (Exodus 30). When the plague spread among the people Israel, Moses and Aaron took fire from the altar and put it in a censer and poured incense on it. They stood between the living and the dead and made atonement for them (Numbers 16:44-48). In the Old Testament the Lord demanded that censers should be kept as they were sanctified by raising incense from the before the Lord.
- Its use was mentioned in a wonderful way in the Book of Revelation. The incense is the prayers of the saints. We should honor the fearful Presence of God by offering incense to Him (Revelations 8:3,4).
- Many troubled souls entered the church and there they felt calm and comforted when the cloud of the holy incense rising from the censor that is in the priest’s hand came to them.
- Many souls that worried felt comfort when they followed and looked at the circles of incense smoke rising to heaven.
- The simple eye sees incense as mere sweet smelling smoke which disappears in the air after a short time, but the eye of the inspired soul which is granted the spirit of contemplation sees it going up to heaven carrying with it the prayers of the saints and the holy angels raise it with hymns of praise.

An objection and reputation

- We have to notice that we offer incense to God only but giving incense to the High Priests is only for attaining their blessings so that they may be raised with the prayers of the people who are members of one body. So incense is not offered to them as persons but to God who abides in them as St. Paul the apostle says, “You are the temples of God and the Spirit is dwelling in you”.
- Some may object saying that offering incense to the Icons of Saints is a worship to persons or to pictures and statues but in fact we do all this with the spirit of fellowship. The church is one body and as the small grains of incense melt and send forth a sweet smell before God, the priest does the same when he gathers the prayers of the saints whether alive or dead, and raises them to God in public worship and deep spiritual significance, thanking God: “who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere” (2 Corinthians 2:14,15). For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved.

Activities and Exercises

1. Light a candle before the Icon of the Virgin or before the Icon of the Patron Saint of the church and ask them to intercede on your behalf to Christ that He may forgive your sins.
2. Send the names of those who departed so that the priest may raise incense for them after the prayer of the Congregation in the Divine Mass.
3. Make a wall magazine and write essays on “Tapers”, “Incense”, and “Icons” in the Orthodox Church. Make use of your readings and drawings if you are an artist in making this wall magazine.

4. Quote verses from the Holy Bible that prove your sound belief about using candles, incense and icons in the Orthodox Church.

Third Week of November

(11) Life of Watchfulness

References

+ “Life of Watchfulness” Fawzy Nimr Mina

The Lesson

Aim

Being faithful to God in word and deed, in small matters before the big ones.

Watchfulness is an important sign on the road of Spiritual Life

- It shows the seriousness of our will and the type of our struggle. Watchfulness means resisting sins even the small ones. It means chastity and abstaining from every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).
- It means that we should hate all forms of defilement whether visible or invisible, as the apostle says: “Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23).

Types of Watchfulness

Suspicion

+ A man may wash his hands several times and still thinks that they are dirty. The same is true with a man whose conscience is always suspicious and who confesses his sins to the priest, yet thinks that they have not been forgiven so he relates it several times. This is wrong. It is not watchfulness but it is weakness and a disease.

Phariseism

It is the watchfulness based on formalities and carrying out the commandments literally like watchfulness in the ritual law where Pharisees used to be careful about outside purification such as washing jars, cups and beds and determining what should and what should not be done on Saturday and all such formal matters for which the Lord Christ reproached them many times: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (Mathew 23:23,24).

The Acceptable Watchfulness

First: In deeds

- The spiritual man looks carefully how he walks. He performs his work with great care and according to what the Divine Truth demands. The spiritual man cares for his apparent deeds and concealed deeds. He examines every behavior and every deed and asks himself: Is it fit? Is it for the glory of God? The scripture says: “Take thought for what is

noble in the sight of all” (Roman 12:17). “We aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of men” (2 Corinthians 8:21).

- Thus we perform our deeds to glorify God the Father who art in heaven. Many people behave foolishly and sometimes indifferently and carelessly, without care or watchfulness and nowadays we often hear expressions such as: never mind... Don’t worry... etc. Many people are not time minded they lie when they talk, they are cunning in talk and behavior, they are dissemblers and timeservers and often dishonest. These are dangerous signs indicating that the spiritual life of man is out of control and that evil desires began to play their part even in the life of those who pretend to be spiritual people. We hear of Anba Anthony who listened to the Divine Word and sold all his property and obeyed the commandment literally. He left a small proportion of his sister and when he went to church, he said, “Do not be anxious about tomorrow” and sold that small portion too and sent his sister to a nunnery. The commandment to him was a Divine Order that must be carried out and was not for argument or bargaining.

Second: In saying

- The tongue is a small organ but it is like the boat rudder that moves the boat to the right or to the left. The following are selected scripture verses, which show the danger of careless talk.
- Lying words: “...idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death” (Revelations 21:8).
- Revilement: “Nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:10). “And whoever says: You fool! Shall be liable to the hell of fire” (Mathew 5:22).
- Silly talk and foul talks: “But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices” (Colossians 3:8).
- Do not swear at all: “Let what you say be simply “Yes” or “No” anything more than this comes from evil” (Mathew 5:37).
- Careless words: “On the Day of Judgment, men will render account for every careless word they utter” (Matthew 12:36). “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits” (Proverbs 18:21). “Those who are killed by the tongue are more than those killed by the mouth of the sword” (Sirach 28:18).
- All what we say then should be useful, true, precise and serious. Let us commit ourselves to watchfulness in talking and let our talk be as brief as possible as, “When words are many, transgression is not lacking but he who restrains his lips is prudent” (Proverbs 10:19).

Third: In Thoughts

- The scripture says: “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Roman 12:2).
- “Take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

In this area, the following exercises could benefit us:

- Resist evil looks as they are the material on which the mind feeds.
- Do not listen to words that do not fit us as children of God as words transform into mental images that trouble the mind, feeling and the subconscious.

- Always pray and make use of the name of Jesus as a blessed means for driving away all evil thoughts. In this respect Anba Daniel the Hegomen says: “We cannot prevent birds from hovering over our heads.. but we can prevent them from making their nests in our hair”.
- Always think of useful things as the head of a lazy person is the devil’s laboratory.
- Do not resort to excuses (such as the power of the devil) in your passions and tendencies.
- Prophet Jeremiah says: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9,10).
- There are sins of the heart such as spite, envy, hatred, jealousy, deception, anger and lusts. So we must watch the movements of the heart so that it may not deviate to the right or to the left... For example we should not do good out of our love for appearance, and we must not be lazy in doing our duty because of illness. We must know that there are wrong motivations that may tempt our hearts to sin.
- It is said that Simon the shoe maker, while mending a woman’s shoe, he looked at the woman and desired her so he hurried and got rid of his eye remembering that it was better for him to enter the eternal life as one-eyed man than being thrown into the fire of hell with his two eyes. The Lord rewarded him by performing the miraculous deed of moving the Mokattam hill through him. He was careful with small things so he could perform a great deed. It is not advisable that you should get rid of your eyes literally but you have to keep them away from evil look and from the stumbling visions of TV.

Dangers of Carelessness

Little foxes spoil vineyards; a small hole may cause a big ship to sink and the people on it are indifferent; and a small stone in the traveler’s shoe causes him to stop walking... the same is true if we are careless with small sins:

- Luke warmness and keeping away from prayers, and not having comfort in them is because our thoughts go astray and the spiritual life is difficult and we hate to struggle.
- There is not growth in grace because the spiritual benefits such as meekness and purity are wasted at a moment of anger or a passing lust.
- Causing others to stumble when they notice that we are double-faced and in the end the Holy Spirit is grieved and does not support man.
- He who is not faithful in small situations cannot be faithful in important situations. He who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much as the Scripture says.

Questions

1. Joseph the Innocent was a model of watchfulness and Esau was an opposite example. Explain.
2. How did the Lord correct Jacob’s carelessness? What was the price Jacob paid because of his carelessness?
3. Show how one sin in David’s life caused many troubles for him, and how one mistake in the life of Lot’s wife caused her destruction. What was that mistake?

A Verse to Study

“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3).

Exercises and Activities

1. When an evil thought comes to your mind, remember the fear of God and say: “Be pleased, O God, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me”.
2. When you suffer from the desire of the flesh bow down and make the sign of the cross and say: “The Lord answers you in the day of trouble: The name of the God of Jacob protect you”.
3. When you err while talking as when you exaggerate tell the people that you are sorry and the correct words you meant were so and so... In this way you send away the devil of lying, pride and love of appearance.
4. When one of your friends ask you to swear that your words are true do not swear but say to him, “Believe me” and do not swear at all.
5. When you see a group of friends saying inappropriate jokes, keep away from them and remember the words of the Scriptures: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the Law of the Lord and on his Law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1,2).

Fourth Week of November

(12) A Debate: Christianity Rejects Fanaticism and Partiality

References

+ “Youth and Social Issues” Anba Bemin

The Lesson

Aim

For young people to get rid of any fanatical thoughts and emphasizing the Spirit of love for all.

What is Religious Fanaticism?

There is a big difference between holding fast in the creed and faith, and blind fanaticism. Fanaticism is spiritual blindness as it causes man not to respect others’ feelings, thoughts and beliefs, but he despises and rejects them.

Dangers of Religious Fanaticism

It is against love as God demands that we should love all people. It is against the behavior of the Lord Christ on earth when He was kind to the woman of Samaria, the woman of Canaan and the slave of the Roman Officer. It leads to quarrel, disputes and contention and this is against Christian Spirituality. It leads to partiality and preferring one to the other, not for something good in him but because he is like him in his belief or religion. Fanaticism may lead to extravagance and cause man to be reluctant, rebellious, violent, and irritable in his talk, behavior, conduct and relation with people. It leads to denominational sedation and the precariousness of the society.

How does religious fanaticism arise?

1. The main reason is ignorance and lack of knowledge as he who knows his religion well does not fanaticize but narrow-minded people and those who are Christian in name only, such people are usually fanatic. As for spiritual people, these are like their Heavenly father; they love all the people.
2. Another reason is that some people are ignorant of the beliefs of others. If we study the values and virtues of others' beliefs, we shall respect those people and at the same time we honor our belief.
3. Some of us imitate some colleagues or those who hold important posts in their attitude and behavior. Fanaticism is a disease that spreads quickly like flu.
4. A man of a certain belief may do wrong and some may take it as a general rule and say that all people of that religion do the same in their life; which is not true.

How can I resist Religious Fanaticism?

1. Love for all.
2. Prayers for all especially for those who are different from us in thought, religion and belief.
3. Do not hate those who despise your religion as this may be due to their ignorance of the truth of your religion.
4. We have to establish a common ground for all citizens whatever their beliefs and creeds may be, such as:
 - a. Sport activities (examples).
 - b. Scientific activities (examples).
 - c. Social activities (examples).
 - d. Cultural, broadcast and information media activities. (examples).
 - e. National Service activities especially in villages and the places that need such service (examples).
5. Emphasizing the ties of love, friendship and intimacy and making use of religious and national occasions to exchange visits and congratulations.
6. Lead a positive life. Be concerned with serving your motherland and your church. Do not give ear to trifles. Paul the apostle says: "Have nothing to do with stupid senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels" (2 Timothy 2:23).
7. Do not interpret every conduct as being religiously motivated. Encourage objective thoughts in life.

Activities and Exercises

Practice the above mentioned principles inside the church and the school. Transform these topics into a style of life.

First Week of December

(13) Explanation of the Orthodox Creed: One God

References

- + "Trinity and Unity" a sermon delivered by H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- + "A simplified interpretation of the Orthodox Creed" Anba Gregarious

- + “Our Holy Faith” Anba Youannis
- + “Interpretation of the Orthodox Creed” Anba Bemim
- + “The Trinity we believe in” Mofid Kamel
- + “Truly we believe” Fr. Moussa Wahba
- + “We believe in One God” Fr. Moussa Wahba

The Lesson

Aim

God is One. The attributes of God. The work of the Father.

The Orthodox Creed reaches us

The soldier who marches at the head of an army of fighters carried the banner and raises it to fix it at the highest spot. He may be wounded; he may die and become a martyr. In case this happens, another soldier may succeed in raising the banner and declaring victory. Thus faith came to us through the saints’ struggle and the martyrs’ blood.

1. The Council of Nicene set the biggest part of the Orthodox Creed in 325 (AD). 318 Bishops attended that Council and Pope Alexander, together with St. Athanasius the Apostolic, represented the Coptic Church. The Council was held to discuss the Aryan heresy. Arius claimed that Christ was not the Everlasting Son of God, but He was created as any other man. Pope Alexander did his best to bring Arius back to the correct creed but Arius would not be convinced.
2. Emperor Constantine attended the first meeting of the Council. St. Athanasius defended the Godhead of Christ and succeeded in having the Council’s agreement to issue a creed to excommunicate Arius and dismiss him. Then he put the Orthodox Creed till the beginning of: “Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit”.
3. In AD 381 the Second Ecumenical Council, the Council of Constantinople was held because Macedonians denied the Godhead of the Holy Spirit, so the Council completed the Second part of the Orthodox Creed.
4. So two Councils; the Council of Nicene in AD 325 and the Council of Constantinople set the Orthodox Creed in AD 381.

One God

First: We believe in God and that God exists (Discussion. Give evidence: The created world... our existence...our mind...inspiration...the prophets).

Second: We believe that God is One... God is one and has no partner...We do not believe in three gods but we say: In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God. If there were two gods, who would be greater and who came before the other? If they were equal, each one would possess half the kingdom! How can a limited being be a god? God is one Essence. The statement “The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” does not mean that they are three gods but they are three hypostases: One Essence...and the Essence of God is Love.

An Example

Man is mind, body and soul; he is not three persons. The sun is disc, ray and heat and it is one sun.

Other Evidence that God is One

There are countless number of clear verses that prove that God is One. These are scripture verses and some of them are:

- “The Lord our God is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- “There is none holy like the Lord...There is none besides You” (1 Samuel 2:2).
- “For who is God but the Lord” (2 Samuel 22:32).
- “I am the First and I am the Last, besides Me there is no god” (Isaiah 44:6).
- “For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (He is God), who formed the earth and made it. I am the Lord, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:18)).
- “There is none good but one, that is, God” (Mathew 19:17).
- “Hear O Israel our God is one Lord” (Mark 12:29).
- “It is One God” (Romans 3:30).
- “there is none other God but one... But to us there is but One God” (I Corinthians 3:20).
- “God is One” (Galatians 3:20).
- “You believe that there is one God” (James 2:19).

God Reveals Himself

The Lord spoke to Adam and gave him a commandment. Adam heard the Lord’s voice walking in the garden. The Lord spoke to Noah and saved him and rescued his family from certain death. He revealed Himself to Abraham, tested him and blessed him. It is He who gave the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. The mountain was burning with fire and smoke. The Divine Sound appeared when Christ was baptized in the Jordan and said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mathew 3:17).

The Attributes of the Father

1. His Existence is a must. The Existence of God is a necessary obligation for interpreting the universe “For Him we live, and move and have our being” (Acts 17,28).
2. He has no end. He is not confined in a certain place. He has no end. He is boundless “You are the same and Your years have no end” (Psalm 10:27).
3. He is a Simple Spirit. He has no flesh. He in Himself is a Spirit “God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship him in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).
4. God does not change. “Man changes but God does not change”. The Lord says, “For the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6).
5. God is everlasting, eternal, has no beginning and no end. The Lord say, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending” (Revelations 1: 8).
6. God exists everywhere. He is present everywhere. No place can confine him.
7. God knows everything. “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight,. but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13).
8. God is Almighty: “Whatever the Lord pleases He does in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps” (Psalm 135:6).

The Work of the Father

First: Fatherhood and Choice

Fatherhood is one of the attributes of God the Father. He is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Father of humanity that is why we call him God the Father. He created us and He cares for us.

Swallows are without number but one of them does not fall on earth without the will of God who art in Heaven. He also cares for plants. He clothes them in a way that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them. But God cares more for man.

Discussion

God created man on the sixth day after he had provided him with all his needs. He also gave him a perfect, accurate, good-looking and beautiful body. He gave him an eternal soul, mind, intelligence, so why then does God let his children suffer?

Sufferings in our life are due to our sensitive advanced nature. Our feeling of pain distinguishes us from inanimate things. Sufferings make us escape to a better life. Some sufferings are the outcome of our behavioral mistakes and others are due to God's purpose, which we do not know (e.g., the man who was born blind).

Choice

Because God is a Father, He chooses His beloved. This choice is according to man's heart's preparedness and response to the Divine Will. He chose us to be His children and it was a special call to us as we believed in Him. The scripture says:

1. Pre-destination: "For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the first born among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).
2. The Call: "And those whom He predestined, He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified" (Romans 8:30).
3. Choice in Christ: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the formation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love" (Ephesians 1:3,4).

Exercises

1. One should be accustomed to contemplating God's love for us, His care for His children and for His creatures.
2. We thank Him every morning for his mercies. 3. Ask with confidence and hope.

Second: The Almighty God

God is our supporter. He opens and no one shuts. He shuts and no one opens. The sun rises in its appointed time. Stars do not sleep. Planets do not collide. There are laws, which control the universe. These Laws are so accurately set by the Lord that scientists find it difficult to discover their details. The Lord controls the universe: "The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your hand. The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from an evil; He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore" (Psalm 121:5-8). "How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways" (Romans 11:33). The Lord also protects our life from dangers, lusts and deviations.

Exercises

First: We should obey the commandments of God and accept his judgments in our life.

Second: Commit yourself to the Lord and he will solve your difficult problems, he will save you from any injustice, trouble or disease. He is the Almighty God who supports us.

Third: He created the Heaven and the Earth

There is the wonderful nature which we see and enjoy its beauty and when we see a lovely thing we utter the name of God. The existence of a thing indicates that someone has made it and if that thing is perfect, we say that its maker has a great ability and skill. There are also the invisible creatures, which we cannot see such as atoms and electrons, which run through wires, but we feel their effects. There are also the remote stars and the tiny microbes. The greatness and majesty of God are beyond our thoughts. There are also the spiritual invisible creatures such as angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim that are without number. Then thousand times ten thousand and thousands and thousands praising God but we do not see them. Those creatures help us. Man is a tiny drop in a big ocean but the Lord cares for him as if all that big universe had been made for man.

Questions

1. Speak about the attributes of God.
2. Define the works of God the Father.

The Second Week of December

(14) Explanation of the Orthodox Creed: The Godhead of the Son

References

- + “You are Christ, the Son of the Living God” Anba Gregory
- + “Titles and works of the Lord Christ” Anba Bemin
- + “Theology” Fr. Michael Mina.

The Lesson

Aim

Proving the Godhead of Christ and his works (We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages).

Discussion

There is a difference between Sonship among people and the Sonship of Christ to God. The human father is older than his son and each one of them is separated from the other but Christ is Consubstantial with the Father everlasting and of the Same Essence. He said about Himself, “I and the Father are One”. The human language does not contain any words that can indicate the conformity and unity except “the Father and the Son”. That is why Christ is “the Son” but there is a big difference: “***He is the only Begotten Son of the Father before all ages***”. There is another simile that can be used, i.e. the coming forth of the light out of a lamp where light is generated but not through flesh “***Light our of Light; True God out of the True God***”. He is of

the same nature and essence of the Father. God is Love and we knew love through His Son. There is no difference in Essence **“Begotten not created”**. As water flows out of a spring and runs through a canal but the water is one...the same is true of the Son...Begotten of the Father before all ages. He is not one of the creatures as He Himself is the Creator: **“Consubstantial with the Father”**. The Scripture says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made”.

Incarnation

We know that the Son is consubstantial with God. He is everlasting and not created but He took flesh of Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. So Christ has two births, the first is everlasting of the heavenly Father, and the second is of the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary. He has not come of a man through the natural way of birth like us and this proves His Godhead: “He was crucified for us of whose kingdom shall have no end”. Now comes the role of redemption, which we confess that it was fulfilled for our salvation. We also confess the Second coming for judgment and kingdom. The angel says to the Virgin: “Of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:33). The following schedule shows Christ’s Tasks and life.

| Time | Place | Task (Post) | Quotation |
|---|--------------------------|--|---|
| 1. Before all ages. | 1. With God. | 1. Divine Sonship. | 1. Only Begotten Son. |
| 2. The beginning of life. 5000 years before Christ. | 2. In heaven. | 2. He took part with the Father in the process of creation. Christ is the word and when God said, “Let there be light the Son(the word) took part with the Father in creation. | 2. The only begotten Son of the Father before all ages. Begotten not created. |
| 3. A. D. I. | 3. In the virgin’s womb. | 3. He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary. | 3. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. |
| 4. 40 days after the Resurrection | 4. From earth to heaven. | 4. Going up to the Bosom of the Father and sitting at Right Hand after fulfilling redemption. He is the Living Lord who intercedes for us. | 4. He ascended into the heavens and has sat at the right hand of his Father. |
| 5. Unknown | 5. From heaven to earth. | 5. The Second Coming of the Lord to judge the living and the dead and to reign for ever | 5. He shall also come back in glory to judge the living and the dead. |

Exercises

+ When we say in the church that we believe in One God, the Almighty God. Does this mean that He controls our tendencies, emotions and instincts?

+ When we confess that He created heaven and earth, do we offer worship to Him in awe feeling that our life is of Him and to Him?

+ When we confess that Christ is light out of light and True God out of True God. Do we ourselves live in light and walk in truth as we are the children of God who is Light of Light and truth of truth?

+ When we confess that the Lord Jesus came from heaven and incarnated for our salvation and

suffered to redeem us. Aren't we ashamed of ourselves when we ignore and neglect such salvation?

+ When we recite the Orthodox Creed, let us have real and practical faith in what we say.

Activities

The children are to be divided into three groups:

1. The first group proves the Godhead of Christ in His nativity.
2. The Second group proves the Godhead of Christ in His miraculous deeds and teachings.
3. The third group proves the Godhead of Christ in His crucifixion and His resurrection.
Quote the verses that prove this and you can make a wall chart.

Discussion

Invite a priest or a minister who has a deep knowledge of theology and let the children ask questions about the difficulties they face in understanding the Godhead of Christ. Evidence should be given from Logic, reason, the Gospel and from different references.

Third Week of December

(15) Explanation of the Orthodox Creed: The Second Part

References

+ "The Holy Spirit" St. Cyril the Great. Translated by Dr. George Habib

The Lesson

Aim

The Godhead of the Holy Spirit. The unity of the church and her tasks.

Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit

This past was put by the Council of Constantinople, which was held to refute the heresy of Macedonius... who denied the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. He said that He is one of the creatures and therefore the church excommunicated him. We believe in the Holy Spirit and call Him "The Giver of Life". When Ananias and Sapphira lied to St. Peter; Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3,4).

The Divine Tasks of the Holy Spirit

- He is called the Spirit of Life or God the Giver of Life. "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2).
- He is the creator; He was not made; "The Spirit of God has made me" (Job 33:4). "By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made and all their host by the breath of His mouth" (PSALM 33:6).
- Through the Inspiration of the Scripture and prophecy: "Who was spoken of by the prophets".

- “Because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21).
- It is He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and it is He that raises up from any sin and purges us: “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you” (Romans 8: 11).
- He makes of us a new creation created in the image of Christ. The Lord breathed in the face of his disciples as He breathed a breath of life in the dust. If the image of Adam was corrupted, the Holy Spirit gave us a new nature through baptism so that we may be in the image of God once more.
- Coming forth: As a ray of light comes from the sun, and as water flows out of a spring to pour into a lake. The same is true of the Holy Spirit who comes forth from the Father and dwells in the Son. The Father loves the Son and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love that comes forth from the Father to the Son. In the Jordan River the Father said, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased”. “And behold the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on Christ”.
- As the water in the well, or of the canal or in a lake is the same water that we drink, the same is true of the Holy Spirit that is consubstantial with the Father and the Son.

One Church

All believers had one heart and one Spirit. The unity of the church is what Christ desires. In His final prayer of intercession He said, “that they may all be one, even as You Father, art in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that You have sent me” (John 17:21).

Universal Church

She gathers all believers of every nation, language and tribe. She gathers all the orders of priesthood of bishops, priests, deacons and also the laity. She gathers men, women and children in one unity, which is the unity of the universal mission.

Apostolic Church

As she is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). The Life of her members is an apostolic life based on abstention and Evangelic poverty. It is impossible to recognize and confess the priesthood of anyone if the hands of legal heads are not set on him.

A Holy Church

She is Holy because Christ is her head. The spring of holiness is the Holy Spirit working in her. The life history of her members is pure and holy (The Story of Ananias and Sapphira proves that the church rejects every corrupted and bad member).

We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins

Christ said to Nicodemus, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, One cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). “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). Baptism is not repeated because it is like the death, burial and resurrection of Christ which happened only one:

“You were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12).

We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come

We believe that our souls are eternal and will not die. When the body dies, the soul goes up to Paradise or goes down to the Hades. On the day of Judgment, the Lord will come in awe and glory and will reward every one according to his deeds. The evildoers will be sent to Hell where they suffer eternal torment, and the righteous are sent to the kingdom of Heavens and the glorified eternal life. Our bodies will be glorified and they will take the image of the body of the raised Son of God, to enter the kingdom as blood and flesh cannot inherit the kingdom. Let us live on the Hope of resurrection waiting for the coming of the Lord. Amen.

Activities

Make a wall magazine about the attributes of the church (One -Holy -Universal -Apostolic).

Fourth Week of December

(16) Christ and the Establishment of Kingdom

References

+ The Christian Religion Book

Question: Who are the happy people whom Jesus blessed and beatified and what are the rewards that he gives them?

Answer:

| The happy people | They are | Their rewards |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. The poor in spirit. | 1. the humble people. | 1. For theirs is the kingdom of God. |
| 2. Those who mourn. | 2. they mourn over their sins. | 2. They shall be comforted. |
| 3. The meek. | 3. they control themselves and do not get angry. | 3. They shall inherit the earth. |
| 4. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. | 4. who seek good life. | 4. They shall be satisfied. |
| 5. The merciful. | 5. who show mercy to others. | 5. They shall obtain mercy. |
| 6. The pure in heart. | 6. they refrain from sins. | 6. They shall see God. |
| 7. The peacemakers. | 7. they make peace with themselves, with God and with people. | 7. They shall be called sons of God. |
| 8. Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. | 8. who struggle and suffer pains for the Lord. | 8. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. |

Question: In His sermon on the mountain, the Lord Christ put the three foundations of worship and the conditions of worship. Explain:

Answer: The Lord Christ in His teachings concentrated on: Fasting Prayer and Almsgiving.

| Foundation | Definition | Commandment | Conditions |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| 1.Fasting 2.Prayer 3.Almsgiving | 1. Abstaining from food for a period of time followed by eating light meals to control the desire of the flesh. 2. A Spiritual fellowship between man and God in which man concentrates on his feelings and heart. 3. Giving our tithes to the needy. | 4. "This kind does not go out but by prayer and fasting". "I afflicted myself with fasting". 5. "Pray without ceasing". "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint". "After this manner therefore, pray you, "Our Father who art in heaven". 6. "Blessed is he who considers the poor. The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble". "Bring the full tithes". | 7. And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces...But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face. 8. Continuously: "Do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do". In secret: "When you pray, go into your room, and shut the door". 9. In secret: "When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing". "God loves a cheerful giver". "He who gives aid, with zeal, he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness". |

Question: Mention the verses with which Jesus defined dealings among the children of God in the domains of: anger -lacing evil -swearing -chastity -never judge others.

Answer:

Anger: "Everyone who is angry with his brother, shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the Council, and whoever says: You fool! Shall be liable to the hell of fire" (Mathew 5:22).

Facing evil: "You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'. But I say to you: Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the others also, and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well... Give to him who begs from you" (Mathew 5:38-42).

Swearing: "Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God or by the earth, for it is His footstool. Let what you say be simply, "Yes," or "No". Anything more than this comes from evil" (Mathew 5:34-37).

Chastity: "Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mathew 5:28).

Do no judge others: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged and the measure you give will be the measure you get" (Mathew 7: 1-2).

Question: In one verse, the Lord Christ set the golden rule of dealing with people. Mention It

and explain it.

Answer: “Whatever you wish that man would do to you, do so to them, for this is the law and the prophets” (Mathew 7:12). This means that what man wishes for himself he should wish for others and the evil that he does not like others to do to him, he also should not do it to others.

| The Miracle | What does it indicate? | Place | Events | Its effect |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| 1. Jesus makes a Leper clean. 2. Jesus heals a man born blind. 3. The raising of Lazarus. 4. Jesus heals a paralyzed man. 5. Jesus walks on water. 6. Transfiguration of Jesus | 1. The authority of Christ on earth and coming down from the Hill. 2. The power of Christ to create. 3. The authority of Christ over death. 4. Christ's authority to forgive sins. 5. Christ's authority over nature. 6. The Godhead of Lord Christ and His glorified nature. | 1. Immediately after Christ's sermon on the mountain. 2. At the gate of the temple where the man born blind used to beg. 3. In Bethany. 4. A house where Jesus was preaching the crowds. 5. Lake Tiberias. 6. The Mount of Tabor. | 1. A leper came to him, knelt down before him, and said, “Sir, if you want to, you can make me clean”. Jesus reached out and touched him: “I do want to be clean”. At once he was clean from his leprosy. 2. The Lord spat on the ground and made some mud with the spittle. He rubbed the mud on the man's eyes and told him to wash his face in the pool of Siloam. The man went, washed his face and came back seeing. Jesus found him and said, “Do you believe in the Son of God” and he said, “Yes Lord I believe”, and knelt down before Him. 3. Mary and Martha sent to Jesus to tell Him that their brother was sick. Lazarus died and was buried. Martha said to Him, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died”. Jesus said to her, “If you believed, you would see God's glory”. Jesus ordered them to remove the stone and said, “Lazarus come out”. The dead man came out. Jesus tour them to untie him and let him go. 4. The paralyzed friends could not bring him to Jesus | 1. Jesus ordered him to go straight to the priest and let him examine him then offer the sacrifice. 2. The Pharisees were angry with Jesus because He healed in the Sabbath. The reproached the man and his parents. 3. All believed that Christ is the True Son of God. 4. The Pharisees murmured because he forgave sins but he proved his authority by the miracle of healing. They were amazed and praised God. 5. The fear then their confidence. 6. The disciples felt the majesty of Lord Christ |

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| | | | <p>because of the crowds so they made a hole in the roof and let him down. Jesus saw how much faith they had and said to the paralyzed man “My son, your sins are forgiven” then He said to him, “Get up, pick up your mat and walk”.</p> <p>5. Lord Jesus went up a hill to pray and his disciples got into the boat. The wind blew against them and they were in trouble. They struggled against the wind and the waves. Jesus came to them walking on water. He encouraged them saying, “It is I. Don’t be afraid”. Peter said, “Lord if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you”. Jesus looked at the wind and the waves and they died down.</p> <p>6. Jesus took with Him, Peter, James and John to a high mountain. While He was praying a change came over Him, His face became as bright as the sun and His clothes as white as light. Moses and Elijah appeared with Him. Peter said, “It is a good thing that we are here”...but the Lord refused to stay. He wanted to go down to be crucified.</p> | <p>and His glory that was with Him before the foundation of the world.</p> |
|--|--|--|---|--|

Fifth Week of December

(17) Debate: The Sins of the Tongue

References

+ “The Paradise of the Soul” Part I, Anba Youannis

The Lesson

Aim

Holiness of thought and understanding.

The Importance of the Tongue

1. It is a true expression of what is inside man (For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks).
2. No one can control it. It is evil and uncontrollable, full of deadly poison.
3. We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father, and also to curse our fellow men, created in the likeness of God.
4. On the day of Judgment, men will render account for every careless word they utter.
5. The measure you give will be the measure you get.
6. Family troubles and disputes among tribes in rural societies, and international wars, all result from formal declaration of the people in office (Give examples from the Holy Bible and from the life history of the Saints).

Examples of the sins of the tongue

1. The sin of judging others (Give examples from the Paradise of the Monks and the Fathers' sayings and what the Book of the "Paradise of the Soul" mentions.
2. The sin of cursing, insulting people and the impolite words.
3. The sin of despising others and bad jokes.
4. The sin of talkativeness and empty words, which are not constructive.
5. The sin of tale bearing, calumny, slander, backbiting and envy.
6. The sin of hypocrisy, simulation, insincerity, partiality and false praise.

There are many other sins that branch out of these main trunks and it is a good thing to tell a story of each branch of these.

How can we cure the sins of the tongue?

1. Repentance and seeking grace and renewal. Everything has become new. Out of it comes fresh water, not salty water.
2. Growth in grace through prayers and studying the Gospel and Practice of Sacraments. We change our shape through renewing our mind.
3. Watchfulness in conduct and in talk and keeping away from rashness and asking for the help of God when we talk.
4. Being fully convinced that the sins of the tongue are dangerous and by examining oneself one can keep away from such sins.
5. Confess these sins to your father of confession and study them with him so that he may help you.
6. Do not imitate the children of the world but be distinguished from them as you are the children of God.

Exercise

“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord. Keep watch over the door of my lips”.

First Week of January

(18) Nativity and Our Spiritual Life

References

- + “Contemplation on the Nativity of our Lord” H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- + “Blessings of Incarnation” Anba Gregory
- + “Levels of Teachings Feasts” Anba Bemin

The Lesson

Aim

How shall I receive the New born baby of Bethlehem?

Introduction

We should be happy on the feast day and rejoice when we celebrate the New Born Baby of Bethlehem. It is a great feast on which we remember the coming of the Lord to our world and His incarnation and becoming man to live with us as one of us and to be like us in everything except sin. The memories of Nativity are very pleasant indeed. Angels in heaven sing hymns of praise, the shepherds and the wise men offer worship to the Lord Jesus, and Jesus in the manger, makes wonderful peace between those in heaven and those on earth but what is most important is the effect of the Lord’s Nativity on our Spiritual Life. Our Lord Christ was born of the Virgin and became man like us so that He may be spiritually born in every human soul that opens her heart to Him and receives Him. Jesus wore our flesh and His Spirit protects us. He was born of human flesh and we are spiritually born in Him.

Repentance

The grace of Nativity dwells in us when Jesus came and dwelt in us “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:17). Jesus does not dwell in us if we hold fast the desires of the world, as the Lord is not born in man unless He is born anew because the soul that is born anew is the soul that can be a dwelling place for the Baby of Bethlehem. We attained the new birth through baptism but we make it perfect through true repentance. True repentance is the devoted life. It is in the life that always looks up to heaven. It is the life that carries out what St. Peter said, “So put away all malice and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like new born babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation” (I Peter 2:1,2). Only through this new birth can we meet the Lord Jesus Christ. Nativity has no meaning unless we hear the voice of the feast in our ears saying to us, “You have to be born anew. Be clean and pure as a new babe. Train yourself. Long for the milk of the Divine word. Taste it and enjoy it”.

Humility

The Nativity of our Lord changed all concepts. The strong is not necessarily the rich or the master as greatness lies in humility. The Lord has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degrees. So it is necessary for us to deny ourselves and follow the Son, “If

any man would come after Me, let him deny himself'. We have to consider ourselves as nothing before God whatever our intelligence, abilities and positions may be. We have to feel that we are in dire need for the Divine help and humbly accept to deal with all people, even the sinners, as if they were much far better than us. We should bravely confess our sins and not to be proud of our talents as the Word of God dwells in the humble heart. The Lord who found comfort in the womb of Virgin Mary who was meek, humble and lowly, still finds comfort in the heart of a humble and lowly person who is never haughty and never arrogant.

Purity

Without purity no one can see God... as how can Christ abide a heart that is filled with bad desires and wrong emotions such as anger, lust and defilement. Jesus was born in a manger, and this indicates that He came to purify and sanctify the desires of the flesh. We have to clean our manger so that the Lord Christ may come and dwell in it. When Nineveh repented, the animals fasted and in the manger the animals received Him. We should control our desires. Look at the Virgin who is the model of purity. Such a heart is the only place that deserves Christ to dwell in. She was filled with grace. Her mind was pure. So the Lord chose her and sent His Spirit to give her Divine power for keeping her flesh, self and soul in the fear of God. She was the temple, the bride and the manger. We have to watch our conduct and behavior especially in keeping the body pure and in abstaining from the desires of the flesh so that we may be worthy of receiving the baby of Bethlehem.

Singing Hymns

The hearts, which are filled with love, deserve to see the Baby Jesus. The magi sacrificed and suffered. Simon the Elder waited for a very long time. The Virgin endured the pains. Joseph suffered a lot. All waited patiently for the coming of Christ. When Jesus was born, the heavens opened and the heavenly hosts showed their happiness through their hymns and praise. The church receives Christmas through a whole month of preparedness through hymns, worship and fasting (The month of Kiahk, the Seven and Four praises). The whole world rejoices on Christmas day as a new great event occurs in the world and in the life of the children of God. O thirsty people, come to the well of water. Let those who are tired rejoice and welcome the birth of the Lamb with hymns. Cast your burden on the Lord. Sing with joy. Praise His Holy Name forever.

Exercises and Activities

1. Nativity fasting should be accompanied by examining the self-conscience, receiving the Holy Communion to take Christ in us especially on Christmas Eve.
2. Study the pleasant Nativity hymns and attend the Nativity Eve Hymn of Praise.
3. You can put on the best clothes but your heart should be humble and show love to the poor.
4. On the feast day, go with your teachers to the orphanages and hospitals to visit the poor and the patients and in this way everyone will rejoice and be merry.
5. When you make the Nativity Cavern, and when you place the animals in it remember that you must sanctify your instincts through grace. When you place the shepherds, remember the Spirit of Vigil. When you place the shepherds, remember the Spirit of Vigil, when you place the Virgin, remember her lowliness and humility. Let the Nativity Cavern be an object of contemplation and a new start.

Second Week of January

(19) The Mystery of Incarnation

References

- + “Contemplation on the Nativity of our Lord” H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- + “The Blessing of Incarnation” Anba Gregory
- + “Levels of Teaching Feasts” Anba Bemin
- + “Incarnation” Fr. Sidaros Abdel Messeeh
- + “The Word became flesh” Dr. Ragheb Abdel Nour

The Lesson

Aim

Concentrating on the love of the Father who sent his Son Jesus Christ to be incarnate of the Virgin Mary.

Introduction

The happy Christmas comes at us to remind us of that glorious day. When we go to Bethlehem and consider the fact of Incarnation, our hearts are filled with feelings of submission and awe when we see that Divine Babe. We worship Him with the shepherds and the Magi and praise Him with the heavenly hosts, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will toward men”.

God With Us

Hundreds of years before Christ, one of the prophets of the Old Testament prophesied saying, “Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted as, God with us” (Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 7:14). Incarnation is a great mystery, which is beyond the human mind: “Great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16). We are amazed when we see the Lord of Glory born in a manger, but we realize that it is the nature of the Great glorified God and His power to empty Himself, “Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:6,7 and Gregorian Liturgy). Thus we see Him coming from heaven to the world that He created to live with men and share with them the flesh in which they live as St. Athanasius the apostolic said, “And take to Himself a body liable to death so that He may die on behalf of all of us”.

God’s Love is the mystery of Incarnation

God’s love for man is beyond imagination. The Son of God incarnated, i.e. He became man like us. This is the greatest proof that God loves us. His love for us made Him share us the conditions of our life, its sufferings and the troubles of poverty and several temptations of the flesh. In his Psalm, David draws a picture of the Divine love that made God descend from haven by saying: “He bowed the heavens, and came down” (Psalm 18:9). The Divine Incarnation, then, is closely

connected with the heavenly Father's love for man whom He created in His likeness. In the hymn prayers, the church teaches us: "God was pleased to bring back the broken hearted Adam to Paradise and to his first order. The Lord , shone and was incarnate of the Virgin and saved us. Peace be to Bethlehem where Christ, the Second Adam was born to bring the first Adam who was made of dust, back to Paradise".

Now Jesus has a Place

The events of Nativity tell us that Virgin Mary and Joseph the Carpenter of Bethlehem were searching for a place but they did not find any place to Stay in. When infant Jesus was born, Mary wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. It seemed as if there had been no place on earth for the Lord to dwell in. All men closed their doors before Him. This gives us an idea about the world before Christ and how man stood far off from God. God did not desire to stand far off from us as He did in the Old Testament, but through His incarnation He came closer to us and lived with us and dwelt in us. He gave us His Body and Blood so that they may be present on the altar with us every day. We see in Christ the perfect model of man who was the purpose of God. It is possible now, for me as man to live in purity and piety by being united with Christ. Because God exists in my life, I can lead the life that fulfils the purpose of God, as through His incarnation, He sanctified the nature of the flesh and our bodies became His dwelling place. The Lord Jesus has a place now in the hearts of millions of people and my heart, now, has become the manger where Christ dwells and sanctifies my whole body and being. Thus I can sing a hymn of praise: "He took what is ours and gave us what is His".

Prayer

O Lord Jesus, how wonderful you are in your love and humility. You humbled yourself and took my humble nature to be your flesh. In Your wonderful love for me, You desired to sacrifice and You sacrificed Yourself for me. You gave me Your Body and Blood in the form of Eucharist i.e. body and Blood on the altar and through them You granted me a fellowship, growth and eternal grace. Grant me O Lord that I may fulfill Your will and prepare myself for you to dwell in and sacrifice my life for the love for others".

Questions

1. Mention the Statement you find in the Orthodox Creed about Incarnation of the Son.
2. Read John 1:1-18 and then clarify the following:
 - a. The verse that shows that the Word is the Everlasting God.
 - b. The verse that shows that the Word was Incarnate and became man.
 - c. The verse that shows that from the Incarnate Word we took grace for our life.
3. What is this grace that we took from Incarnation for our life?

Recitation

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Third Week of January

(20) The Feast of Epiphany

References

- + “The Second birth” Anba Bemin
- + “The Seven Sacraments” Habib Girgis
- + “The Precious Jewels in the Interpretation of the Church Rites”

The Lesson

Aim

Baptism is a new birth and Epiphany is a great Feast.

Introduction

This week the Church is celebrating a great feast, i.e. The Epiphany. In the past, all Egyptians celebrated that feast. History tells us that Caliph Ikhsheed used to go out himself to an island in the River Nile and his people lit one thousand lamps around him so that he might celebrate the Epiphany with the Egyptians, the Copts. People used to go out in great numbers, in great processions. Muslims and Copts together carrying flambeaus and candles. They went together to the River Nile to dive, believing that in so doing they would be healed and cured.

Epiphany is celebrated in memory of Christ’s baptism in the Jordan. John the Baptist baptized Him. John baptized people and said to them: “There comes one mightier than I after me, the Straps of whose sandals I am no worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:1-12). On the Eve of Epiphany, and before the holy Mass, the Church raises a prayer called “the Service of the Blessing of the Water” in memory of Christ’s Baptism. Then the priest sprinkles this holy water over the people.

Baptism is a New Birth

When Christ went down into the water of the Jordan, the heaven opened and the Spirit of God appeared to people in the form of a dove. This shows that the Holy Spirit will dwell in us through Baptism. Christ was not in need of baptism but He was baptized for us as He became the Son of man and became like us in everything except sin. Then a voice was heard from heaven: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. This voice answers us that through baptism we become beloved sons.

The first important event in our life that binds us with Christ is baptism. In the first month after a child is born, the babe is to be baptized by immersing him in the holy water, and through the Sacrament of baptism, the child attains the second birth, which is grace and gift from heaven. The first birth is through flesh when he is born of his mother. The Second birth is a spiritual birth. Through baptism with water and spirit, the child becomes one of the children of God (Refer to the conversation that took place between Christ and Nicodemus in John 3:1-13). Let us contemplate some of the rites that are practiced in the Sacrament of Baptism:

Why do we reject the devil?

In the rite of the rejection of the devil, man confesses that he has fallen and in his fall he has become in the enemy's hand and that Christ was incarnate, became man, died and rose from the dead to give us the Second birth, and that through this new birth we become subjects in the kingdom of God and the devil has no authority to harm us. This rite emphasizes that the devil is not a symbol or an abstract idea. He is a being and not a myth.

The church knows that the devil rules the world that has fallen so she faces this power in baptism and orders the devil to keep away from the water and from the person who is going to be baptized. Because she has the power of the cross, the resurrection and the work of the Holy Spirit, she sanctifies and purifies the water and the baptized as well. The church knows that the gates of hell were broken and that another power came into the world to take it back to God. This will come true when all the souls and the whole life and the whole world devote themselves to God.

In the Sacrament of baptism, the church declares this and in this rite the baptized look to the west and raise their right hands and say (If they are children, their godmother say this on their behalf): I reject you, O devil. I reject all your deeds and all your evil soldiers, and all your bad devils, and all your power, and all your despised worship, and all your tricks, all your army, all your authority, all your hypocrisy. I reject you. I reject you. I reject you. Thus begins the new life with struggle and declaration of war against the powers of the enemy.

The Precious Oil

Oil has an important spiritual meaning in the Liturgies. In the past, it was used as a remedy. We have the parable of the Good Samaritan who poured oil on the wounds of the man who was attacked by robbers. The church uses oil in baptism indicating that it is the true remedy for sin.

In the past oil was used in lighting. The parable of the wise virgins refers to their use of oil in lighting their lamps. Baptism gives enlightenment to the heart of the mind, so the church uses oil as a sign for the true light which is poured in the heart of the baptized after receiving the new birth.

Oil was a sign of rejoice. David's psalms contain many hymns about the oil of rejoice, salvation and peace. Prophet Isaiah prophesied of the precious oil. When the church anoints the baptized with oil, and she puts him in the holy water, she heals the baptized self and soul of the wounds of the devil and aims at reconciliation and peace between him and the heavenly beings and seeks light, rejoicing and pleasure in his new life, granted him through grace...through that great mystery.

Water in Baptism

God blessed the water of the Jordan, "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The God of Glory thunders". Baptism is a process of washing, "the washing of the second birth". We say: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51). The water, which caused the destruction of man in the great flood, became a source of life in baptism and the second birth. Water cleans the body but the Spirit dwelling in it cleans the inside and the baptized is born anew. Baptism means that we die and rise with Christ. Our Teacher St.

Paul says: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death” (Romans 6:3-9). Through burying then baptized three times in water, the baptized attains the power of the Lord’s death and burial for three days till we rise into the new life as Paul the apostle says in his Epistle to the Colossians: “And you were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead”. (Colossians 2:12).

Why does the baptized put on white clothes?

The white color is a sign of purity and the new nature: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”. The white color is a sign of light, beauty and enlightenment that the believer attains through baptism. In the early ages, the fathers called the Sacrament of Baptism as the mystery of Enlightenment. The true believer lives in light and takes off the works of darkness, wears the armor of light and behaves according to what is fit. The white dress is a sign of the new nature attained by the baptized. Yes, truly we are the children of Light as we are the children of Resurrection. Blessed is he who keeps his clothes pure till the day of the coming of the Lord Amen.

Activities

Attend the Baptism mass to see how the rite is practiced. Read the prayers of baptism, especially the part of renouncing the devil, from the Book of Liturgies.

Exercise

Behave according to what is fitting, what befits the new life that we attained through baptism.

Questions

1. Why do the baptized put on white clothes?
2. Why is the girdle put round their bodies and is untied by the Bishop or the priest?
3. Why does the godmother reject the devil before baptizing her babe?
4. Why do we practice baptism by immersing not pouring or sprinkling water?
5. Why is the baptized anointed with Myron (Chrism) oil?
6. Why does the church insist that every baptized babe should have its godmother? What is her work? Why has it disappeared nowadays?
7. Why are children baptized although they do not understand faith?

Recitation

“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

Fourth Week of January

(21) The Voice of the One Crying

References

+ “Studies and Contemplation on great Feasts” Anba Bemin

+ “The Life of the Baptist” Fr. Marcos Daoud

The Lesson

Aim

Repentance as a preparation for receiving Christ.

The Axe Is Laid To Root Of The Trees

The preaching of the Baptist gave warning of life or death. Life and death are connected with repentance, and repentance is to throw oneself into the Bosom of God. Repentance means coming back to the merciful bosoms. It is to review our accounts and change the attitude of our hearts and this is the meaning of “the root of the trees”.

Every Mountain And Hill Shall Be Made Low

The prophecy of Isaiah explains the aspects of repentance that the Baptist called for. Mountains refer to the pride of man who must go back to himself. No one can be haughty before the Lord. The Lord is pleased with the humble hearted, and He smiles the arrogant: “The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars, the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon”.

Fill Every Valley

This refers to the weak points in the life of man so the repentant must examine himself so that he may know why he keeps away from God, and recognize the points of weakness, humility, and inferiority.

The Rough Country Will Become Smooth

“The crooked shall be made straight”. This refers to the crooked ways of man such as religiousness in appearance, postponing and the hesitant heart. Such a man appears to be pious, but in fact he loses his power. The same is true with wickedness, cunning, cheating, deceiving, hypocrisy, dissimulation and walking in the counsel of the wicked.

A Practical Step

Each repentant needs a certain step at which he should keep away from his sin that hinders him from receiving salvation: “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God”.

To Tax collectors; they must collect no more that is appointed them (Luke 3:13).

To the soldiers; they must rob no one by violence, or by false accusation and be content with their wages (Luke 3:14).

And you, what should you do? The voice is crying in the wilderness of your life and tells you what to do to attain salvation.

Bearing Witness to Truth

John was able to say to the Pharisees, “You brood of vipers” and to say to Herod “It is not lawful for you”. So the first step in the life of a repentant is to say to the evildoers, “It is not lawful for you” and to say to the bad company, “It is not lawful for you”. Any criticism or resistance must

not affect him on the part of his friends or those who oppose him. The word of truth has a prominent place whatever happens “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them”.

Pious friends and disciples gathered around John. Such people should gather around the repentant believer. John lived a serious spiritual life so he was worthy of being called “The Baptist. The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way to the Lord”. He came before in the spirit and power of Elijah, the spirit of courage and bravery in truth. The spirit of Chastity and purity as Jesus’ disciple. John bore witness to Jesus and said that Christ was the center of the believer’s life. He is the bridegroom and the bride is his and it is He who will come to dominate the hearts of the believers. John’s preaching aimed at preparing the hearts, through faith and baptism, for Christ to dwell in and for the Holy Spirit to abide in, and for receiving the correct teaching. Repentance, then, is to imitate Christ in our life. Our conduct should reflect the fact that our hearts are filled with him, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”.

John said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”. He is the mediator between God and the repentance and there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. True repentance means that we should cast all our anxieties and sins on Christ for He cares about us.

Exercises

- Let us not be ashamed when we declare our faith before men. Our life has changed now.
- Let us contemplate the image of Christ who takes away the sin of the world and who went as a meek lamb to the Jordan, especially in time of anger or after the fall.
- We have to take a positive step and decisive decisions when we go to confession and apply the verse: “Bear fruits that befit repentance”

Activities

- Study the character of Elijah in the Old Testament and write a comparison between the attitudes of Elijah and the Baptism.
- Explain and clarify the aspects you admire in the character of the Baptism who reproached Herod and did not fear the Pharisees or the hypocrites.
- Make a wall Chart for the church library and make a deep study of the life of the Baptist, its virtues and the aspects of heroism in its character.

Fifth Week of January

(22) Saul was a Powerful King

References

+ “The Life of David” Translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud

The Lesson

Aim

The dangers of rashness in our life.

A people who want a king (Demand for a King)

God ruled the people of Israel through judges who led a spiritual life such as Prophet Samuel, and Samuel used to declare the will of God to the people in all the important situations of life. When Samuel became old, the people asked him to appoint a king to govern them like all the nations. But that thing displeased Samuel as he wanted that people to be distinguished from all the nations through receiving the purpose of the Lord directly. It did not please God to appoint a king for the people but when they insisted, the Lord gave them a King. Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to him, "Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Make them a king".

Samuel anoints Saul as King

The Lord told Samuel that he would bring him a man from the Land of Benjamin and that Samuel should anoint him king of the people. When Samuel saw the man, the Lord said, "This is the man I told you about. He will rule my people". There was a talk between Saul and Samuel. Then Samuel took a jar of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him. When Saul turned to leave Samuel, God gave Saul a new nature (I Samuel 9:15, 10:9).

The Spirit of God took Control of Saul

King Saul met a group of prophets. Suddenly the Spirit of God took control of him and he joined in their ecstatic dancing and shouting and he became a prophet. When the people caught sight of Saul among the prophets they said their word, which became a proverb "Has even Saul become a prophet?" (I Samuel 10:12).

Samuel called the people together and told them that he anointed Saul as king. So the people gave Saul a warm welcome and Samuel said to them, "Here is the man the Lord has chosen: There is no one else among us like him". All the people shouted, "Long live the King". Saul was a strong mighty man. The Lord was with him in all his wars and wherever he went, he defeated his enemies.

Saul is rejected as King

Saul was rash and did not obey the Commandments of God. It happened that Samuel did not come at the appointed time to offer the burnt offering and the peace offerings. Saul was rash enough to offer the burnt offering and the peace offerings himself, although he was not a priest and no one but a priest of the Tribe of Levi was allowed to offer such offerings.

In this way Saul disobeyed the Lord's Commandment. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came, and Saul went out to meet him and salute him. Samuel said, "What have you done?", and Saul said, "When I saw that you did not come within the days appointed I offered the burnt offering". Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly, you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you; for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue; the Lord has sought out a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him to be prince over the people".

The enemies gathered to fight Saul and God was not with him and the fighting was very heavy around Saul and he himself was hit by enemy's arrows and badly wounded. Saul took his own sword and threw himself on it and died. The enemies took him and put his weapons in the temple of the goddess Astarte and nailed his body to the wall of the city of Beath Shan. But the people of Gilead took down his body at night and burnt it and fasted for seven days.

Questions

1. Why was Prophet Samuel displeased when the people asked him to anoint them a king?
2. How was the first king of Israel anointed?
3. "Has even Saul become a prophet? " What does this saying mean?
4. The life history of King Saul represents the history of Israel. When the people kept the commandment, the Lord supported them and when they disobeyed the commandment, the Lord rejected them. Explain.

Activities

- Ask your teacher about the meaning of the burnt offering and the peace offerings and why they were offered.
- Ask your teacher to explain to you the work of the prophet in the Old Testament.
- Note that there is a difference between the men of the Old Testament and the believers of the church in the New Testament when we speak about the coming of the Spirit of God to fill them. What is that difference?

Study and Contemplation

If you make a comparison between king Saul and Christ the King of Kings, you can complete the following sentences:

- (1) King Saul was appointed and chosen by the people, but Christ was...
- (2) Saul was anointed with the holy oil by Samuel, but Christ was anointed with the Holy... at...
- (3) Saul disobeyed the commandment of the Lord, but Jesus obeyed the Will of God till...
- (4) When Saul died, his body was thrown in the temple of idols then it was burnt, but when Jesus died on the...he broke the gates of...and set. ..free and brought them back to...
- (5) If you make a comparison between the government systems in the Old Testaments and in the New Testament you can note that: In the Old Testament there were the fathers, the Judges and the kings, but in the New Testament, we find that Christianity is not concerned with any system of governing, but she welcomes any advanced systems that may emphasize the social justice and serve the people's interests.

A Social Problem

Young men suffer from the problem of rashness. We saw the danger of this attitude in the life of Saul. It is necessary, then, for us to reexamine ourselves.

- Do we seek the purpose of God before we start any new task or do we rush and follow our wrong thoughts?
- Do we think in the spirit of prayer before we do anything?
- Do we behave foolishly with others and quickly judge the attitudes affected by other people's words or by unsound emotions?

- If you are suffering from the problem of rashness, practice the following spiritual exercise: Raise your prayers every morning and say to the Lord , “O Lord, guide me when I think and speak through me. Fill my life with your Spirit and be the Alpha and the Omega of my life. The beginning and the End. Do not allow me to be rash and do what I desire”.

Recitation

+ 1 Samuel 12:24

First Week of February

(23) David the Prophet and the King

References

+ “The Life of David” Fr. Marco Daoud

The Lesson

Aim

The innocence of the heart.

The Shepherd and King

Prophet Samuel anointed Saul as King according to the people’s desire, but Saul was not sincere and could not bear the responsibility granted him by the Lord and he disobeyed the Commandments of God. So the Lord deprived him of his kingdom and sent Samuel to search for a new king. Samuel went to Jesse’s house in Bethlehem and saw his sons but no one of the seven sons was chosen by the Lord so he asked Jesse, “Do you have any more sons?” Jesse answered: “There is still the youngest, but he is out taking care of the sheep”. Samuel asked Jesse to send for the young shepherd and when the boy came, the Lord said to Samuel: “This is the one, anoint him”. Samuel anointed David in front of all his brothers, “Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. The Lord was pleased with David because his heart was pure and he obeyed the Commandments of God “I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart who will do all my will” (Acts 13:22).

David the Hero

The Lord’s Spirit left Saul and took control of David. Some days later, David challenged the mighty Goliath and decided to save the people of God from that evil man as he had saved his sheep from the mouth of the lion before. David went on to fight the mighty man but the mighty man laughed when he saw the young shepherd with a stick in his hand. But David said to him “You are coming against me with sword, spear and javelin but I came against you in the name of the Lord Almighty” (1 Samuel 17:45). David killed that mighty man with his catapult and a stone. Goliath’s followers fled and the Lord rescued His people.

All the people were happy because they were saved and the streets became crowded with people, and wherever David went, people gathered round him. All the women sang this song: “Saul has

killed thousands, but David tens of thousands” (1 Samuel 18:7). When Saul heard the song, he became jealous of David. Saul knew that David would become King so he hated him and wanted to kill him. But Jonathan, Saul’s son, loved David as himself. The Lord was with David and saved him from Saul. Then the opposite took place as Saul without knowing it fell twice in the hands of David who could have killed him and got rid of him but David refused to kill him.

The anointed King

David became King instead of Saul. He was thirty years old. David was sorry for the death of Saul and mourned for him and for his sons who died in the battle. He was very sad because he lost his friend Jonathan. David was a good king. God gave him power and support and helped him in everything he did. This was not the case with Saul who tried to establish for himself an earthly kingdom. David always submitted himself to the Lord, always seeking to achieve the will of God and glorify His Holy Name. He always sang his psalms praising the Lord. It is clear that the Lord chose David in a way that was unique. He desired to make of him a model of a Greater Being, that is the Messiah the Expected king and to make of his kingdom a symbol of the everlasting heavenly kingdom. This is clear when the Lord of Hosts said to David, “I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me; your throne shall be established forever”. David replies, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that You has brought me thus far?”

“Because of your promise, and according to your own words are true. May it please you to bless the house of your servant that it may continue forever before you” (2 Samuel 7:8-29).

In this spirit, David ruled all his life. He knew that the Lord had given him a certain message to fulfill which is to prepare the way for his Incarnation. The earthly kingdom of David is a symbol of the heavenly kingdom, which Jesus Christ established, and his holy church will continue forever in all parts of the world.

God’s Promise to David

Justice and equality prevailed during the reign of King David. He cared for his people and loved them as he had loved his sheep when he was a shepherd. Prophet Nathan announced the Lord’s Covenant with David, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body and I will establish his kingdom. I will be his father and he shall be my son” (2 Samuel 7:12-14).

The covenant was fulfilled by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ who descended from David, “Of this man’s posterity, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as He promised” (Acts 13:23). David sang happily rejoicing in the promise of God in his psalms: “The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back, one of the sons of your body, will set on your throne” (Psalm 132:11).

This covenant was fulfilled when the Angel Gabriel said to Virgin Mary: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and He will be called the Son of the

Most High, and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of his father David, and He will reign over the House of Jacob forever and of His kingdom, there will be no end” (Luke 1:30-33).

People often called Jesus the Son of David

“Bartimaeus, a blind beggar... began to cry out and say: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:46). When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was thrown in an uproar. The crowds that went before Him and that followed Him shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9).

The Great Prophet

David was not only a great King, but he was also a great prophet. Guidance and inspiration came to him from the Holy Spirit. In the psalms that David sang there are many prophecies of the coming of Christ, His Divinity, His life and His Resurrection “I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me: You are my son, today I have begotten you” (Psalm 2:7). “Lift up your heads, O gates: and be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in” (Psalm 24:7).

These psalms are mere examples of David’s prophecies of Lord Jesus. In one of his sermons St. Paul the apostle explained the meaning of some of these prophecies (Acts 13:33-37).

Recitation

“The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool”. (Psalm 110: 1).

Activities

Answer the following questions:

1. Read the following psalms and contemplate the verses that refer to the Lord Christ: Psalm 2, Psalm 16, Psalm 22, Psalm 41, and Psalm 110.
2. Make a comparison between Psalm 2 and Psalm 16 and Acts 13:33-37.
3. What does it mean to say that Christ is the Son of David?
4. Together with your colleague make a wall Chart about David the King and Prophet, making use of his life history in “1 Samuel” and “2 Samuel”.

Second Week of February

(24) Jonah the Prophet and the Symbol

References

- + “Contemplations on the Book of Jonah” H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- + “The Book of Jonah” Translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud
- + “Christ in all Books” A. M. Hodgkins

The Lesson

Aim

Salvation in the death of Christ and his resurrection of which Jonah is a symbol.

Introduction

“Jonah” is a Hebrew word that means “a dove”. This word may remind us of Noah’s dove which was sent to declare that the Lord was no more angry with men, and that peace is now coming back to the people.

How does the Lord Speak?

In the Old Testament the Lord spoke to his people through the prophets and they:

- + Deliver the words of God directly;
- + Make signs, symbols and rites (the Paschal Lamb and the manna...);
- + Declare the will of God by offering themselves as models (Isaac, Joseph, Moses, David).

As for the gentiles, they have their conscience as those who are without law are law for themselves. This is clear in the way the Lord treated the people of Nineveh as He did not excuse them from repentance although they had no prophets or law. They knew themselves, through their conscience, asked the help of what they considered God. They refrained from throwing Jonah into the sea and although they were pagans, they cried to the Lord: “We beseech You, O Lord, let us not persist for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood”.

The Gentiles and the Jews

The peoples of the world lived in complete corruption, idolatry, zoolatry and worship of ancestors prevailed. They had rites for adultery and evil priestesses. Sometimes they offered their children as human offerings to please their cruel gods, so the Jewish Law considered them defile and the Jews were forbidden to mix with them. The Lord ordered the Jews not to imitate them so that they may not be punished as evil people. But the Merciful Lord prepared Salvation for those too.

Nineveh was a great city and the great Nimrod had built it (Genesis 10: 11). Nineveh was the Capital of Assyria, the Mistress of the Ten kingdoms. Its destruction was impossible as its fence was so big that it could hold three war wagons. The city had more than 120,000 innocent inhabitants (Jonah 4:11) and there was no end of treasure or wealth of every precious thing (Nahum 2:9). Amidst this abundance in wealth, success in commerce, and advanced civilization, the people led a corrupt life, drank wine and neglected their salvation.

Why did Jonah refuse to Breach them?

- Jonah considered them as Israel’s deadly enemy.. He desired that God’s wrath would lie heavy upon them and that the Lord would not grant them His grace and steadfast love.
- For him it was a risk to preach such a great city that was the capital of the Pagan World.
- The ancient man was working in him so he did not wish to appear as a false prophet who would say without doing. He wished that he himself would benefit from the mercies of God.

God Works

The important thing in the story was not Jonah as a person, but what Jonah stood for was the most important thing. Salvation is in Christ. The Lord passed over Jonah’s attributes, fanaticism

and narrow mindedness. On the contrary, the Lord gave him lesson for his life. But Jonah without feeling it was a symbol of what would happen that is the Salvation, which would be fulfilled through the death of Christ and his resurrection.

Similarities between Jonah and the Lord Jesus

Jonah

1. He was from Galilee (Gath hepher, 2 Kings 4:25).
2. The sailors said: “O Lord we pray, do not punish us with death for taking this man’s life”.
3. Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.
4. Jonah was inside the whale dead and alive.
5. Jonah was a sign for the people of Nineveh by being rescued from certain death.
6. Jonah preached a disobedient nation outside the fold of Israel.

Lord Jesus

1. “It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish”.
2. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Mathew 12:40).
3. While He was on the cross, blood and water came forth from His side.
4. Christ have His resurrection as a sign of which John said: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Christ’s sign was to die in flesh three days and rise for the salvation of men.
5. He is the Shepherd of all the world who will gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

Jonah’s story tells us about the salvation of Christ, that salvation is in Christ only and the great wrath is outside. The belief in Christ as the Savior who died and rose from the dead and our return to Him is the only way for the peoples of the earth to return to God.

A Lesson in Love

- When Jonah saw that his warning to the city and his message of doom did not come true, he was angry and went out of the city and sat down.
- He prayed and said to the Lord: “I pray You, Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil. I know that you will forgive them show mercy to them when they cry to You”.
- The Lord said: “Should not I pity my sheep. Do you do well to be angry for the plan that gave you shade and shelter? You pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow. You felt sorry for it when it perished. Should not I pity my sons and daughters? For this reason, Jonah, I chose you to deliver my message to them”.
- Your love, O Lord, surpasses any words. I felt this deep love when I was inside the belly of the whale so I prayed to You from the depths of my heart.
- What were your feelings after what happened?
- I felt that I died and I came back to life, but I wonder why did you leave me in the belly of the whale three days and three nights?
- I denied that you would be a symbol of me and for all generations.

- Lord, I am not worthy of this honor; to make of me a symbol of your death and resurrection.

Exercise

Call the sinners to repent, confess and receive the Holy Communion so that they may be saved. Do not be fanatic. Show your love for all without exception.

Activities

- Make a wall Chart and write the story of prophet Jonah. Make use of art and writing in making the of art.
- Draw a map and show the cities mentioned in the story of Jonah the prophet and the position of Jerusalem.
- Hold a prayer meeting so that the Lord may show mercy to sinners, make them repent and save them from their corrupt life.

Third Week of February

(25) Nehemiah the Zealot (1)

References

- + The Book of Nehemiah.
- + “Nehemiah’ Translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud

The Lesson

Aim

Developing the feeling of the holy jealousy for the Service.

The Suffering of the People in Exile

They were in great trouble and shame, the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates were destroyed by fire. When Nehemiah heard this news, he sat down and wept, and mourned for days and he continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven “Let Your ear be attentive, and Your eyes open, to hear the prayer of Your servant which I now pray before You day and night for the people of Israel, which we have sinned against You... We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments... Give success to Your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man” (Nehemiah 1. Notice his courage facing troubles of his brethren in spite of his great post and notice also that he resorted to the weapon of prayer and not to the earthy weapons).

The Meetings with the King

“Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick?” the King asked Nehemiah. “Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchers, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” Nehemiah replied. “For what do you make request?” the king asked. So Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven and said “If it pleases the king... send me to Judah, to the

city of my father's sepulchers, that I may rebuild it". The king approved his request and supplied him with letters and timber (Notice that Nehemiah prayed before he spoke to the King).

Grievous conditions

When Sanballat, the Horonite and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel (The minister must face troubles and meet with stubborn people inside the church. Remember the troubles that the Jews aroused in the face of the apostle). Nehemiah did not fall into despair in spite of the sad conditions outside (the buildings and the walls) and the sad conditions inside (hearts and people). He took courage and said to them: "Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer disgrace", and they said, "Let us rise up and build". So they strengthened their hands for the good work (Notice that when a man is enthusiastic, jealous and faithful, his followers increase in number). Nehemiah had trust in God who granted him success when he rose to build (It is God that grants success. We have to work as hard as we can in our life, in our studies and in the Spiritual, ecclesiastical, social and national domains without despair).

Contemplate how the enemies resisted Nehemiah and how he stood firm in faith and how he carried out his message bravely (Chapter 4).

Facing the situation

Do not fear those who resist you. We prayed to our God and set guards against the enemies day and night. They worked with one hand and carried weapons with the other hand (These are the attitudes of the children of God. They divide their time between studying and prayers. The Lord heard the prayer and blesses the work).

Activities

- Try to imagine the broken walls of Jerusalem and draw them after Nehemiah started building them.
- Draw the people who were building the walls, half of them were building and the other half who were kept on guard against the enemies.
- Together with your teacher, make a study of the troubles that faced the following saints and how they overcame them: Paul the apostle, Athanasius the apostle, and St. Anthony the Great.

Spiritual Exercises

- Zeal and sincerity to the church and the motherland.
- Do not be afraid of troubles and take opposition into consideration.
- Stand firm in the face of these troubles by prayers and positive work not by disputes, division and passive attitude.

Recitation

"Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer disgrace" (Nehemiah 2:17).

"The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we His servants will arise and build" (Nehemiah 2:20).

Fourth Week of February

(26) Nehemiah the Zealot (2)

References

- + The Book of Nehemiah.
- + “Nehemiah’ Translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud

The Lesson

Aim

Developing the positive attitude towards facing the problems of life.

Positiveness in Work

The builders were doing their work while the sword of each one of them was tied to his side. The man who was to sound the alarm on the bugle stayed with me (Chapter 4). Every day from dawn until the stars came out at night, half of us worked on the wall and the other half stood guard with spears (Notice the persistence and insistence and hard work which lead to success).

Rejecting luxury, selfishness and exploiting the post

From the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah and for twelve years neither I nor my brethren ate the food allowance of the governor. I acquired no land and I held to the work on this wall (Chapter 5. A model of leadership and shouldering responsibility that should be followed... and not exploiting the post for private interests).

Plots against Nehemiah

- Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem put their heads together and plotted to destroy the great work.
- Nehemiah refused to negotiate with them saying, “I am doing important work and cannot go down. I am not going to let the work stop just to go and see you”.
- They all wanted to frighten us thinking, “their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands” (Chapter 6).
- Should such a man as I flee? and what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not gain (A model of true manhood. Manhood does not mean imitating those indifferent corrupt young men but it means determination and holding fast to principles).
- He prayed for his enemy. This is the Spirit of the Children of God.
- When the wall had been rebuilt I appointed an honest man who feared God to be in charge of it (This is the spirit of responsibility. The best man in administration should be chosen).

Prayer, Repentance and Humiliation for the Dedication of the City Wall

Read chapters 9 and 10 and you will find an excellent model of public repentance. On dedicating the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites carried cymbals and harps. The priests and the Levites performed ritual purification for themselves, the people, the gates and the city wall. They offered many sacrifices to the Lord and rejoiced because the Lord made them happy (How happy we are

when we achieve spiritual and social success. The Psalm says: “May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy”. He wanted them to get rid of foreign women and asked them to take Solomon as example of a man whom the foreign women led him to sin.

Activities

- Make a wall Chart or write an essay about the virtues and aspects of heroism, which you admire in the life of Nehemiah.
- Nehemiah was a spiritual leader and an excellent administrator. Give examples to show this.

Exercises

God did not give us the Spirit of failure but He gave us the spirit of love, power, endurance, patience and guidance.

Recitation

“For the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

First Week of March

(27) The Lord Christ solves problems in Secret

References

+ The Book of Christian Religion.

The Lesson

Aim

Review of previous lessons.

Christ, Glory be to Him, Solves Problems

Question: Prove with examples that Christianity resists fanaticism.

Answer: Fanaticism is an ancient problem It faces humanity and Christ resisted it.

The first example: The people of Galilee fanaticized against the people of Nazareth. Nathaniel said: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” he said this about Christ, but Christ showed kindness to him and revealed His power of prophecy and said: “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you”. So Nathaniel was sorry for what he said (John 1:45-51).

The second example: The Jews fanaticized against the people of Samaria. When the disciples went to a village in Samaria to pave the way before Christ, its people refused to receive Him. The disciples said: Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them? But He turned and rebuked them.

The third example: As the Samaritan woman said, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan. So how

can you ask me for a drink?” But the Lord led her to His kingdom.

The Remedy to Fanaticism:

- In the parable of the good Samaritan, the Lord Christ said that mercy should not be connected with race, religion color or any kinship.
- Christ came to both Jews and Gentiles and all became one in Jesus Christ.
- In the Lord’s prayer Christ taught us to say: Our father...This means that all men are brothers.
- Fanaticism implies hatred and injustice and these attitudes are against Christianity.

Question: Show examples from the Holy Bible to cure and overcome the problem of sin.

Answer: St. Paul the apostle says: “For the wages of sin is death”.

- When David sinned, he confessed his sin to Prophet Nathan saying: I have sinned against the Lord” and the prophet said: “The Lord also has put away your sin”.
- David always remembered his sin saying: “For I know my transgression, and my sin is ever before me”.
- God helped Prophet Jonah to get rid of his sin when he threw him in the belly of the whale and then saved him. And Jonah, in his turn, could preach the people of Nineveh and tell them the good news and repentance and salvation.
- Lord Christ, glory be to Him, has the authority to forgive sins. He said to the paralyzed man: “Your sins have been forgiven”.
- He also said about the woman who had been caught in adultery: Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” and He said to the woman: “Go and do not sin again”.
- He also advised the Samaritan woman to leave her sins and begin anew.

So the remedy lies in showing the viciousness of sin, encouraging the sinner to repent, accepting his true repentance, washing it in his Holy Blood, and warning him against the setback.

Question: Show the conditions of following Christ.

Answer: This can be shown from the story of the three persons who wanted to be His disciples.

| The man who wanted to follow Christ | His problem | |
|--|---|--|
| 1. I will follow you wherever you go. 2. Let me first go and bury my father. 3. Let me first say farewell to those at my home. | 1. He wanted to take the blessing without toil. 2. His deep love for his family being hesitant in following the Savior and being effected with the worries of life. 3. Holding fast to the world and its luxuries and the desire to hour the stick in the middle of it. A hesitant man. | 1. The life of ministry is full of sufferings. 2. Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests. 3. No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. |

Activities

- The teacher guides the children while performing their discussion and the children write solutions for the problems.
- He encourages the children to quote verses from the Holy Bible as evidence for their solutions.
- In the spirit of prayer, repentance and exercise and carrying out the commandment practically the topics can be changed from being school subjects into practical life.
- A wall magazine can be made for the class, about the problem and the solutions offered by Christianity.

The Triumphant Christ

The events of ascension

- After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus stayed on our earth for forty days. During this period, He appeared to His disciples and proved His resurrection, explained the prophecies to them and gave them authority to forgive sins and tour them to evangelize His name.
- He ascended to heaven while they were looking at Him at the Mountain of Olive and He raised His hands and blessed them.
- They bowed to Him in worship and gladly went back to Jerusalem.
- An angel in white appeared to them and told them that Christ would come back again from heaven in the same manner they saw Him going up to heaven.

The Blessings of Ascension

- Heaven has become the believers' dwelling place "My kingdom is not of this world".
- Jesus ascended in the flesh. He took of our nature and promised us saying: "And where I am you may be also".
- Jesus Christ sent us the Holy Spirit from heaven and said to us: "If I do not go away, the comforter will not come to you".

The Promise of Sending the Holy Spirit

Jesus gave His disciples this order: "Do not leave Jerusalem for ten days. You will be filled with power when the Holy Spirit comes on you". They all joined together in a group to pray frequently for ten days till the Holy Spirit came on them on the day of Pentecost and Jesus' promise was fulfilled "I will pray to the Father, and He will send you another comforter, to be with you forever".

The Work of the Three Hypostases

The Father: created man, loved him and promised to redeem him.

The Son: incarnated, became man, was crucified, rose from the dead and ascended to heaven and raised us from our sins.

The Holy Spirit: came on the Virgin and God's power rested upon her so she became the mother of Jesus. The Holy Spirit came on the disciples and gave them the power to evangelize and it is He that guides the believers and the church.

The Second Coming

Jesus said, "When I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also". In His first coming, Jesus was born to save the world and he said: "I did not come to Judge the world but to save the world". But in His second coming, He will judge the living and the dead and say to those on His right, "Come, O Blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world".

The necessity of being prepared

The Lord says to us, "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect". The Lord gave us the parable of the wise virgins and beautified those who are ready and warned those who are not ready. He also gave us the parable of the ten talents and likened the believer to the servant whom his master will ask about the talents he gave him. He advised us to do mercy so that we may be ready for his second coming saying: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Matthew 25:35).

Activities

- Explain the meaning of "being prepared for the Second Coming".
- What is the work of each hypostasis of the Holy Trinity in our life and salvation.
- Show how Christianity deals with the problem of fanaticism and how you can practice this Christian Spirit in your school, and in the environment in which you live.

Second Week of March

(28) In Secret

References

- + "The Garden of Soul" Part 2, Anba Youannis
- + "Contemplations and studies on the Great Feats" Anba Bemin
- + "The Life of the Orthodox Prayer"
- + "The Treasure of Grace" Part 4, Archdeacon Banoub Abdu

The Lesson

Aim

Being ready for fasting.

Introduction

Before the church starts its journey with the struggling believers, who decided to crucify the desires of the flesh, she sets the foundations of struggle and defines the aspects of the lawful struggle. It is like adjusting the compass, and preparing and adjusting the machines before going into the desert on a long journey or for an important battle.

The Importance of the Lawful Struggle

Not everyone who struggles is crowned. There is false struggle and lawful struggle. “Not every one who says to me: Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven”. The scripture declares that the kingdom of God is taken by force and that our battle is not with flesh and blood but we are contending against the principalities, against the powers...against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. These dangerous and wicked powers are filled with wickedness, mischievousness, cunning, and cheating. The people need wisdom, insight, enlightenment and awareness. Our Orthodox church does not believe in Salvation in an instant, but she believes in decisive repentance that is followed by struggle till the end, and no other way can save man. Many people began spiritually and ended with the flesh. As there are outside enemies such as the world and the devil, there is also an enemy lying inside that is the self with its authority, stubbornness, and evil emotions.

False Religiousness

The Lord Christ faced a kind of sick religiousness and false struggle. That kind was practiced by the Scribes and the Pharisees. Their struggle closed the gates of the kingdom of heaven before men. Their religiousness made the way crooked. The Savior rebuked and reproached such people who were hypocrites, warning them of severe punishment as:

- They preach what they do not do and this is the case of hypocrisy.
- They bind heavy loads and do not carry them or move them with their fingers and this is simulation.
- They like to have the first seat and show their worship to people and this is love of appearance.
- They devour widows' houses and for a pretence make long prayers; this is darkness in its worst case.
- They cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity; this is formality in its worst shape.
- The church sees no benefit in worship or struggle unless man frees himself from love of appearance, hypocrisy, simulation and formality.

In Secret

The Gospel of the Mass of Carnival Sunday is about the aspects of true sincere struggle, which is acceptable before the Lord, and the church sums it up in the expression, “In secret and concentration on the internal life”. Before practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them: “When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners...When you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites... that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret”.

Secrecy is not contradictory to publicity, which means struggling with the believers, but it is contradictory to love of appearance that is pretence for seeking people's praise. In the days of the apostle the believers struggled together, but each one of them had his own secret which is between the bride and the bridegroom as expressed in the Song of Songs: “A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed. Secrecy is good judgment, truthfulness and sincerity in faith”.

It is concentration on the content, not the form. It is to concentrate on intentions, motivations and feelings rather than apparent practices before people. It is to concentrate on spiritual experience more than formalities and material patterns. It is to work sincerely to please God without caring for people's talk or seeking self-satisfaction. Now, let us be ready: After a little time, we are going to start the journey. Let us be active and put girdles around our waists. Let each one of us count the cost of the journey and concentrate on these spiritual practices before starting the blessed Spiritual journey:

- Fasting is not to eat certain kinds of food but it is a love sacrifice, which the believer offers for that who dies and rose from the dead for him.
- Fasting is not distress, suppressing one's emotions or deprivation but it is a release of the soul, expurgating the body and refreshing the worship.
- Fasting is to control the inner man and the outer man.
- Fasting in itself is useless unless it is accompanied by continuous prayers and almsgiving.

If our souls respond to these practices and if we practice them with a sincere heart, our spiritual ears will hear sweet voices coming from the boundaries of Eternity mixed with the voices of worshipers who worship God in all the churches and they all sing in chorus the blessed Lent Song.

Activities and Exercises

- Start fasting from the beginning and devote a period for abstaining from food, this period should increase gradually under the guidance of your father of confession.
- Devote the sixth Hour period for prayer. Pray before you have your meal and remember the passions of the Lord.
- Give up the bad habit of talking much and the love of appearance.
- Let us practice piety in secret especially during Lent. Devote a part of the tithes to be offered to the poor on the Feast Day.

A Problem

Question 1: What shall I do if my family insists that I should postpone fasting? Should I fast while the other members of my family are not fasting?

Answer 1: You do not fast alone but the whole church fasts with you. Try to convince them You can take a decision and ask your father of confession to interfere, but whatever happens do not give up your principles.

Question 2: What shall I do if the members of my family see me while I am praying or when people know that I am fasting?

Answer 2: Do not worry about that and continue practicing this virtue so long as you do not like ostentation (showing off).

Third Week of March

(29) Contention and the Three Kinds of Challenge

References

- + “Contemplations and Studies on the Great Feasts” Anba Bemin
- + “The Holy Lent” Anba Macary Monastery
- + “The treasures of Grace” Part 4, Archdeacon Banoub Abdu
- + “Temptation of Christ” Translated by Iris Al Masry

The Lesson

Aim

To resist the desire of the eyes, the desire of the flesh and the pride of life by the Power of He Who conquered in the wilderness.

Recitation

“Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8).

When Adam fell and was dismissed from Paradise, his sin implied three falls which were all fatal and led to Hades.

1. Pride of life (to be equal to God).
2. Lust of the flesh (he desired and ate).
3. Lust of the eyes (he wanted to possess knowledge and keep away from God, and possess wisdom and be independent of the Lord).

The First Adam was defeated in the battle and the Second Adam came to wage the battle again but is confident of victory and triumph as He is the Son of man, the holy and the righteous who obeyed till death, the death on the cross.

Between the First Adam and the Second Adam

He was healthy, strong and happy but when temptation came to the Second Adam, He was in a barren wilderness, He was hungry and very weak. Temptation came to the first as instigation and incitement, but to the Second Adam it was a test and experience so that He may give the power of His victory to all who believe in Him: “For because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted”. ”For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin”.

The three kinds of challenge that met the Lord in the wilderness were not directed to the Lord only but we have to bear in mind that the Lord in that situation represented the whole humanity. The victory He achieved, then, was kept for the believers and saints who win victory through Him and with Him in every age and in every generation.

The First Battle

Why Was the Lord hungry

The church tells us that the desire for food is one of the most dangerous sins in the life of man that is why a monk is trained to a life of chastity, fasting and devoutness when he enters the monastery. The church teaches him how to control his belly and larynx. Many ascetics lived for

months without food. We hear about many Buddhists, in India, who spend months without food. If this is so, the Lord then was able to adjust and control the hunger he felt in His body and it is He that said about Himself, "I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again".

But He did not do that to prove that humanity is united with His godhead, but to give the enemy the domain that suited him, so that, when the battle takes place, the fasting man is able to turn the enemy's arrows to his scabbard... The enemy attempted to convince Adam and his descendants that food, material and the world are the substance of life, but the Lord who knows the truth, truly knows that this is lying and deception. The Liar wanted to convince all men that our whole life is connected with the earth and earthly things and those who satisfy the desires of the flesh still lead a material life and what moves them is material motivation. Those people will die and will be destroyed if they keep away from the true source of life but the Lord Jesus knows that God is the Source of life, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men". But food, material and the world will come to an end and the life of man exists only in the Son the Logos by Him all things were made and all things consist (Colossians 1:16).

Fasting and Chastity against the desire of the flesh

We fast then to show the Lord that through our hunger and thirst, there is hunger in the heart that material things cannot satisfy. The waters of the world cannot quench the thirst of His children. In the past, the Lord said to Israel, "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Today the church says to her Lord who won victory in the wilderness and conquered the enemy, "We fast and become hungry so that we may be satisfied by the heavenly manna, the bread of life. Whether through the word on the pulpit, or by the Logos put on the altar. Through this chastity, the believer's natural and perfect unity comes back to him. It unites man's soul and body with God's love, and in this way man's powers work in harmony aiming at perfection and as a guarantee for true perfection that is expected in eternity and hoped for in heavenly Jerusalem. Lusts disperse, scatter and cut man from inside, but chastity and holiness gather the personality and grant her peace, happiness, satisfaction and comfort. Fasting is a means for achieving the life of purity, chastity, the holiness of the members of the body and overcoming the strong sex instincts inside us (Examples from the Garden of Monks).

The Second Battle

After the enemy had been conquered in the battle of the flesh and the desire for food he set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and asked Him to throw himself down as the angels would give charge of Him as it is written in Psalm (91) "For He will give His angels charge of you, to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone". But the Lord Jesus refused the offer because:

1. it was not from the Father but it was from the enemy.
2. he did nothing in his life to glorify himself separated from the will of his good Father, but all what he did was for the glory of God although he and the father are one.
3. these great deeds and the splendid aspects that stimulate emotions do not offer a spiritual message but offer an unsuccessful gospel and a curriculum that does not use the power of

the Lord. If chastity is the virtue with which you fight the desire for food, we find that obedience is the virtue with which you overcome the temptation of the enemy, pride, haughtiness and false praise.

- Obedience is to forsake our will till death; if we do not forsake ourselves, then we can forsake nothing.
- Obedience is the inner listening to the voice of God.
- Obedience is the obedience of the Only begotten Son to His Heavenly Father.
- Obedience dominates our will if we obey the truth and carry out the commandment.
- Obedience means love for Christ and for Christ alone. In the book of Revelation, we see that the Redeemed practice it with joy and follow the Lamb where ever he goes.

The Third Battle

The Lord conquered the devil, in the temptation of the flesh, by fasting and He defeated him, in the temptation of haughtiness, by obedience and modesty. But the third temptation is the temptation of owning and possessing which the Scripture refers to as the Lust of the eyes, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (Psalm 2:8). Christ is truly coming to fulfill this prophecy so that the whole earth will be the Lord’s and His Christ’s but the Cross was God’s means of salvation. The enemy wanted to alter the plan of Salvation and the temptation was severe. The end was correct but the means was evil and many people are destroyed because they think that the end justifies the means. But the Lord Jesus is the end and the means together. He is the way and life together. He refused to suspend hostilities with the devil. All those who live for truth accept death and do not give up the truth entrusted to them. In this battle we find that the virtue of voluntary poverty is the best virtue. The Lord helps those who struggle to separate themselves from everything and keep away from material things to find their true being in God, and God fills our hearts if we prepare them for Him and accepted to give up the desire of possessing things for the sake of gaining spiritual life and Salvation (Like that man who sold the field and bought the precious jewel). In this, the saying comes true: “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it”.

Instructions

If in his sermon, James the Sirougi says:

In the first temptation: Let us resort to fasting and severe asceticism in our fight against our love for gormandize and greediness.

In the Second temptation: Let us cast away our love for false glory, so that we, through humility, can live with God.

In the third temptation: Let us flee from love for wealth, possessions and power as I they tread and destroy all love for righteousness.

Exercises

- Increase the period of fasting in which you abstain from food and resist the desires of the flesh and its lusts.
- Do not decorate your body with jewelry and perfumes.
- Devote a certain period every day for reading the Word of God. Resort to fasting and confession.

- Decrease the time you spend in listening to Songs and watching films. Listen to the word of God.
- Conceal your talents and skills. Do not speak about them or declare them and do not boast about having them.

Activities and Questions

1. Make a wall Chart about the three temptations the Lord faced in the wilderness.
2. Draw a picture about the flight in the wilderness.
3. Attend the Holy Mass and spiritual meetings during fasting days and make more contemplations.
4. When we sin, we often blame the devil and say that he has deceived us. What do you think?

Fourth Week of March

(30) The Prodigal Son

References

- + “The Paradise of the Spirit” Part I, Anba Youannis
- + “The Guide to Confession” Anba Bemim
- + “Turn me O Lord and I will turn” Fr. Youssef Asaad

The Lesson

Aim

The practical steps for repentance.

Introduction

The story of the Prodigal Son will remain an abundant, spring for the mercies of God. The church reads this parable at the beginning of the Lent. In this parable we find the following:

- The deep love of the Father who always forgives.
- The state of the sinner and how sin corrupted the life of man, destroyed him and caused his misery.
- Self-righteousness, Phariseism, and depending on human strength in life are useless.
- A warning against fall, rewarding the repentant and forgiving sins as the true repentance is renewal of life.

Steps of Repentance in the life of the Prodigal Son

The First Step: He began to be in need: Being in need of fatherhood is the first step towards repentance. Hunger and the thirst for righteousness is the main gate through which repentant enter. But those who lead the life of the Pharisees, who sit with Simon to judge the woman who sinned (and repented after meeting the Lord became righteous), those who are self-satisfied, those who admire their self-righteousness, and those who are filled with pride because of their human virtues, are not in need of the Christ of sinners: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”.

In this stage in the life of the Prodigal son the Scripture says: “So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine” (Luke 15:5). How miserable is that man who makes human attempts and resorts to people, thinking that men can solve his problem and release him of his troubles, isolation, emptiness and misery.

Such a man will increase his misery. He will desire to fill his inside with anything but no one will comfort him or release him of emptiness and isolation. The devil gives him delight when he sins so he rushes towards sin but finds no delight, “Nobody gave him” as the Scripture says.

The Second Step: He came to himself. True repentance does not mean mere grief.. but is it the blessed grief? It is the positive grief of which the Scripture says: “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but ungodly grief produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

- The blessed grief is the grief for the sake of God.
- The blessed grief is the grief that the Lord beautified saying; “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).
- It is grief accompanied by tears but through it we have hope.
- There is pain, there is weeping, but there is also confidence in the Father’s bosom.
- In it, there is murmur against the ugly sins of the past, but there is also confidence in the Blessed Divine promises.
- The repentant who grieves at sins, hears the Lord’s voice in his heart saying: “And him who comes to me I will not cast out. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “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).

In this stage, the Prodigal Son says: “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger. I will arise and go to my father as I have confidence in his fatherhood and his love whatever my sins are”. The devil encourages man to sin and fall and when man falls, the devil seeks to drive him into despair. The spiritual man struggles before he falls, but if he stumbles, he hurries to rise saying: “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise” (Micah 7:8).

One of the characteristics of this stage is contrition of the heart: “I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants”. The Lord looks from heaven, at the humble hearted and raises them whatever their sins are. It is written: “The Lord lifts up the downtrodden, he casts the wicked to the ground”. “He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap”.

Ahab sold himself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord, when Jezebel, his wife, incited him And when Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about dejectedly. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite saying, “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself fore me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring evil in his days” (1 Kings 21:25 -28).

God does not treat us according to our sins but according to His great mercy, He regards our humility and humble hearts and accepts our repentance through the mercy of His Son Jesus Christ who offered Himself as an acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the whole world: “The blood of Jesus His son cleanses us from all sin”. He regards the humble sinner through the sacrifice of the cross, accepts him and gives him the blood of His beloved Son that has the power of forgiveness.

The Third Step: Taking a decision “He rose and came to his father”. Repentance is a change of attitude and a deep change of the heart’s attitude This situation has two sides: the inner side and the outer side. The inner change is represented in the holy grief, contrition, faith and confidence in the promise of God. One of the best example is the thief on the right who believed and his faith has been reckoned to him as righteousness. St. Baessa who refused to go back to the place where she used to sin, then she died and John saw her with the souls of the Saints who perfected faith and proved that repentance turns adulterers into virgins (Synaxarium 2 Missra).

But the outer side implies two phases: The first phase is to manifest this internal movement in the form of actions, situations and conduct before God and men. The Second phase is to go to confession. As for announcing the effect of the new life and declaring the power of resurrection, which filled the day-scattered bones (Read Ezekiel 37).

St. Paul’s preaching to the Ephesians shows that, “Many also of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver (Acts 19: 18, 19).

Zacchaeus repented before all the people and decided to give half his property to the poor and if he cheated anyone, he would pay him back four times as much. In this situation we can concentrate on the following characteristics:

1. Complete confidence in the promises of God and His love and never to depend on self-righteousness.
2. Deep hatred of sin, its circumstances and sources.
3. Deep love for the Lord Jesus and great appetite for worship.
4. Practical love, ministry and modesty in conduct in general.
5. Join the fellowship with the believers in the church.

These attributes make repentance not only mere spiritual rejoicing that takes place in a moment when one is affected by a preacher or moved by one of the verses, but it is also a continuous life, which is the life of God in us. St. Paul expresses this by saying: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”. Repentance, then is to desert the egocentric life and adopt the life of Christ in us. It is the Passover from the land of bondage to the Land of Canaan, the Land of true comfort.

The Fourth Step: Going to confession. What remains then is the final step which is declaring the inner repentance and the change of situation, and showing what happens inside man to the priest

to whom believers entrust their secrets and confessions and who is given the power of loosening and binding according to the apostolic power received by the apostles from the Lord Himself.

In the early church confession was made in public when the believers met to practice liturgies. That is because that who sins, sins against Christ who is the Head of the church, and against His body, which is the church. But after the spread of Christianity, the church preferred that confession would be in secret before one priest.

Discussion

1. What would happen if I did not go to confession?
2. Should I confess to God or to a priest? Why? Is there a difference?
3. What are the steps to be followed before going to confession?

Activities

- Let us read the Holy Bible, find out our weaknesses, grieve at our sins and seek the forgiveness of the Lord.
- Let us record our confessions in a certain notebook.
- Let us resist our sins through practicing the exercises given to us by our father of confession.
- Let us hold prayer meetings so that the Lord may bring back those who are outside the Church and help the repentant to stand firm in faith.
- Let us make a wall Chart about the parable of the Prodigal Son through writing, drawing and pictures.

Fifth Week of March

(31) Christ meets the Samaritan Woman

References

- + “Studies and contemplations on Great Feasts” Anba Bemin
- + “The Treasures of Grace” Part 4, Archdeacon Abduh Abanoub
- + Interpretation of the Gospel of St. John, Chapter 4.
- + “How Christ deals with Sinners” Part 1, Archdeacon Ramsis Naguib

The Lesson

Aim

Christ can give salvation to sinners.

God Demands

- That the human soul, after falling in sin, should feel that she could not approach the Lord as if He would take something out of her: “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself”.
- The Lord appeared as if he wanted something (Give me a drink). The Lord is not in need of anything but He tests the will of man and respects his freedom.

- The Lord gives when He sees man's desire responding to His Divine Will. We notice that Jesus did not take anything from the Samaritan Woman even after the long conversation with her. He did not even take water from her to drink.
- Christ will not take anything from you. He will only take away your sins and troubles, your despair and anxiety, but He is ready to give you the water of life.

God gives

- A spring of water that never dries and that is always flowing.
- He gives from inside so do not seek Him outside your heart.
- He is the Everlasting God. He begins in time but he will go into eternity. He quenches your thirst so you will need nothing from the world. In fact, the gifts of God are complete. He gives Himself to you.

Let us contemplate the situation of Lord Jesus at the well:

- He was tired and it is He who gives comfort to those who are tired.
- He asked for water and it is He who quenches the thirst of all those who are thirsty and out of Him come the wells of living water.
- He needed the other and it is He who satisfies the needs of the whole world.
- He was a sojourner and it is He who created all things and it is He who reigns over heaven and earth.
- He was hungry and whoever eats of Him lives forever.

The problems of the Samaritan Woman

- The Samaritan woman was not an ordinary woman but circumstances made her always in a lower position. Her sins made her social status lower than that of others but she was still a human soul in the image of God and after His likeness. Jesus was sorry for her, kind to her and pitied her.
- She was a woman and the society at that time preferred men to women. The Jews had that attitude in the days of Christ.
- She was a Samaritan pagan woman who was despised by the Jews.
- She was a sinner. She lived with five husbands so she had a bad reputation and no one wanted to marry her or live with her. She fell into despair as she failed in correcting her way of living.
- She suffered from humility and Jesus raised her human status and destroyed the obstacles of race, fanaticism, reputation and people's talk. He stood with her and talked to her.
- She was enslaved to sexual desires and He gave her the water of the eternal life.
- She suffered from formal religiousness so He spoke to her about Salvation and worship in spirit and truth. He did not argue with her or go into fruitless discussion.
- In His talk with the Samaritan woman, Jesus was a priest and a prophet. A priest interceding for her weakness and protecting her. A prophet revealing the darkness that lies inside to free her from bondage.
- Jesus put His blessed hand on the place of disease and the beloved sin, "Go and call your husband". We need to sit with ourselves to discover our sins before we start repentance.

Formal religiousness is not enough

The Samaritan woman tried to discuss religious issues and fanaticism among the Jews and the people of Samaria in an attempt to postpone her repentance. But Christ, through quiet words, gently led her to worship the Father in spirit and truth. Finally, He faces her and says that He was the “Messiah” the Christ and He was the way. Christ’s food and drink is the salvation of the lost souls and this is what the disciples did not understand.

Confession in public and the New Life

- She had to confess so that her sins might be forgiven (The importance of confession to God and to the priest).
- She deserted sin when she met Christ (She left her jar and went, the same that Levi did when he left the place of collecting taxes).
- She hurried to call others to meet Christ (that who hears let him 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”.

Questions

1. The Samaritan woman felt ashamed when she confessed her sins. Give evidence of this and show how the person who confesses can overcome the shyness that hinders his confession.
2. Why is fasting useless without repentance and confession?
3. What does, “Living water” mean?
4. What are the wells that man goes to quench his thirst?
5. Interpret this verse: “Everyone who drink of this water will thirst again”.
6. Show how the Lord, in his meeting with the Samaritan woman, dealt with the following problems: sin, formality, and religious fanaticism.

Recitation

- “I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord; and You did forgive the guilt of my sin” (Psalm 32:5).
- “Everything who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4: 13,14).

First Week of April

(32) Do you want to get well?

References

- + “Contemplation on the Gospel of John” Part I, Anba Bemin
- + “Interpretation of the Gospel of John chapter 5” Translated by Fr. Marcos Daoud
- + “The patient likes disease” Yassa Hanna
- + “Christ’s dealing with sinners” Part I, Ramses Naguib

The Lesson

Aim

Jesus can strengthen the weak will.

The Disabled's Will

Man was not like that; God created him free, in His image and after His likeness. In the Garden He gave him dominion over the whole world, and granted him the will, activity and freedom that he could even refuse God who created him. What did he, then, gain from his disobedience, rebellion and keeping away from the commandments of God? He is now disabled, his will is paralyzed, his emotions are sick He is represented by that man who is paralyzed and in bed and who suffers from despair and loss of hope because of the long time he spent in failure and weakness.

Jesus Alone Knows God's Plan

- He went to Jerusalem to meet that patient. It is God that makes the initiative. It is He that meets us. We only need to find Him and open our hearts to receive the work of His grace.
- He noticed that the place was beside the Sheep Lake where the Jews washed the sheep before they offered them as sacrifices in the Temple. This indicates that the Law failed in healing and curing the human soul.
- He noticed the long period of disease and that the patient lost hope in being healed.
- He saw him lying there, and He knew that the man had been sick for such a long time” (John 5:6). The days, which we spend in sin, may be long but Jesus is able to liberate us.

I have no man to put me in the pool

Casting our anxieties on men is wrong. We do that many times but the Lord Jesus appears after we lose every confidence in men “Cast all your anxieties on Him, for he cares about you”. Even the angel who was sent to move the water could not save the man who needed salvation.

Diagnosis

In all His meetings, the Lord taught us to respect the human will. He does not force Himself on man; it is He who created man. He created Him in His image, after His likeness in freedom. He gently stands at the door, but He does not enter unless we open the door. He whispers to our hearts, “Do you want?”

- There is a difference between desire and ability. Man may have desire but he can do nothing, but Jesus gives power and always demands that we desire.
- Your good intentions and repeated attempts to rise please the Lord's heart. Only do not fall into despair even if you suffer a long time. The paralyzed man made many attempts and thought that his attempts went in vain but the Lord regarded them and counted them “Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time”.
- We have to notice that good intentions alone are not enough. There is a desperate need to meet the Lord who will move the still water of our life.
- You may say, “I shall do these good things or those good deeds”; you may promise to do things or set punishment for yourself but all these are of no value. You must meet Christ. You must live with Him. If we can do good for ourselves, why did Christ die then?

- There is a serious fault in the life of that man; he fell into despair and lost hope. He might have enjoyed lying by the lake receiving alms from people coming on feast days, enjoying their looks of pity and their kindness to him. He neither could, nor wanted. He loved to be sick!
- The Lord revealed the concealed reason for the problem and the cause of the trouble. No one knew that reason except the paralyzed man himself. If we hold fast to sin, then there is no hope of remedy and if we deny it, then we deceive ourselves and truth is not in us. The way of escape is long and our situation goes from worse to worst.

Remedy

These were the dimensions of the problem. That paralysis that took hour of the soul and body together. The Lord did not heal it by reproaching the man or reminding him of his sin but He gently referred to it, “See you are well. Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you”. He used warning words “Lest nothing worse befall you”. But before this or that He gave His order, “Rise... carry... walk”. The man went happily to the temple. He entered the temple after a long time of sickness. His weakness will became strength.

God always works

The story refers to the grudge and protest of the Pharisees against that man and against Jesus because they worked on the Sabbath but Jesus replied, “My father is working still, and I am working”. And that man did wrong when he told the Pharisees that Jesus healed him on the Sabbath day and ordered him to carry his pallet and walk as if in doing this, he was not obeying the Law. We expected that he would be thankful to the Lord, or he would hold fast to Jesus Christ but he aroused troubles against Him instead. But to such a man Jesus came.

The Disbelievers

It is strange that a group of men see the miraculous deed, and at the same time the darkness that fill their hearts and insight makes them see the light as if it were darkness. They wonder why the Lord heal the patient on the Sabbath day. They consider it a sin and the reason for this is that Sabbath is a day for comfort and God gave it to man to rest and remember the mercies of God more than he does on the other days in which he works to gain his living. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. But the Pharisees’ religiousness alters matters and changes the Sabbath into a kind of paganism but the Lord is not like that. He has given us the Law and it is he who gives it its true original meaning as the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.

There was no reply to be given by the Lord to the stiff-necked people and the cruel hearts but what the Son does is what He sees in the Father. The Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He does. The Father has power to raise the dead and the Son also gives life to whom He likes. The Father does not judge anyone but He gave all judgment to the Son and He who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent Him.

One may think that the Lord’s answer is not the direct answer to the question and protest of the Pharisees, but He who contemplates deeply and with understanding, understands that the Lord Jesus wanted to elucidate to them and to all men that the Father bears witness to all His works. If they truly believed in the Father, they should necessarily believe in the Word who is the true expression of the Mind of God. How miserable is that man who believes that he is the guardian

of the Law and judges every body who does not agree with his narrow-minded thoughts and wrong interpretation!

But it is the Lord Jesus who came from the bosom of the Father and it is He alone who could express and announce the desires of God. Because of their cruel hearts, the Lord gave them five testimonies that bear witness to His glorious deeds:

- The testimony of John the Baptist (John 5:33).
- The testimony of the works given to Him by the Father (John 5:36, 37).
- The testimony of the Scriptures (John 5:39).
- The testimony of the Father Himself and it is enough (John 5:43).
- The testimony of Moses on whom they set their hope (John 5:46).

Exercises

1. Beware of falling in the small sins as a small hole may cause a whole ship to sink and sin always attacks the will and man in this case does not desire salvation.
2. Insist on listening to the words of God in your life. Respond to the Divine words and you will find growth and renewal. You can listen to the word from the Gospel, from the church or from your father of confession.
3. Do not fall into despair when you fall but seek the help of God every day.
4. When you have a holy desire, first bind it with seeking the Lord's help every day in your life, then take one positive step within the boundaries of your ability. If you cannot do everything just start and the Lord will complete.
5. When you are ill do not forget to practice the sacrament of the unction of the sick and also share and take part in the prayer of the Unction of the Sick on Friday (End of the Lent).
6. Pray that God may heal the sick whom you know and whom you do not know.

Second Week April

(33) I was Blind and Now I See

References

- + "Baptism Sunday" Anba Gregarious.
- + "Studies and Contemplations on the Gospel of St. John" Chapter 9, Ana Bemin
- + "The Treasures of Grace" Archdeacon Banoub Abdu

The Lesson

Aim

Spiritual enlightenment: Jesus gives us a spiritual eye with which we can see his divine light. I

Jesus emphasizes the glory of God in His works

- The disciples tried to explain the problem of sickness and pain from which this man suffered from birth. Some of them believed in the transmigration of souls (*which is a wrong belief*). According to this belief, some of the souls of the grandfathers come back

and are born again in the grandsons. When anybody sins, he comes back to be reborn in a deformed state and is tormented till his soul becomes purified. This belief reached the disciples from the Greek culture and they wanted to ask the Savior about it, so His answer was decisive.

- Disease and pain are not punishment but they are a means for declaring the work of God and His power. Pains, troubles, disease and losses show us the love and kindness of God. When the Lord passes and finds that we are suffering, He interferes and helps us.
- One of the saints was very sick and in great pain. When he was on his deathbed, he sent for the members of his family and said to them: “Come and see how a Christian conquers his pains and death”.

Two kinds of sight

- When one reads the whole story, one wonders how could those who saw the miracle with their own eyes refuse to believe. When the sun rises, some people do not see it. Of course the fault does not lie in the light of the sun but the fault lies in the sick eye, which does not want to see.
- Of course those are the Pharisees who questioned the patient as if he were a criminal. The blindness of their hearts made them blaspheme the Living Son of God in spite of the clear prophecy of Isaiah about Christ: “Behold your God. He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy” (Isaiah 35:4).
- The parents of the man who was born blind, were afraid to declare the truth although they saw it. The question of sight, then, extends from the eye to the heart.

Steps of Recovery

- God always takes the initiative. He lets the temptation take place but He has the solution. We notice that Jesus used spittle and mud, which harm the healthy eye so how could they open the eyes of a blind man? This surely refers to the process of creation when the Lord created man from the dust of the earth.
- Jesus puts his hands and this is enough. With his hands he makes everything new. The Lord insists that the blind man should go and wash himself in the pool of Siloam. This has two meanings: The word Siloam means, “Sent forth” and this indicates that Jesus is Christ, or it means “washing” and in this it refers to baptism. When the blind man speaks of Jesus he says: “He is a prophet” then he moved to a higher degree of faith and said, “If this man were not from God, He could do nothing at all”.
- At last his vision becomes clear and his spiritual insight opens and the following dialogue runs between him and Jesus:
 - Do you believe in the Son of man?
 - And who is He, Sir that I may believe in Him?
 - You have seen Him, and it is He who speaks to you.
 - Lord I believe...and he worshipped him.
- There is a clear text that prevents the Jew from worshipping any other than God and here we see that the eyes of the blind man have opened and he worshipped in awe like Moses when he saw the bush and was enlightened with the light of God and like Simeon the Elder who when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said; “Mine eyes have

seen they Salvation”.

- Tears fell from Saul’s eyes and he realized that all what he did in the past was a big fault which he repented later on. His eyes became blind, but when he was baptized and Ananias lay his hands on him, two spiritual eyes opened. There were new eyes that could see the Lord, and bear witness, in all nations and among all peoples, to the greatness of that concealed mystery, and the truth of Salvation, and recites: “I was blind and now I see”.

Reasons for Spiritual Blindness

- Haughtiness and pride owing to knowledge, position, wealth or authority may cause spiritual blindness. Some scientists thought that there is no God and that man can invade space and do miraculous deeds although their ability to do this is an evidence of the Existence of God who is invisible to them. When Herod thought that He could give life and death and was pleased with the praise of the hypocrites when they said to him, “This is the voice of god, and not of man”, immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory; and he was eaten by worms and died.
- This may be due to Phariseism and holding fast self-righteous and the belief that we never sin and that we obeyed all commandments. This made the hearts of Saul, Ananias, and Caiaphas blind.
- It may be due to ignorance, which is a dangerous disease that blinds many people so they do not know the way of salvation and ask the same question Pilate asked, “What is the truth”. While Truth was standing before him! Our ignorance of the Bible and the teaching of the church is dangerous and by knowledge the righteous are delivered.
- It may be fanaticism that closes the heart of man so he keeps away from the love of God and others.
- It may be the bad company who boast about doing evil and pretend to give useful advice till they deceived the Lost Son and took him afar from his father’s love and he that he was happy and free, but that did not last long.
- It may be sin that made Judas sell the Savior for thirty coins of silver. The devil filled his heart so he went to Gethsemane in the darkness of the night to search for Jesus and kiss him. As for his miserable soul, it had been swallowed in darkness.

Activities

- Blessed are your eyes for they see: We gained the spiritual enlightenment in baptism. The Lord connected seeing with washing. This chapter is read on Baptism Sunday. The church calls Baptism, “The Mystery of Enlightenment”. We have inside us now the power to distinguish between good and evil. This is the new nature by which we attained the knowledge of the mysteries of the Divine Nature. Our eyes open through Baptism.
- The Renewed Repentance: When the priest lays his hand on the head of the person who confesses, “Scales” fall from the eyes of the repentant and they see how they sinned and kept away from God. They see ugliness of sin. Sin is like a grain of sand which when enters an eye it blinds it and troubles it. The repentant who confesses their sins may not realize their wrong motivations but the Lord reveals to them through their father of confession and then he knows the tricks of the flesh and the danger of postponing.
- Meeting the Lord: These practices should be based on one test that is the personal presence of Christ then we compare our present state with our previous state and say:

“One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:65). Our concentration on continuous meeting with the Lord in our daily life is the only guarantee for the safety and soundness of our sight: “He who follows, will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Third Week of April

(34) The Sabbath of Lazarus, Palm Sunday and the Holy Week

References

- + “The Treasures of Grace” Part 5, Archdeacon Banoub Abdu
- + The Text read in the Holy Week.

The Lesson

Aim

Being acquainted with the events of the Holy Week.

Introduction

The coming days are the most wonderful days of the year in the church. In the church you can follow the last week in the life of Christ till the resurrection. It begins by the Lazarus Saturday, then comes the Palm Sunday and the prayers of the Holy Week continue as they are arranged according to the hours of day and night till Good Friday, the day on which our Good Savior was crucified. Then finally comes the great celebration of the glorious resurrection and the victory of Christ on death.

Lazarus Saturday

On that day, they celebrated the occasion of bringing Lazarus back to life. They prepared a dinner for Jesus in Bethany, the house of Lazarus. Many people came to Bethany to see the man whom Jesus raised from death.

Palm Sunday

The next day, crowds of people came out to meet Jesus when He entered Jerusalem. The crowds took the branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, shouting: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”.

Public Mass for the Repose of the Departed (Requiem or general funeral)

Prayers for the repose of the departed are forbidden in the passion week, so after the Mass on Palm Sunday, the church performs a public requiem. After the distribution of the Holy Communion, the sanctuary doors are to be closed, the sanctuary veils are drawn, and prayers for the general funeral are raised.

Prayers of the Holy Pasch

The word “Pasch” means “Passover” and it refers to the destroyer when he passed over the houses of the Hebrews which were sprinkled with the blood of the Passover Lamb which in turn

stands for the sacrifice of the Cross. Pasch is called “Pascha” in Coptic and “Fissh” in Hebrew.

Pasch is the name given to period between Palm Sunday and Good Friday. The Passover lamb was selected and kept from the tenth day of Nisan (Abib) till the fourteenth day of Nisan, then it was offered as sacrifice. That is why the doors of the sanctuary are shut after the Mass of Palm Sunday and are kept closed for four days without any masses till Maundy Thursday, then they are shut again till the celebration of the Holy Burial on Good Friday. The Pasch prayers are raised in the Second Chorus of Church indicating that Christ suffered and was crucified outside the camp. During Pascha prayers the church sings the hymn of “To You is the Power and glory...” This hymn is taken from the Revelation 5:12.

Monday

Jesus left Bethany in the morning and on His way to Jerusalem, He was hungry and He cursed the fig tree which did not bear fruit, then He went to the temple and drove out those who were buying and selling and He spent the whole day teaching the people in the temple. He left the envious chief priests and went to Bethany to spend the night there.

Tuesday

Jesus left Bethany in the morning. As He walked along the road, He saw that the fig tree dried up and died. A conversation took place between Jesus and the high priests. He warned the Pharisees and gave many parables about the kingdom of God.

Wednesday

The Lord of Glory rested in Bethany as He wanted to be alone for sometime. The Council of the Seventy high priests (the Synagogue) was held and Judas made a plot and betrayed Jesus to the chief priests. Judas started looking for good chance to deliver Jesus over to them. This day is called Job Wednesday because of the severe pains that Job suffered. Prophet Job was patient and in his patience, he became a symbol of Christ.

Thursday

Jesus ate the Passover meal in the upper room. He washed His disciples’ feet and gave them the mystery of Eucharist. That is why in the arrangement of the prayers that are raised on Maundy Thursday, the prayer of the blessing of water and washing of the feet are performed then the Holy Mass is performed.

The Good Friday

Caiaphas questioned Jesus and accused Him of blasphemy because He said that He was the Son of the Living God. Pilate questioned Jesus for the charge of being king but He said, “My kingship is not of this world”. The Lord of Glory was crucified. He accepted death on behalf of humanity, and He Himself became our Pasch and He was offered as a sacrifice for us and by His blood became eternal Salvation to us.

Some of the Prayers raised on Good Friday

- “You established the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Your name was there long before the creation of the sun. O God Almighty, now I see you hung on the cross. O Lord, how did wrongdoers find courage to do that?”

- “O Lord who decorated the earth with flowers, they put a scarlet robe on your body. O Lord, in whose fist the heaven and earth are held, they put a reed in your right hand. You hung the whole earth by the word of Your mouth, and they hung You on a cross. You were crucified because of our sins and You put an end to the pride of death”.
- “O righteous and pious people go out today. The Lord has gone down to Hades, with the spirit He took from the nature of Adam, and He first took hold of Adam’s hand and raised him up, together with his children, and brought them back to Paradise, the dwelling place of continual happiness, rejoice and comfort”.

Question

- How did the miraculous deed of raising Lazarus from the dead, affect the crowds of people? What was the result?
- Explain the meaning of these words: Palm Sunday, Hosanna, rites, and angels.
- What did Jesus do after He had entered Jerusalem?
- Write the conversation that took place between Jesus and Peter when Jesus was washing the disciples feet.

Exercises

1. Always go to church and attend the Pascha prayers and follow these prayers in the Passion Week book.
2. During the Passion Week, read the Holy Bible according to the following Schedule:
 - Monday: Mark 11:11-24, Luke 9:18-27.
 - Tuesday: John 8: 12-20, Luke 9:28-36.
 - Wednesday: Matthew 26:1-16, Luke 13:22-35.
 - Thursday: Luke 22:7-23, John 16: 12-24.
 - Friday: Matthew 27:1-66, John 11:1-45.
 - Saturday: Mark 16:1-20, John 12:1-19.
 - Sunday: Luke 19:28-48.

Fourth Week of April

(35) Christ imparts faith to the two disciples of Emmaus

References

+ “The Meeting of Emmaus” Mar Mina Church, Shubra

The Lesson

Aim

How can we have Jesus as a friend to us in our daily life.

On the way to Emmaus

The following conversation took place:

- What is this conversation, which you are holding with each other as, you walk and why are you looking sad?

- ❑ Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?
- ❑ What things?
- ❑ Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. It is now the third day since this happened. Moreover some women of our company amazed us by saying that He is alive.
- ❑ O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer things and enter into this glory?

This conversation took place between Jesus and two disciples on the way between Jerusalem and Emmaus, in the morning of resurrection. Jesus draw near and went with them and spoke to them but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. He blamed them and reproached them because they did not understand the words of God and the words of the prophets about Christ. They had to believe in the Gospel because if they believed in the Gospel, the eyes would open, their sadness would be no more and their grief would turn into joy.

Their eyes were opened

Jesus went in to stay with two disciples of Emmaus. When He was at table with them, He took the bread and blessed, and broke it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened and they recognized Him. Dullness of the heart was removed. Dullness of disbelief, and dullness of sadness were no more. Suspicion and anxiety turned into faith and confidence in resurrection and turned sadness into joy and hope of triumph over death. Jesus still cares for the weak soul that is perplexed, and strengthens its weak faith and stays with it till the end to encourage it and kindles its heart with hope.

Jesus Christ vanished out of their sight and Cleopas said to the other disciple: “Did not our hearts burn with us while He talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scripture”. Jesus’ support to the believers kindles their heart with love and the word of God gives light to their spiritual senses and fills them with enlightenment, understanding and zeal so they become fervent in spirit.

Christ accompanies us in the journey of life

In our life journey, we are in dire need of Christ as a friend as it is He who strengthens our faith and effort. Christ in whom we believe is the Living God who rose from the dead and He still lives with us and accompanies us through all the ages and generations according to His promise: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”. This fact fades sometimes and we do not recognize it sometimes as what happened with the two disciples of Emmaus.

How can we see Jesus?

First: It is we that should always discover the desire of God and His will in our life. We see His power in His creation and understand His purpose in salvation through His only begotten Son. Through weakness (the cross), He revealed what was greater than power. The two disciples of Emmaus could not recognize this deep meaning and we ourselves are often slow at understanding the purpose of God and His wonders and His miraculous deeds in our daily life.

Second: The Scriptures are at hand. Jesus explained the scriptures to the two disciples of Emmaus. He facilitated the difficult matters in their life. When we are unable to understand the purpose of God we have to resort to the scriptures and the attitudes of His holy men and apply them in the matters of our life.

Third: Receiving the Holy Communion. Perfect enlightenment often comes to us when we receive the Holy Body of the Lord and His Blood and we all become one mind and one heart: “But we have the mind of Christ”. Let our purpose be in harmony with the purpose of God. We have to realize that what seems to be evil and weakness, is what is good for us. Receiving communion, complete preparedness, long prayers and continuous worship establish knowledge of the purpose of God in the life of a believer.

Questions

1. Give the real meaning of these words that were mentioned in the story: Slow of heart to believe... Their eyes were kept from recognizing Him... our hearts burnt within us.
2. Give examples of situations in which our faith becomes weak and say how can we strengthen our faith.

Activities

1. Always remember the name of Jesus and pray to Him to that He may be with you in your prayers, and in your studies. Remember Him when you eat, when you play and when you sleep.
2. Make a wall Chart about the two disciples of Emmaus before their eyes were opened and after the recognition of the Lord who walked with them.

First Week of May

(36) Jesus appears after his Resurrection

References

- + “The Meeting in the Upper Room” Mar Mina, Shubra
- + “The Meeting at Tiberias” Mar Mina, Shubra

Verse

“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14).

The Lesson

Aim

How Christ solves problems through His glorious Resurrection.

In the early morning

- Mary stands for those active and energetic souls that hurry to meet the bridegroom among the garden trees, while the disciples shut themselves up because they were afraid.

- ❑ Mary also represents the true feelings of love, which fill the hearts of sincere people.
- ❑ She search for Jesus and sought Him in tears. She rejoiced when she saw Him and He delivered her the first happy news and the greatest message to the world “Tell My brethren to go to Galilee and there they shall see Me”.
- ❑ Love gave Mary courage, activity and effectiveness. But Mary’s problem was that she was looking at the tomb and the tears made her unable to see. She sought Christ among the dead while He was behind her and speaking to her. Angels appeared to her. Those angels are a symbol of the servants of God and they attract us to Christ.
- ❑ At that moment, Mary looked at Jesus and heard Him saying to her, in a gentle, calm and personal way “Mary” .
- ❑ Jesus can comfort the troubled soul and when she tries to hold Him, He says to her, “Do not hold me” but He takes her and ascends to the depth of Godhead.

Portion of the Unbelievers

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them: Peace be with you” (John 20:19). Those who live in fear, sadness and defeat; those who suspect, deny and blaspheme. What will Jesus do to such people? To such people, as the scriptures says, Jesus Came. Jesus goes to those who cannot come to Him because of their sins. He neither punished them, nor did He reproach them, but He gave them the greatest gift; He spoke to them and His words gave them hope and made them rejoice when He said, “Peace be with you”. He gave them the peace of conscience, the peace of God, which surpasses any thought of mind. He gave them confidence in themselves and in the mercies of God. Happiness filled their minds and amazement filed their eyes, and they remembered His words and promise of resurrection.

Now Thomas... was not with them

What is the role of that member who does not attend the meetings of the disciples (the church)? Of course, he will not see the Lord and will live in doubt for eight days.

- The work of the church in this case is to transmit the happy news to him and those who have seen must tell him, the same as the disciples did when they said to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord”.
- What will the Lord give to this member who is slow at understanding and of little faith? He had no words to give; he only had a wounded open side and His heart was ready to receive and welcome all sinners and His naked chest embraces all people.
- He had no instructions to give. He only had the mark of the nails, which make everybody ashamed, and kindle the lukewarm hearts with love.
- The wounds of Jesus cure and heal the perplexed and frightened souls.
- The wounds of Jesus comfort those who are tormented, and miserable.
- The wounds of Jesus teach us how to sacrifice. They opened the closed doors to those who do not know the meaning of sacrifice and self-denial.
- The wounds of Jesus heal those who suffer from the sexual desire and those who seek the beauty of the flesh.

By the Sea of Tiberias

- There was still a serious wound in Peter’s heart, which no one could see but the Lord. Peter had lost confidence and suffered from denial.

- Peter forgot that he dedicated his life to the Lord. He went back to the worldly matters seeking his living: “I am going fishing”.
- And there, while we are busy working, Jesus appears in our daily life. He reminds us of our early life. He reminded Peter of the same miracle that was the cause of his first dedication (The miracle of catching a lot of fish).
- Jesus gently blames His disciple who fell by saying: “Do you love me?” He said it three times as Peter denied Him three times. Love is always a remedy for sin and lack of love in the cause of sin.
- Peter gives an eloquent answer to that critical questions and that was the only way he could answer: “Lord you know everything. You know that I love you”.
- God knows the circumstances that led you to sin. He also knows your repentance and He rewards you. The world knows only that you have sinned but Jesus knows everything.

Tend My Sheep

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gathered His sheep after Resurrection. He is now bringing Peter back to His first order. So Peter lived and died for Christ who died and rose from the dead for him.

Question

By His resurrection, how did Jesus Christ solve the following problems, and what remedy did He give: Doubt, Fear, and Sin.

Second Week of May

(37) The Preaching of St. Mark

References

- + “St. Mark the Evangelist who Evangelized Egypt” H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- + “The History of Patriarchs” Severus the Son of Al Moquafa
- + “The Story of the Coptic Church” Iris Al Masry

The Lesson

Aim

To know the extent of St. Mark’s Ministry and what he could offer for Christ.

Introduction

Evangelism is responsibility and duty. The Lord Jesus Christ likened it to a grain of mustard seed, which when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs. It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened. Evangelism is carrying light and flambeau. The grace of God chose this young man to carry the Light to all the World.

He was one of the Seventy Apostles

St. Mark was trained to announce the good news. The Lord Himself made him His disciple and

taught him and the Lord is the Greatest Teacher and the source of true light. But the true preaching of St. Mark began when he saw the Living Lord in his own house, in the upper room, after the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection. In Jerusalem and Judea St. Mark accompanied St. Peter the apostle in his journeys. St. Peter's wife was St. Mark's father's cousin (Aristopulos was St. Mark's father). It was not easy for St. Mark to evangelize in Jerusalem where the Lord was crucified, and where James was killed and Peter was imprisoned. Such a young man could not face such perils unless he has a strong true faith and confidence in what he saw and heard and bore witness to. St. Mark evangelized in places that were near to him such as Lebanon and the tradition in Lebanon states that St. Mark was one of the first who evangelized there. Then he preached in Syria, especially Antioch.

In Antioch

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles says that in Antioch, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said: Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2, 3). "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit... they also had John to assist them" (Acts 13:4-5). This means that he evangelized in Antioch at first. Their service was successful. Then he accompanied Paul and Barnabas.

To the ends of the earth

- He was a zealot, young man, kindled with enthusiasm and jealousy in spite of his slim and weak body.
- The Lord Himself mended that weakness in his life, St. Mark and Paul sailed from Antioch to Salamis to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God there. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos and there the proconsul Sergius believed, but Elymas the magician withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith.
- Then he went to Perga in Pamphylia in Asia Minor; a swampy place where diseases spread. Some believe that he was taken ill with severe fever and he was unable to continue his service.
- He went back to Jerusalem evangelizing and preaching and in spite of the difficulties that surrounded him, he was sincere in his work. He attended the first ecumenical council in A.D. 50. He heard the apostles' opinion and shared them their rejoice and joy as the gentiles received faith. He was the first to preach the gentiles in Cyprus, with Barnabas.
- On his second journey, Paul took Silas with him and refused to take Mark. But Barnabas who was older than Paul and Mark was sure of Mark's sincerity, zeal and love, so he insisted that Mark should go with them. The two apostles separated and Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas went to Asia Minor.
- After the death of Barnabas the apostle, Mark stayed in Cyprus to strengthen the churches with the grace of God.

In Pentapolis (The Five Cities in North Africa)

After the death of Barnabas the apostle, St. Mark was sent by the Holy Spirit to preach the word of God in Cyrene, his birthplace in AD 5. The gospel was known there through some believers who attended the miracle on the day of Pentecost and believed after listening to the sermon delivered by Peter. People of all nations attended from Egypt and the regions of Libya near

Cyrene (Acts 2:10). Those people helped St. Mark in his service and he established a church for them.

The Light of Faith in the Land of Egypt

The Lord who blessed the people of Egypt, sent us St. Mark the apostle. When St. Mark came to Alexandria he prayed the Lord to help him in his mission. And there at the shoemaker's shop, he sat. He was very tired and exhausted. He carried no purse, no bag, no sandals but his heart was filled with faith, which is the greatest gift. Drops of sweat began to water the new tree that St. Mark planted in Egypt. He stayed with Annianus who received faith when St. Mark performed a miraculous deed to him. Annianus became the first Bishop of the church of Egypt. St. Mark stayed in Egypt for ten years then he left for Asia and Europe to preach the word of God there. Then he came back to Egypt to water his dear plan with his precious blood.

The lamp gives brighter light

St. Mark left Alexandria for Pentapolis about A.D. 65 in North Africa (now Libya and Tunisia) to visit the churches there. On his way to Pentapolis he visited Ancient Cairo (Babylon) and some towns in Upper Egypt. He received a letter from St. Paul calling him to go to Rome to help him in his preaching especially after he had known of his sincere service in Egypt and Africa.

St. Mark in Rome

It is well known that St. Mark was one of those who laid the foundations of the church of Rome and his name is mentioned in the epistle to the Colossians and the epistle to the Philippians, which were written by St. Paul.

In Venice

There is evidence that St. Mark not only went to Rome but he also went to Venice where he established its church. After his death, his head was buried in a big Cathedral bearing his name. It was St. Mark who preached them, saved them from darkness and brought them to light.

Profitable for the Ministry

Paul the apostle himself bore witness to St. Mark, in his epistle to Timothy when he was the apostle of the gentiles. He said: "He is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). He also sent the Colossians letters of recommendations so that they might receive him and welcome him when he came to them. We see now that St. Mark evangelized in Asia (Colossi), Europe (Rome and Venice), Africa (Egypt and Libya), Cyprus, Lebanon and Syria.

Before the Lamp is put out

Mark stayed with Paul for a long time. He helped the mighty Paul till he (Paul) attained the crown of martyrdom in A.D. 67 together with Peter the apostle. Now Mark became a man of experience owing to the pains he suffered, and the power he obtained from the Lord himself and his pure apostles.

Now, it was time for Mark, that bright lamp to reflect his last light to the world through his martyrdom. St. Mark was happy to go back to Alexandria. He saw that faith was flourishing and the church was growing, but he realized that he would not escape from the angry people who rose against him. The angry crowds entered the church when he was praying on Easter Sunday.

They tied his feet to a strong horse that dragged him through the streets of Alexandria, then they put him in prison. At last he attained the crown of martyrdom while his face was bleeding and his flesh was scattered, and in this way one of the greatest churches of the Christian world was dedicated. He preached truth and light and in the end became a martyr.

His most important words

1. In Rome, he wrote the first Gospel (it is said that he wrote his Gospel in Egypt). In his Gospel he was an eyewitness of the miraculous deeds of the Lord and his crucifixion and resurrection.
2. He wrote the first Liturgy and handed it to Annianus and he used it in his prayers. St. Cyril the Pillar of Religion developed it and it is now called the Liturgy of St. Cyril.
3. He established the first Theological Christian School in the world, to be a source of light and knowledge and to establish the Christian principles thus opposing the Pagan School of Alexandria established by Ptolemy.
4. He ordained Annianus as the first bishop of the See of Alexandria, which played a vital role in the history of the Christian world.

The Role of the See of St. Mark in the World: It is the See of St. Mark that:

1. resisted the Jewish Materialism by its internal spiritual life and its interpretative contemplative approach of the Holy Scriptures, which was against literalism.
2. resisted the Greek Pagan Philosophies by the Christian philosophy. This was due to the efforts of the teachers of the Theological School of Alexandria such as Clement of Alexandria.
3. resisted the heresies and confirmed the Christian Creed. It was the Coptic Bishops that put the Christian dogmas in their correct forms, and put the Orthodox Creed and resisted heresies.
4. stood firm in faith during persecutions. The church of Alexandria gave the world the greatest number of martyrs. Many were killed by the hands of persecutors. The See of Alexandria was the rock on which the hands of persecutors lost power. Pains became severer after the Schism in the church and the interference of the emperors in the church policy as they desired to force people to believe in their strange beliefs.
5. established monasticism. It was not Constantine the Great that set the foundations of Christianity, but it was Anthony the Great that did so. Monasticism spread all over the world and many people became his disciples and adopted his approach. Of those we have Helareon of Palestine, Augustine of Africa and Arsanius of Greece.
6. evangelized in Africa, Europe, and Ireland by sending Egyptian monks and bishops to those countries. The name of St. Mark will remain a great sign of a great see established by a great evangelist.

Activities

- + Draw a picture of St. Mark.
- + Write a brief summary of the Life of St. Mark.
- + Write an essay about the first church he established.

Exercises

Contemplate how the Evangelist lived and how he devoted his life to the Lord and how he loved

preaching; and imitate him.

Third Week of May

(38) God's Call to me and my Work

References

- + "The Life of Dedication" H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- + "The Pastoral Love" Fr. Tadros Yacoub
- + "Explanations and notes on Dedication" Dr. Ragheb Abdul Nur

The Lesson

Aim

The meaning of dedication.

Introduction

The priest said to me: "My son, I am going to tell you a story the events of which took place a short time ago. After completing the religious ceremony of announcing the engagement of two of my old friends who were with me in Sunday School when we were children fifteen years ago, and who were my colleagues in the university, I congratulated the young couple and greeted those invited (The suitor was Hanna, who continued his work as a teacher while I, according to God's call to me, dedicated my life to serve the Lord as a priest and the Lord arranged that I would perform the engagement religious ceremony for Hanna, the bridegroom and Phibi, the bride). I recognized three of our old colleagues but I couldn't remember their names so I asked one of them I think I know you.

Aren't you Luke who worked with me in Sunday School classes a long time ago?

Yes, father. This is true. My name is Luke but I'm afraid I can't remember your name because a long time has elapsed since we last saw each other.

Our friend Hanna said to us: O father... Do you remember Luke, Boulos and Saleeb, our colleagues in Sunday School?

Look! (he said pointing to me)... Don't you remember him... He is Father Youssef. At that moment we felt happy and joy filled our hearts so we greeted one another again and kissed one another. We then sat together in a small room and waited for our friend Hanna to come after he received the congratulations of the guests. While we were drinking cups of fruit juice, I asked them: Where are you now? Where do you work, Luke? Where do you work, Boulos? Where do you work, Saleeb?

- ❑ Boulos said: Father, I now work as a lawyer, Luke is a weaver and he works in this city but Saleeb is a jeweler.
- ❑ Saleeb asked: Father, why did you desert your work and dedicate your life to the difficult service of priesthood?
- ❑ It is God's call to me, Saleeb. After completing my studies, I had a strong feeling within

me that made me offer my whole life to the Lord. I felt that the Lord called me to His service through the mystery of priesthood. Immediately after getting married, I was ordained a priest in one of the near villages. This happened three years ago.

- ❑ Luke said: O Father, what you did is a great sacrifice. We are ashamed of ourselves as we cannot do the same thing.
- ❑ Luke, it is not as what you think, it is God's call. You must have felt it in your work. It is God's call that makes you offer service to the Lord.
- ❑ Saleeb was quite amazed and asked: Father, how can that be? Can I service the Lord through any work as a jeweler?
- ❑ Boulos said: Whatever the service we offer to the Lord may be, of what value is it when compared to the service a priest offers to the Lord?
- ❑ I said: Do not speak like that, my brothers. Do you think that man cannot serve God unless he is a priest? No, this is a wrong idea, and, sorry to say, many believe it. God, of course, does not desire that all people should be priests or who, do you think, will cultivate the land and who will cure people of their diseases and who will work in the projects of land reclamation?
- ❑ Boulos asked: Does this mean that I can serve the Lord in my work?
- ❑ I said: Of course...Any person can do this if he has the desire to serve the Lord through his work. This is our main duty.
- ❑ Here the three asked in one breath: How can that be, father? At that moment, Hanna and Phibi, his bride, came, longing to listen to that talk, so we gave them a brief summary of what we said and they asked the same question: How can that be, father?
- ❑ I said to them: Every man can serve God in his work by doing many things. Honesty in work is service to God; devoting the Lord's day to prayers and charity work is service to God; being a good model in work is a kind of service to God. So, there are things that all persons can do through performing their jobs, but there are things that characteristics we can offer service to Christ.
- ❑ Hanna asked: Father, there are some jobs through which man cannot serve God...and he made the question clear by saying: When a man who is guilty of a crime asks me to defend him before a court of law, how can I defend him and say that he is innocent while I know that he is guilty. Am I serving God in doing this?
- ❑ Look, if you refuse to defend those who are guilty of crimes, all men will know that you are a true Christian, and all the oppressed will come to you and, then you will find out that you are doing the same work and offering the same service that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself offered when he was on earth. Didn't he always defend the oppressed? You have a chance to bring about a reconciliation between disputants and become a peacemaker: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).
- ❑ Father, what can a weaver like me, or a jeweler like Saleeb do to serve God in his work?
- ❑ When you offer people what you do honestly and sincerely, and when you deal with them in the spirit of love and respect, in this case you serve them and serve yourself. When people see your good works they will glorify God, our heavenly Father. When you weave a dress and give it to a naked poor man, you will hear that voice: "I was naked and you clothed me", and you, Saleeb, if you deal with people in the same spirit of honesty and do not share others in their love for money, and if you are not greedy for gain (1 Timothy 3:8), in this case you have offered gold to Christ as the magi did, "Honor the Lord with your substance".

- ❑ Phibi joined the meeting and asked: Father you have spoken about professions of men, but there is a question that puzzles me. How can I serve the Lord after marriage and getting busy working in the school and at home?
- ❑ This is a good question, Phibi but don't you know your abilities and potentialities. The Lord will be pleased with you when you do your home duties and be a source of joy to your husband and children. You will also serve God through bringing up your children according to Christ's commandments as "Woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty" (1 Timothy 2:15). Sincerity in your work as a teacher will lead to the building up of souls and preparing young people for a bright future.

Then the priest said to those present: I think I have spoken enough and I hope that we will meet soon at my house so that I may know what each one of you will have done to serve the Lord in his work and through the duties of his job.

Questions and Discussions

1. "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). In the light of what you deduce from the lesson, state the meaning of this verse.
2. Explain how each of the following workers can serve the Lord: farmers, physicians, telephone operators, electricians, nurses, carpenters, taxi drivers, and teachers.

Activities

Write an essay on the profession you like to practice when you grow up and how you can serve God through this profession. Bring the essay with you next week. Write an essay on "How I can live the life of dedication".

Fourth Week of May

(39) What shall I do with my life?

References

- + "The Garden of the Soul" Part 2, Anba Youannis
- + "The Ministry" Fr. Cherubim Yacoub

The Lesson

Aim

The goal of my life is Jesus Christ.

O taste and see that the Lord is good!

If one of your friends invited you to a dinner or a great party that was made especially for you, as a sign of his love for you, wouldn't you go and attend that party. Of course you will always remember that nice invitation and friendly deed. You will always talk about this good friendly deed and tell all your friends about it.

If that friend is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and if that great dinner to which He has invited you is the eternal life with Him in the kingdom of Heaven, then it is your duty to tell others of the good deeds of the Lord, as the Lord did not give us Himself to keep Him for us but to invite others to share us our joy with the Savior “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you so that you may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:3).

Dreams for the future

This is the Lord’s call to us to serve Him in our life. We have to invite others to enjoy His love, salvation and gifts with us, but I am sorry to say that many people dream of a future devoid of the service of God in their future jobs and works. Some of them plan to be doctors and think how to gather a lot of money to enjoy themselves forgetting their duty towards God who will give them success and money. Others dream of becoming great engineers, to build fantastic buildings or construct machines forgetting that the Lord invites them to serve Him through performing their work as engineers.

I will serve the Lord

From the pervious lesson, we know that every man can serve God in his work, but all men are invited to serve the Lord. Some feel, at a certain time in their life, that the Lord invites them to devote their whole life to complete dedication to serve His Holy Name. Of these people we see priests, monks, nuns and those who serve the Holy word. Such people devote their whole life to the service of Christ. According to St. Paul: “For we are all His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2: 10).

A Questionnaire for Discussion

“The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother He named my name” (Isaiah 49:1)

God invites you and you have a mission to perform in life. And now... in order to be able to decide how you will serve God in your future life, we give you this questionnaire in the form of questions for you to answer:

1. Do you prefer to devote your whole time to the service of the Lord or do you prefer to serve him through your work and the tasks of your job? Why? (devote my life to the service. Serve while I work).
2. If you prefer complete devotion to the service of God, what kind of service do you hope to perform? (to be a priest, a deacon, a bishop, a monk, to serve the orphans and widows, missions, preaching, serving the patients and disabled, serve the poor, other services).
3. If you prefer to serve God through your work and profession, what profession do you like to practice in the future? (a doctor, an engineer, a lawyer, a scientist, a teacher, a farmer, a merchant, others).
4. If you become a doctor, for example, what service can you offer the Lord through your work? (give the poor free medical treatment, pray with patients, help the church by giving her money, others).
5. If you become an engineer, what service will you offer? (help the church in her projects, devote a part of your income to participate in preaching, teach children in Sunday School,

- others).
6. How will you serve God, if you become a merchant? (Honesty in dealing with people, explain the scripture to others when there is a chance to do so and giving a copy of the Bible as a present to people who do not have a copy, helping the poor customers by not taking any profit from them).
 7. If the nature of your work compels you to devote your whole time to doing it, how will you serve the Lord, then? (to leave the job and devote your time to the service, offer your service in the church only on holidays, keep a certain sum of money and set it apart to be spent by others who serve in the church, other suggestions).
 8. If your work takes up the six days work of the week, what do you prefer to do on the seventh day? (complete rest at home all the day, going out for a walk, visiting relatives and friends, going to church, going to church and serving in it, visiting the poor family or one of the patients, others).
 9. If your work is with people who do not know Christ, how can you serve Christ among such people? (Speak with others about Christ and the Holy Bible, giving them a copy of the Bible as a gift, invite them to go to church, living with all the Christian Spirit and with honesty, other suggestions).
 10. In case you marry and have children, how can you serve the Lord through your family? (bring up your children in Christian faith, pray and read the Scriptures with the family everyday, attend the holy mass and receive communion, other suggestions).

Activities

1. Read the following parts from the Bible and quote the verses that call man to serve God: Isaiah 43:1-3, Jeremiah 1:6-8, Ephesians 2:8-10.
2. Read also the following parts and quote the verses that show the blessings that the servant of the Lord receives : John 12:23-26, 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

Homework

Write a ten lines essay about your hopes and desires for the future.

First Week of June

(40) The Holy Spirit is at Work with us

References

- + “Heaven” Anba Youannis.
- + “The Divine Ascension” Anba Bemim
- + “Ascension” Fr. Ibrahim Gabra
- + “Glory be to you in your ascension” Samir Kamel

The Lesson

Aim

Our longing for heaven.

Introduction

If Christ's work on earth was expiatory, yet He is now in heaven making intercessions for us. He completed redemption and rested in His glory and the glory of His Father that was with Him before the foundation of the world.

Preparing of place

In the Father's house there are many mansions. This means that the Father's heart is open to all men (each according to his order). But Christ ascended to prepare that place, so He will go on behalf of the redeemed men and go before them into the Holies. What gives us hope now is that Christ rose with our flesh to heaven. He carried our humanity with Him to the depth of the heart of God so that we may find courage to enter the Divine holies.

I will come again and will take you to Myself

The two angels who appeared at the time the Lord ascended, referred to this saying: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The Lord will come soon. When the work of the church is completed and the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom is complete, the Lord will take us so that we may be with Him all the time. There is a close relationship between the Lord's ascension and His promise to come, He will not leave us as orphans, He will not be slow in His coming and He will never neglect His promise. The Lord ascended eastwards to heaven, and the church still faces east in her prayers as Christ will come from the east and the Lord promised to send the Comforter after He went up to heaven. The Lord showed that it was better for us that He would go up to heaven to complete the plan towards the church as He had completed the plan of salvation. In this way we received the early blessing of ascension on the day of Pentecost through the Comforter, the Holy Spirit that the Lord send.

The Lord Reigns Now

We also reign with Him. To us, His ascension means glory and honor, because when you honor the head, you honor the whole body. In the Vision of Daniel, Daniel gives us an idea about this glory: "I saw in the night vision and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And he was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him" (Daniel 7:13, 14).

He is now seated king over all nations. He sent His disciples, as a triumphant king, to gather the spoil: "You have ascended on high. You have led captivity captive. You have received gifts among men" (Psalm 68: 18), then He says: "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 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mathew 28:18). He gave authority to the church to perform her glorious mission so that all nations may be submissive to Him in love, "Your Divine throne endures for ever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity" (Psalm 45:6).

He also subdues His enemies

The enemies were not saved as, "The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, till I make your

enemies your footstool” (Psalm 110:1). Ascension was a prelude to the judgment, which would destroy those who resisted. The Lord Jesus Himself prophesied of it when He said to the High Priest “you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). Paul the Apostle says about Christ who rose from the dead and sat at the right hand of the Father in heaven: “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He has put all things under His feet” (Ephesians 1:12,22).

But the last enemy to be destroyed is death so the Ascension was a preparation for the second coming: “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:25). He always lives to make intercession for us. This is the priestly work which makes intercession for sinners, before God the Father, not through words but through the marks of the wound with which He ascended to heaven so that He might be the expiation for our sins. The Lord kept them in His glorified body: “And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Revelation 5:6), so He is the priest and the sacrifice together standing and slain and always lives to make intercession for us.

I am with you always to the close of the age

He never separated us, He never left us as our unity with Him is inseparable. His ascension to heaven does not mean that He is hidden from us, on the contrary, His ascension brings us nearer to Him and turns our earth into heaven waiting for His coming “Amen, Come Lord Jesus”.

The blessing of the ascension can be summarized in the following points:

1. Sending the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.
2. The continuous expiatory intercession in heaven.
3. The promise of the Second Coming that is full of glory.

Remember the Ascension of Christ in the following situations.

1. When the desires of the flesh wage war against your soul.
2. When the wicked people afflict you.
3. When you fall in sin and need forgiveness and intercession.

Activities

1. Draw a picture of the Ascension of Christ to heaven and draw angels around him
2. Make a wall Chart about the blessings of ascension.
3. Attend the celebration of the Ascension Day and take part in the hymns of the mass, and receive the Holy Communion of that Great Feast.

Second Week of June

(41) The Holy Spirit is at Work with us

References

- + “The Holy Spirit and His work with the Soul” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + “The Holy Spirit between the New Birth and the Continuous Renewal” St. George Church,

Sporting.

The Lesson

Aim

The work of the Holy Spirit in a believer.

Points of Resemblance from real life

The fathers likened the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul to a treasure inside porcelain vessel: the vessel is our thick body. It is like a porous stone or a sponge filled with water and when you put it in your hand the water comes out of it spontaneously; the same is with the grace of the Holy Spirit when united with the believer and fills his mind, thoughts and life. Since the body without a soul is dead, so man without the work of the Holy Spirit is dead. There are several other similes that befit the secret work of the Holy Spirit and His support to the human soul. The following are examples: Oil in the lamp is like the Holy Spirit that gives light to the soul. The threads of a textile and vertical lines of which are weak but when interwoven with the horizontal strong bright lines strengthen the textile and its good quality. Fire makes iron easy to shape and in the same manner the work of the Holy Spirit purifies the flesh.

He will reprove us of sin

As a woman lights her house with a lamp to search for the lost coin, thus the Holy Spirit reproves the repentants, and awakens their conscience. When Peter delivered his fluent speech the Holy Spirit pierced the hearts of the audience and those who crucified Christ were among them and when they heard it they were convicted by their own conscience “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles: Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37,38).

The Holy Spirit give man hope and encourages him to practice the work of repentance so he rejoices in fasting, prayers and tears. But if man resists the work of the Holy Spirit, repentance become impossible and salvation cannot be attained. He who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Blasphemy means that man insists on resisting the work of the Holy Spirit and refusing repentance altogether, and adopting a sharp stand against the work of God and as Anannias, Caiaphas and Judas Iscariot did.

He sanctifies us

The Holy Spirit is the good precious treasure and it is He that sanctifies the repentants and washes them then prepares them to become a good vessel filled with virtues and gifts “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). In baptism we put on a new dress and the Holy Spirit helps us to keep that dress always new, clean and pure. The process of sanctification means continuous struggle to: attain virtues and attain gifts.

Virtues given by the Holy Spirit

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness,

self control” (Galatians 5:22).

The gifts given by the Holy Spirit

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

He guides us

The Holy Spirit always gives enlightenment. No one knows your thoughts but yourself as the soul of man knows man and the Spirit of God knows the works of God and guide us to truth, all truth. He reminds us of the words of Christ in the time when we need His guidance. This guide dwells in us and gives us advice “but the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; and His anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him” (1 John 2:17).

The Spirit guided the apostles and the disciples and the martyrs during persecutions and they spoke and bore witness before governors, rulers, and tyrants and they were never weak and they never refrained from bearing witness and Jesus gave a promise saying: “But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things” (John 14:26).

He Comforts us. When the soul settles and rejoices with the work of the Holy Spirit in her she becomes like a tree planted by streams of water that yields delightful fruit. The Holy Spirit gives her peace and joy so that grief and toil are no more, and the Lord fills our life with everlasting love and grants us good things. The joys of the world do not please the soul that was created in the image of God. The soul of a believer rejoices only in the Lord.

The Spirit Intercedes For Us

This Greek word, “Paraclete” is composed of two syllables: “Para” meaning beside, and “clete” meaning the accused person in a court of law. The Holy Spirit then defends us and intercedes for us and stands by us in the Divine Court of Justice, therefore He is our only Comforter and perpetual intercessor “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8: 26).

He Dedicates Us

We said that the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul is like the work of fire in flesh. He prints His mark in the flesh and His mark cannot be erased. This happens in the Mystery of Confirmation where man as a whole, body, thought, self-mind, and heart becomes the Holy Spirit’s possession. It is the fiery Spirit that prints the mark of King Christ in us “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 God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). “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” (1 Corinthians 3:16,17).

Situations

When sin wages war against you and you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit shout in your heart and guide you, what will you do?

- Will you try to suppress the Divine Voice?
- Will you be indifferent?
- Will you be in favor with sin?
- Or will you be in favor with the Spirit, subdue yourself to him and offer true repentance?

Prayer

O Holy Spirit of God, let my whole life be yours. Grant me the spirit of submission and repentance. Let my tears be pure and guide me so that I may not be alone in the wilderness of this world which is full of thorns, and do not leave me in the middle of the road. I need your kind comfort and acceptable intercession, and your precious instructions. O King of life, I promise that I will worship You and obey your commandments all my life. O Holy Father receive my soul, my life and my destiny. O Holy Son, dwell in my heart. O Holy Spirit, sanctify my body which is filled with sin and purify me of the defilement of both body and soul and grant me the spiritual life so that I may walk in the way of the Spirit and not complete the lust of the flesh.

Activities

From the Prayer Book, study by heart the third hour passages as they are all about the Holy Spirit. Obey the Lord and follow His commandments. Seek the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit in your prayers all the time. When you live for truth, the flame of the Holy Spirit will move your heart. When you love the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ, your heart will be kindled with the fire of the Spirit.

Third Week of June

(42) Division in the Church of Corinth

References

- + “The Divine Love” Fr. Tadros Yacoub.
- + “Love for the neighbor” St. George Church, Sporting.

The Lesson

Aim

I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.

The Church Established by Jesus

When the Lord Jesus came to our world, He desired to mend the effect of sin on man. Sin led to individuality, division and perplexity. The image of humanity at the Tower of Babylon was a clear model of the effect of sin on the relation between man and his brother. Man, in his haughtiness wanted to be a god and build a tower the top of which would reach heaven. God came down and mixed up their language, so they could not understand one another.

The Lord chose apostles and disciples and tried to remove the inner obstacles among them, and stood against selfishness, pride and love for having authority. He gave Himself as a model of modesty, love and sacrifice and He showed them a little child as a model of modesty, endurance, and meekness, a model to be followed. Then He celebrated the Passover with them and gave them His Holy Body and Blood and established the Sacrament of Eucharist, the mystery of fellowship and unity. He ordered them to keep that Divine Sacrament in memory of Him and to keep that covenant, the covenant of unity, love and strong internal relationship, which the effects of time cannot weaken.

On the day of Pentecost, the apostle, the disciples and Maries were gathered praying in one spirit and the Holy Spirit came down on them and they spoke different languages but these languages were not like those spoken by the Tower of Babylon; on the contrary, they were gathered, unified tongues so that each one who joined the church and was baptized became an integral living part of that mysterious wonderful body. The Book of Acts tell us about the unity of the church saying: “And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes” (Acts 2:44-46).

Divisions

But the enemy (the devil) is never calm and never feels comfort when he sees a united group living in one spirit, one mind and one heart. He always causes troubles, divisions, partialities and fanaticism. Let us have an example: The Church of Corinth, which Paul the apostle visited on his second journey and after his visit to Athens. He stayed in Corinth one year and six months according to a vision he say “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18: 10).

Silas and Timothy joined him and Luke had been with him since the beginning of his visit, but after Paul had preached and departed, a man named Apolos, a Jew from Alexandria, who has deep knowledge of Scriptures went to Corinth and caused division in the church; some said, “I belong to Paul” and others said, “I belong to Apolos”. While Paul was in Ephesus, reports of dissensions in Corinth came to him by Chloe’s people. He was deeply sad because of this news which he heard and he wrote to them saying in his first chapter, “I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that here be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarrelling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each one of you says: I belong to Paul or I belong to Apolos or I belong to Chephas or I belong to Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:1-13).

In the third chapter he says, “For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving like ordinary men? For when one says: I belong to Paul and another, I belong to Apolos, are you not merely men? When then is Apolos? What is Paul? ...I planted, Apolos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field,

God's building" (1 Corinthians 3.3-9).

Causes Of Division

From the text of this epistle we can deduce the factors that corrupt the unity of church and lead to divisions and dissensions:

1. Haughtiness: This disease separated and split the unity that was between Adam and God in the Garden, it is this disease that caused dissension and (division of the church in the Council of Chalcedon).
2. There is no Love: Love is the remedy that strengthens the ties that make unity strong. Love is the juice that forces each organ to be fixed and, to flower and give fruit for the vine. Love that never thinks badly of others and is not selfish never falls.
3. Envy and Distrust: This is the fruit of being lukewarm in worship, and separation from the Holy Spirit's domain, which is expressed by Paul the apostle by saying: "you are merely men".

Activities

Discuss the effectiveness of love in the life of the believers and show how we can put an end to the disputes that may happen between: A believer and his wife at home, etc.

Recitation

"What then is Apolos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each. I planted; Apolos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

Questions

1. Of what importance is unity in the life of the church?
2. How did the Lord unify the many into one?
3. The church of the apostles is considered a blessed model of unity. Give evidence and show how unity overcame dissension.
4. What are the factors of dissension in the church?
5. What causes the present dissensions inside the churches and the religion institutions? How can they be cured?
6. What is your role as Christian towards these dissensions?

Exercises

1. Reconcile between those who are in dispute.
2. Pray for the unity of the members of the church in the local domain.
3. Pray for the unity of the believers in the church of the whole country.
4. Pray for the unity of all Christians all over the world within the frame of the sound Orthodox faith.

Fourth Week June

(43) Confessing Christ

References

+ “Martyrdom in Christianity” Anba Youannis

The Lesson

Aim

There is nothing upon earth that I desire besides You.

You are my Witnesses

When the Lord Jesus chose His disciples and His holy Apostles, He desired them to be the disciples who would bear witness to Him, to His death and His resurrection. That is why He said to them: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The Lord ordered the disciples to stay in Jerusalem till they received what the Father promised to give them and when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they could trust in Him in bearing witness to the Lord. As soon as the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, Peter the apostle stood among the crowds and delivered a fiery Sermon confessing and bearing witness and he attracted three thousand souls to the church. Stephen the Archdeacon confessed Christ in a spiritual wonderful speech and his face was like that of an angel.

The Martyr’s Confession

The tyrant Roman Emperor Neron and many other emperors after him aroused severe persecutions against the meek Christians. He set fire to Rome and sat to enjoy looking at the terrible scene and accused the Christians of burning Rome, so the crowds rose against them and a great number of innocent Christians were sentenced to death and were killed, others were hung on pine trees in the Emperor’s gardens in Rome and they were burnt with fire to amuse the crowds who asked the believers to deny Christ and offer sacrifices to the idols, otherwise death would be their destiny. In times of persecution, confessing Christ in public cost a man his life, but Christians were brave enough to confess Christ in public before governors thus declaring their love for king Christ and their faith. St. Paul emphasized that when the true believer says “Jesus Christ is Lord”, he is guided by the Holy Spirit and he cannot deny his faith so long as the Holy Spirit is at work in him “You know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:1-3).

A wonderful example of the desire to confess till death

When St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch heard that he was called to stand before the Roman Emperor in Rome to bear witness to the Lord Jesus, he wrote a letter to the Romans saying: “I’d like my body to be devoured by wild animals as in this way I’ll be able to go to God...when my body disappears and the world sees it no more I will be truly Christ’s disciple”.

Brave Confession

The church confessions of Christ in secret was not due to hear fear of the emperor’s

persecutions, but it was confession in public, thus challenging all powers and persecutions as the disciples remembered the Lord's words: "So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven".

Personal love of the Lord Jesus gave power to those who bore witness to the Lord and confessed Him, for how can't we confess and bear witness to the Lord who died for us? The life of fellowship also kindled the spirit of confession and bearing witness as they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers. Their confession of Christ came through both words and actions and those who were tried and flogged rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Christ. Such courage was not a kind of rashness or a desire for heroism, but it was a natural result of the spiritual love and the work of the Holy Spirit in men.

How to attain the power of this confession

St. Cyprian, in his writings about Christianity in early times said: "They drank Christ's Blood every day so that this Divine Blood might give them the power to offer their blood for Him". When the Holy Spirit lifts our eyes to heaven, we become indifferent to the sufferings that afflict us when we confess Christ even if they lead to death... In this Paul the apostle says: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). The people still recite the covenant saying: "Amen, Amen, Amen. We preach Your death, O Lord, Your Holy Resurrection and Ascension we acknowledge. We praise You. We bless You. We thank You, O Lord, and we entreat You, O our God".

What hinders bravery in Confession?

- ❑ Being afraid of people: this means that we take people's opinion into account and we fear people more than we fear God but we have to bear in mind that complete trust in God drives fear away and makes our love for Christ firm in our hearts.
- ❑ Relying on oneself without seeking the grace of God: Refer to Peter's attitude during the trial of Christ.
- ❑ Insincerity in inner life: he who lives in the spirit of the world, the spirit of haughtiness and the spirit of luxury finds it difficult to confess Christ and bear witness to Him as his spoiled body fails him and compels him to deny Christ. An example of this is Judas the traitor who loved silver more than the Lord.
- ❑ Separation from the spirit of the church as the person who keeps away from the church and who does not practice prayer, or receiving communion or the life of fellowship with the believers, is secluded by the devil little by little till he is completely secluded and becomes a coward.

Social matters

Sometimes, a young person meets with non-Christian children or teachers in the school and those people may ask about Christ's Godhead, the Holy Trinity, Incarnation and Redemption. How will you answer their questions?

1. If they are not serious in their question and you feel that they are jesting or mocking, do not answer them.
2. If they are serious, pray the Holy Spirit to give you power then explain modestly and

with love the faith in us as the Scripture says: “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” but keep away from discussions that lead to nothing except religious fanaticism.

3. If the questions are above the standard ask the priest and the Sunday School teacher to help you, and give you the correct answer.

Questions

1. What do we mean when we say that the church is “a witness”?
2. Of what significance is “the brave Confession” in the life of the holy apostles?
3. How did martyrs confess Christ?
4. What hinders our true confession?
5. How can you attain the power to Confess to the Son?
6. What is the style that should be followed when someone asks you about your faith in Christ?

Spiritual Exercise and Activities

- ❑ Any situation you find yourself in, seize the chance and confess Christ and do not deny Him even if confession leads to death.
- ❑ Read about holy saints who made good confession. Gather booklets about martyrs and keep them in your private library to read them.
- ❑ Examine yourself before God to know what extent you are ready to die and bear witness to the Holy Name.
- ❑ Examine yourself to know to what extent you are prepared to confess and bear witness.

Recitation

“No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

First Week of July

(44) The Prayer Room

References

- + “The Garden of the Soul” Part 2, Anba Youannis
- + “Life of Prayer” Fr. Matta Al Miskin
- + “The Prayer of Jesus” A monk from the Eastern Church

The Lesson

Aim

Solutions for the difficulties we face when we pray.

Introduction

The most wonderful moment in life, is the moment when a believer sits with himself in the presence of God. When he shuts the door and enters his room, God opens the gates of heaven. When he is alone, a believer can enjoy living with the Almighty for some moments at which the

soul can taste the Holy fellowship when the Origin and the image meet and the hearts shouts: "Lord, it is well that we are here". The Christian man should stand as a piece of stone before the Divine Sculptor and say humbly to him: "Print your image in me". We change from glory to glory if we go on praying as praying is a school where we not only speak to God but we also listen to Him. A lady spent long years in her prayers and she prayed the Lord many times to give her what she wanted. She complained that God did not answer her, but when she learned to be silent in her prayers, she began to listen to the voice of God within her. She thought that prayer was mere repetition of words before the Lord. Hannah, Samuel's mother was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. Eli the priest took her to be a drunken woman. He said to her, "How long will you be drunken? Put away your wine from you, but Hannah answered: No, my Lord...but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord". In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son thus the Lord granted her petition which she had made to him as Eli the priest said to her (1 Samuel 1:12-18).

Hindrances in the Prayer Room

1. *Not being accustomed to prayers:* The devil hates seeing us praying with concentration as this means that we are free from his bondage. Man may say to himself, I am tired now or he may lean against the wall and may feel that this body is heavy and not active. We are not used to long prayers or in other words we are used to no prayer. Solutions should start with steady fast steps. We have to train ourselves to overcome the devil and to control our thoughts. One of the saints said, "The good thing you do now with sadness and toil will be done one day with joy".
2. *Absence of the mind:* You may need to control your thoughts and concentrate your mind on prayer only so that you may not think of any other thing. When you enter the church try to contemplate the icons and look at the people praying. When you feel that you are not praying well, do not deceive yourself as prayer means lifting up both mind and heart to heaven. Prayer has been the power to train the will and the whole being of man of self-control. Reciting psalms and reading in a low voice are of benefit as your ear, tongue and eyes work together and this helps you to control your thoughts. If the devil continues fighting you, make use of the sign of the cross and bow down in worship and say: "O Lord, I am not standing before you to repeat words so grant me pure prayer".

The late coming of the Lord's answer

Some people connect prayer to their personal interests. It is true that we should pray the Lord to give us what we need but must not forget that he said, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well". The Lord's answer may come late as He tests our love for Him. He may postpone His answer to teach us to be earnest in our prayer. The free gifts of God are precious, not cheap so we have to seek them with toil. We should have the spirit of faith within us as God is our Father and He will not be late "For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end. It will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay" (Habakkuk 2:3). So when you stand to pray, do not say, "I gained nothing" as God is always at work, in secret, in the heart.

Always busy at work

You don't have any other necessary work to do except prayer so put it at the top of our list of work. Devote a certain time for it. Dedicate and sanctify the period devoted for prayer. The

people of God used to pick up manna in the early morning so we have to devote the best part of our time for prayer. Let us begin the day with prayer. Let us devote a certain period every day for prayer as in doing this we establish the habit of prayer and when this habit is established, bad habits will vanish.

Prayer is the mother of all virtues

How wonderful prayer is. It is the gate of heaven. It is the key to the treasures of God. It is the mother of virtues. If you want to be meek, pure, smiling, calm like the angels, always pray. If you suffer from haughtiness, anxiety, boredom or ill treatment of friends, sit with Christ; if you want to learn and taste the Lord's love sit with Him and live with Him, the Lord will give you more than what you want. Only remember His commandment: "Man ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

Spiritual Exercises

1. Devote a certain time in the early morning for prayer and pray before you start studying your lessons.
2. Practice using Psalms prayers (The Prayer Book).
3. Tell your father of confession about your spiritual life in the light of your prayers.
4. Practice reciting the Prayer of Jesus many times every day: "O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner".
5. When you suffer from any temptation or an evil thought or any difficulty recite: "Be pleased, O God, to deliver me: O Lord make haste to help me".

Second Week of June

(45) Many gifts and One Aim

References

+ The Gifts of the Church.

The Lesson

Aim

To be acquainted with my gifts (talents) and my duty.

Like the Body and its members

+ One day the members of the body felt that they are not satisfied with their work. They do the same work all the time; the feet walk, the eyes see, the ears hear, the arms and hands hold things. All the other members of the body have functions. They all decided not to work and each member wanted to find a different work to do. The leg said, "I want to be a hand so that I may have a higher position. I was always low and I always walked on the ground". The hand said, "And I also no more desire to do what I am used to do. I always hold things and put food into the mouth, and write the homework and letters. I work all the time and I need rest". The ear said, "I like to be an eye. I prefer seeing to hearing. I do not desire to hear any more".

All the members of the body began to talk in this way. Each member desired to do another job. But the hand could not walk and the leg could not write. The ear made an attempt to see and the eye tried to smell flowers and breathe the air, but each member could not perform the others member's function. Each member realized that it has an important work to do and each member could not live without the help of the other members, so all the members performed their original functions once more and they were all happy with their work (Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

The Body of Christ

St. Paul says that we are all members of the one Body of Christ. When we were little children, the priest baptized us and we became members of the One Body of Christ, and each one of us received the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Confirmation. We are then members in the church, which is the Body of Christ, and each member in the church attains certain gifts as there are several kinds of spiritual gifts and we receive these gifts from the Holy Spirit. These gifts are given to us to perform different services in the name of Christ. The Lord gives us special power to serve Him in the church and in the world. When anyone of us makes use of his gifts in his service, he gives evidence to show that the Holy Spirit exists in his life for the benefit of all people.

Using gifts in the church

The church is responsible for announcing the qualities of Christ and bearing witness to Him by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is at work in the believers through the different gifts they have such as driving out demons, healing patients, teaching, caring for building up the Body of Christ and supporting the church to bear true witness to the Lord. These gifts and miraculous deeds do not depend on men's intelligence or his personal abilities, but they are gifts that express the grace of God, His power, His mercy and goodness. The Lord gives them, according to His will, to whom He desires to give so that His name be glorified in His church all the time.

Kinds of Gifts

When we read the epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12:4-30), we find many kinds of gifts. These we shall give in brief and we shall refer to the function of each:

1. The Gift of Speaking God's Message: The ability to speak in different tongues. Speaking in different tongues was often accompanied by the gift of translation, which enabled the person to translate the message given to him by the Holy Spirit into other languages.
2. The gifts of prophecy and the gift of teaching: These two gifts are concerned with teaching, explaining and elucidating the purpose of God and announcing His Divine sacraments, but these need inspiration and being acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct us for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15).
3. Gifts of Administration: Under this title we have the gifts of administrating church affairs. These are given to Patriarchs, bishops and priests. The gift of service is given to deacons who are the arms and eyes of bishops. There are gifts that announce the glory of God to strengthen the believers and raise their spirit such as the gifts of driving out demons (performing miracles) and healing diseases. St. Paul gathered all these gifts in these words of his: "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit. To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gift of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another

prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another diverse kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. But all these works that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” (1 Corinthians 12:8-11).

To make use of the gifts is to express love

As all these gifts aim at our serving one another to build up the Body of Christ, these gifts, when they work in harmony, and through their conformity and connection, they play the role performed by the unity of the eye, the hand, the leg and the ear. In this the apostle says: “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that, which every joint supplies according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16). So the different gifts by which we serve one another are an expression of love and “love” means that each one of us should use his gifts to serve others.

Deviation in using gifts

1. Those who have gifts may be haughty. A believer who has attained a gift may become haughty and proud; this usually happens when man lives for himself and forgets that God has given him that gift not to glorify him but it is God alone that is to be glorified through his gifts. The Holy Spirit often get the gift back from the haughty whose salvation in this case becomes very difficult unless he humbles himself and serve the believers with complete sincerity and contrition as the Lord Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and he did not pride himself upon doing that although he is the Holy who deserves all glory and honor.
2. The second deviation lies in disorder and contradiction, as that who has the gift of teaching is not satisfied with it and desires to have the gift of administration and so on. St. Paul the apostle in his comment on these cases said: “If the foot should say: Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body I (Inferiority complex), that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say: Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? (desire for authority and looking down upon the gifts of others). But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body” (1 Corinthians 12:5-20).
3. Passivism, laziness and lack of diligence are examples of these deviations. This happens to those whose talents are few who desire to appear or who envy those who have many talents, although the body has small organs and big organs, hidden organs and visible organs. St. Paul said: “God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part” (1 Corinthians 12:21-25).

What should I do with my gifts?

Each believer should be acquainted with his/her spiritual and personal gifts, which the Lord has granted him/her. So everyone should examine himself so as to define his activities with the help of his father of confession, who can spiritually guide the sincere believers in God’s way. The believer has to thank God for what he has taken and acquired and he must not think of other people’s gifts or of imitating others. He has to thank the Lord and ask Him to polish the gifts He

has given him no matter how few they are (as he might think). He has also to make use of his gifts to serve the society and not to be selfish but that “the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:35-27).

I know a gifted boy who tries to make use of his gift of drawing. He decided to draw a picture of the Lord Christ and the saints. When you look at the pictures he has drawn, you have deep feelings of reverence for the spiritual meanings that the picture reflects. Another friend of mine who cannot draw but can write, asked his friends in the class to cooperate with him to do something for those boys and girls who keep away from the church. They issued a small magazine once every three months. They wrote about the spiritual blessings of the church and Sunday School. Some wrote essays, some printed them, and others distributed the magazines between the colleagues and friends. One of the girls could not cooperate in writing as she could neither write nor draw but she could play music well. She decided to make use of that gift and she brought her musical instrument and sang hymns and melodies on Sundays. She taught some children and after a short time, they formed a band that played and sang the church hymns.

Know our gifts and use them

A young friend of mine read the words of St. Paul the apostle about the spiritual gifts, then he asked me: “I understood that each one of us has spiritual gifts, but I am not sure that I have any spiritual gifts. I go to Sunday School, but I do not participate in the activities of the boys and girls. I can neither draw nor write. I know nothing about music either. Sometimes I hate myself when I feel that I cannot benefit others”.

I said to that young friend, “Well, my friend, I will try to help you. You will be surprised to know that the things you can do are more than the things your colleagues do. You love your friends and your friends love you. Your decent way of dealing with them helps you to solve the problems that may be aroused among them. You give them a good example of Christian life and they try to follow your example. Don’t you know that meekness and love are the most important spiritual gifts? And that we, through love can bring the whole world to Christ? and that when each of us makes use of His individual gifts for serving people, He expresses His love for them in a practical way? “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them in proportion to our faith; He who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, holdfast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection” (Romans 12:6-10).

Questions

1. What is the function of the gifts in the church, and why is the church called the Body of Christ?
2. What are the different kinds of gifts? Make use of chapter 12 of the Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12) and count these gifts.
3. What distinguishes the use of gifts in the church by the holy children of God?
4. How are gifts wrongly made use of?
5. What is my duty towards my gifts? How can I know my gifts?

Exercises

I have to know the gifts I have, thank God for them, use them honestly to glorify God through my service to others.

Recitation

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Jews or Greek, slaves or free and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Third Week of July

(46) Love is the greatest gift

References

- + “The fruit of the Spirit is love” Fr. Bishoy Kamel
- + “The Divine Love and the Commandment” St. George Church, Sporting
- + “Love for the Neighbor” St. George Church, Sporting

The Lesson

Aim

Love is the greatest gift. Practicing practical love.

Introduction

When St. John the Beloved became very old, the believers used to carry him to the pulpit of the church to preach but he only repeated these words each time: love one another, My sons, love one another”. When he was asked why he repeated these words only, he said: “Love is the fulfilling of the commandments and the law, and he who loves is born of God for God is love”.

Here is a nice story:

+ Marcos sat in his room, opened his Bible and read St. Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians. The first Epistle, chapter 13 about love but he could not understand the practical meaning of love. While he was thinking, he fell asleep and saw a nice vision in a dream. When he awoke from his sleep, he wrote down what he saw in his dream:

I was at a railway station. I saw a man standing beside me. The man said to me, “Come with me”. I walked with him and we took the train. We sat at two opposite seats. The train moved. The first station we stopped at was “The New Corinth”. We got out of the train. While we were walking together, I looked at the man. The man smiled to me. His face was all kindness and peace. Comfort filled my heart and I was happy. The people who were walking in the street were also calm and had bright faces.

We reach the Love Square. In the middle of that square, there was water flowing from a nice fountain. The Square was full of statues. The man said to me, “Look at this big cross on which the crucified Christ is hung”. I looked and saw Jesus hung on the cross and there was a statement written under him: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his

friends” (John 15:13). There was also a statue of St. Stephen the first martyr bowing on his knees. The words he had said were written under him: “Lord do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). In a corner, I saw a big painting of Virgin Mary holding the child Jesus on her hands, and the hymn that Mary sang was written thus: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden... For He who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His name” (Luke 1:46-49).

There was a statue of the Father receiving the Lost Son and these words were written: “Let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:23,24). We found a seat at a corner and we sat there beside each other. I said to the man: “I like this beautiful square” and the man said, “In this place, no one knows animosity or hatred; no one feels jealous of anyone else; each one serves the others with the gifts he has modestly and thankfully. Nobody boasts about what he has before others as the Lord has given each one of them the blessing to serve others with their gifts. Nobody raises his voice foolishly or impolitely but each one listens to the others with patience and lowliness. When a lad like you sits with his friends or in his class, he listens attentively to what the others say. He never despises anyone; he never tries to impose himself on others, but tire to convince them of his opinion and points of view with patience. Even if someone says something incorrect, he does not despise him or answers him dryly, but he says a nice word instead. In this way the situation changes to the better and discussion becomes fruitful and they all talk in a friendly atmosphere. Each one of them opens his heart to the other, speak frankly and believe what the other says and endures everything with perfect love. Each one of them expresses his good wishes to the other”.

I said to the man, “I like to stay in this place and enjoy this friendly atmosphere which is full of love” and the man said, “But you can enjoy this atmosphere in your life. Everything depends on you. When your heart is filled with love for all people, you will see everything in a different way and you will find that the small problems can be easily solved and you will...” I interrupted him saying, “But how can I listen to a person who insults me without answering him back? How can I love such a person?” and the man said, “This is why love is the greatest virtue. You need to train yourself and practice love in your life, if you truly desire to live in New Corinth. You can live there with your mind and heart. Don’t you know that love is the crown of all gifts and the mother of all virtues?”

When I heard these words I came to myself and looked around me and discovered that all I saw was a nice dream and the Holy Bible was still open and the same chapter was still there. At once I took a piece of paper and a pen and began to write and record this beautiful dream.

Let us go to the New Corinth

Marcos read his dream to his colleagues in the class, the following Sunday and when he finished reading it, there was a lot of discussion on the part of his colleagues who made many comments. One of them said, “I envy the boy who sits beside me in the class as he gets higher marks in the examinations”. The teacher said, “You must not be jealous of him as this may lead to hatred, but you have to rejoice. At the same time, you have to exert a greater effort and study hard and in this way you will get higher marks next exam”. Marcos said, “I love my younger brother, but he annoys me when he takes my things and use them. I know I must show kindness to him and share him the things that belong to me but I’ll try to tell him that when he needs anything, he

must tell me before he takes it so that I may not search for it”.

Then all the class read together chapter 13 of Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians. One of the boys asked, “I cannot understand how love is considered greater than faith or hope”. The teacher said, “Our faith in God is based on God’s love for us and our love for God as without love there is no faith nor is there hope. St. John the apostle explained this meaning clearly: “Beloved, let us love one another for love is of God and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him” (John 4:7-9).

Without love, the soul cannot draw near to God as God is Love. Thus Beloved John preached all the days of his life even when he became an old man.

St. Paul the apostle says: Aim at love

In this epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul emphasized the importance of gifts in the church and he said to the believers: “Earnestly desire the higher gifts” and then he said, “I will show you a still more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). He asked the believers to aim at the life of love. He wonderfully emphasized the importance of love by saying: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

This shows us that love is the greatest of all gifts whether these gifts are speaking in the tongues of men, prophetic powers, knowledge, faith or works of mercy, as unless these gifts are mixed with love, they become void of the good essence that makes them acceptable before the Lord and the Lord does not accept works in number or quantity but in quality. In this the apostle says: “So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

The Importance of love in the Christian life

There are three kinds of love in the life of man:

1. The first kind is the passion of the flesh. This is called lust as it results from selfishness.
2. The second kind is mutual love, which is superior to the first kind, but it is not deep and it cannot form unity between lovers.
3. The third kind is the spiritual love (in Coptic: Aghapi), which is the true Christian love of which the Lord Jesus gave us a model when He loved us and gave Himself for our sins to deliver us and redeem us. True Christian love means the presence of the Lord Jesus in the believer’s heart as Jesus alone is love and without love, the soul cannot draw near God as God is love. Without love the church cannot be a church, as how can the body become the body of the Lord while it is devoid of love. We can realize the depth of love and its importance in the life of the Lord Jesus especially when He gave us His Holy Body and Blood as power, sacrifice, gift and love for all who receive them. St. John the apostle shows us the importance of love when he says: “He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:10,11).

The fruits of Christian love

+ St. Paul the apostle spoke about the fruits of love and its qualities in the chapter we are contemplating when he said:

- ❑ Love is patient and kind so we have to be kind to the weak.
- ❑ Love does not envy so we have to bless the gifts of others so that envy may not fill the heart of a believer.
- ❑ Love vaunts not itself and is not puffed up. This is because love is meek and modest so the devil's finger cannot corrupt it.
- ❑ Love does not separate itself from others, as it is not boastful.
- ❑ Love does not believe itself unseemly and it does not seek her own. This is because love is pure because of the work of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit of love and holiness.
- ❑ Love is not easily provoked and thinks no evil. It is meek, modest and patient. It endures all and is open to all.
- ❑ Love does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. This is because it aims at truth and abides in the light. It does not aim at the darkness of sin and fanaticism "He who does what is true comes to the light" (John 3:21). "He who loves his brother abides in the light" (1 John 2:10).
- ❑ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. "Love never ends" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Practical Love

1. The story of the two brothers and wheat, in the church history.
2. The Story of Ibrahim el Gohary and his brother who was despised and insulted by one of his relatives.
3. The story of the punch of grapes which was sent before its season and each monk gave it to his brother without tasting it, out of love and preference till it went back to the boss.
4. Stories of Anba Bishoy and Anba Sarabamon and Anba Abram (Read the Books of "The Garden of the Monks", "The History of the Church" and the Synaxarium).

Questions

1. What does it mean to say that love is the greatest of all gifts?
2. What are the kinds of love and what is the true Christian love?
3. What are the qualities of Christian love?
4. What are the fruits of Christian love?

Activities

Do acts of love to your brethren specially those who are sick, poor, and those who are in grief. Send gifts to hospitals and orphanages.

Recitation

+ 1 Corinthians 13

Instructions

We have studied some topics mentioned in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, but the teacher together with his children can study the whole epistle and prepare questions for discussion and

practice the spiritual exercises in their behavior and conduct.

The following are the topics to be studied in the first epistle to the Corinthians:

1. Divisions in the church (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4).
2. Do not mix with adulterers, as this sin adultery is dangerous and fatal. Your body is holy as it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (Chapters 5, 6).
3. Virginity is better than marriage. To remain single is better than to marry (Chapter 7).
4. Do not cause others to fall (Chapter 8).
5. Bring your body under complete control (Chapter 9).
6. The Lawful and the unlawful. What is expedient and what is inexpedient (Chapter 11).
7. He who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord (Chapter 11).
8. Spiritual gifts, living membership, the unity of spirit (Chapter 12).
9. Love is the greatest gift (Chapter 13). Study by heart the verses about love 4-8.
10. The gift of speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy and the gift of interpretation (Chapter 14).
11. The Resurrection of the Lord from among the dead and its effectiveness and the Second coming of the Lord in the clouds (Chapter 15).
12. Instructions and wonderful spiritual pieces of advice (Chapter 16).

Fourth Week of July

(47) Fathers of Monasticism

References

- + “Anba Anthony” St. Athanasius the apostolic.
- + “Contemplation on the life of St. Anthony” Pope Shenouda III
- + “The Story of the Coptic Church” Iris Al Masry
- + “The Garden of the Monks”

The Lesson

Aim

To be acquainted with the heritage of our fathers the monks and their spiritual experience.

In the wilderness and on the mountains

- Far away from the noise of life and there in the quietness of the wilderness, who find groups of people who lead a life of worship. Those people retired from the world, and driven by love and strong desire, they sought silence and solitude away from human habitation and there they practiced prayer and contemplation.
- When Christianity began, some Christians desired to dedicate themselves to the life of worship, so they left everything behind them, money, property, worldly matters, everything, and lived in the desert and spent their time praying, fasting, contemplating, reading the Holy Bible and helping others. Their aim was purity of heart. They were meek, modest and silent, their faith was deep and strong and their life was simple. They

could live with little of food and chose the life of voluntary poverty as an implied protest against the material luxury in which the world lived. They also imitated the Lord Christ who gave us the greatest model of the life of simplicity in food, clothes and property.

- ❑ This kind of life is called Monasticism. A monk is a man who dedicates himself and devotes his whole life to the Savior. He is dead to the world in flesh and thought so he does not concern himself with money, position, social status, home, family or any other thing and he chooses for himself the life of poverty and obedience to his teachers. Meekness and virginity are the two main bases of monasticism.
- ❑ Monasticism was first known in the desert of Egypt where the great fathers of monasticism lived and taught their disciples who came to them from all parts of the world, and many of those disciples went back to their countries and established monastic systems in their churches. Some of the fathers of monasticism are: St. Anthony, St. Pachomius, St. Basil and St. Ephraim.

St. Anthony the Father of Monks

Anthony was born in Kemn el Arous. Beni Sweif Governorate about 251 AD. He came from a rich family. He was eighteen years of age when his parents died, leaving him with his younger and only sister. One day, he entered the church and listened attentively to the words of the Gospel. He was struck by the reading of the Gospel in which our Lord speaks to the rich young man, “If you want to be perfect, go sell all you have, give to the poor and come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21).

St. Anthony took this advice seriously, as a personal invitation addressed to him by God. He decided to obey the commandment, so he sold all his property and gave the price to the poor, keeping back only a little for his sister. He placed his sister in the charge of a Christian family, then he left for the desert where he lived in solitude for twenty years as a hermit. He lived alone all that time. He divided his time between prayer, interweaving palm leaves, reciting psalms work and reading. He kept away from the cares of the world and devoted his life for prayers and spiritual contemplations. Many people heard of his abstinence so they became his disciples and built their cells near his cell and asked his advice in all spiritual matters. They used to gather together on Sundays to receive the Holy Communion.

St. Anthony went to the city twice. He went to encourage the martyrs to endure the pains. He helped them, supported them when they were tried and urged them to hold fast to the Christian faith and to confess Christ. The Second time he went to Alexandria, he was 90 years old and he went there to support Pope Athanasius against the heresy of Aryanism, and to help him in his struggle against the Arians.

St. Anthony became famous that thousands of monks gathered around him, and he became their spiritual father. He guided them, advised them, and directed them with his instructions and wisdom. St. Anthony is truly the father of monks.

The Principles of Monasticism (as derived from the life of St. Anthon)

1. Spiritualism and Perpetual Prayers: Anthony played the harp of the soul and sang the sweet hymns of worship and made progress in the life of worship and prayers.
2. Solitude: He loved to speak with the Lord, loved the words of God and to contemplate

the Divine words. His living among men hampers that growth. For this reason, he deserted the world and went to the desert to live there, not escaping from the cares of the world, but he went there to devote his whole life to the worship of God. He was the first man to be called “a monk”. It is he that established the monastic system and many followed him. Many people followed his steps. They left the world and lived in complete solitude, which was not a closed sick solitude, but it was a solitude open to others, through prayers for the world (What is the difference between closed sick solitude, and the original spiritual solitude?). Here a monk practices love not only for God but also for people. He went to the outside world twice to encourage martyrs and assist them during their trial. That happened when he was 70 years old. When he was 90 years old, he went to Alexandria to resist Arius who proclaimed that Christ was man and not God who appeared in the flesh. He helped Anba Athanasius the apostolic the Pope of Alexandria in his fight against this heresy.

3. **Virginity:** Monks never marry not because marriage is wrong but because they are completely concerned with God. Virginity is not mere refraining from marriage, but it is chastity, pure thoughts, honest talk, and consecrating and devoting the whole life to the Lord.
4. **Voluntary Poverty:** Anthony left everything. This is what we call “abstinence”. He did not seek the charity from others, but he ate and gave alms by the toil of his hands. Many person were rich, but they left the world and went into wilderness and led a life of complete Poverty, virginity, solitude ad toil of the hand. Christ likened this to that who sold his field to buy the precious jewel.
5. **Obedience:** Many people came to Anthony the hermit; became his disciples, obeyed him and followed his advice. Since the devil fought them in many ways, those monks found it necessary to obey their instructions and teachers so that they might grow in faith and defeat the devil.

St. Pachomius the founder of the Coenobitic System

St. Pachomius was born in Isna, in Upper Egypt of Pagan parents in 290 AD. When he was young he served in the Roman Army. One day his troop was sent to Ethiopia. On their way to Ethiopia, Christian villagers went out to meet and welcome them. They gave food to the soldiers and welcomed them in a way that soldiers were not used to. They washed the soldiers’ feet, although the soldiers ill-treated them. After the war, Pachomius became Christian, was baptized and disciple to Palaemon, a famous hermit, and he practiced the life of monasticism. St. Pachomius is the founder of the Coenobitic system. He founded many monasteries and won a world fame because of his monastic system.

St. Basil the Great

St. Basil was born of a Christian family in 329 AD. He was instructed in the fundamentals of the Christian faith by his sister Macrina. He completed his higher studies in Athens, then he visited the famous monks who taught him the rules of monastic life, self-control, fasting and vigil (wakefulness). He was interested in contemplating nature and he spend most of his time in prayer, hard work, reading and writing. He wrote many books and essays on Christian creed and the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. He wrote the Divine Liturgy, the Liturgy of St. Basil, which is used in our Coptic churches most of the year. St. Basil was a great teacher. He warned the Christians against the heretic teachings. He requested the rich to show mercy to the poor. He

also distributed his wealth between the needy and established an institution for the cure of the sick and the comfort of the travelers and the poor.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

Mar Ephraim was born in Nissibeen at the beginning of the fourth century and there he received his teachings. He became an abbot in the Raha District. He led a life of monasticism and abstinence, then he left the monastery to serve the word of God in the city of Raha and fought the Aryan heresy that spread among the people there and corrupted the mind of the believers. He helped the people of Raha during the famine. He visited St. Basil in Caesarea. He wrote several spiritual essays and memoirs. He also interpreted some parts of the Holy Scriptures. St. Ephraim the Syrian is one of the greatest fathers of the Syrian church. He was a great poet and writer. He was called, "The prophet of the Syrians, the teacher of the Syrians and the harp of the Holy Spirit".

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the basic rules of the monastic life?
2. Compare between the monastic system established by St. Anthony and the Coenobitic system established by St. Pachomius.
3. What was the part played by each of the following in the life of the church: St. Basil the Great, and Mar Ephraim the Syrian?

First Week of August

(48) The Monk as a messenger and the World need for monasticism at present

References

- + "Contemplations on the life of St. Anthony" Pope Shenouda III
- + "Monasticism" Fr. Youssef Asaad
- + "Coptic Monasticism" Anba Macary Monastery

The Lesson

Aim

- + Emphasizing the fact that the monk leads a positive life for the church, the service and the society.

The Works and Services of a Monk

A monk's time is divided between worship, contemplative reading and work. Although these activities are private business, yet they offer great benefits to the church. Note: How the church can benefit from the monk's worship? The monks devote long times to prayers for the people and the world and they benefit the church by their readings when they brought to the world the original spiritual church heritage of the fathers' writings, and when they recorded their deep tests to benefit others. Note also the monastic works which are connected with prayers and reading.

The monks wrote books about prayers, hymns, interpretations, sermons, the history of the church and many other writings. They copied these writings and sold the toil of their hands whether in

the form of books or handiwork to the people and to the churches.

The monasteries became universities and scientific centers and their light of knowledge beamed all over the world. People liked the writings of monks on all subjects and the libraries of the Monasteries contained the greatest books and references in all fields of knowledge. Many monks worked in the field of church service and many of them translated the church books into different languages. Thanks to these monks, the Christian faith spread all over the world.

In the 5th and 6th centuries, the Coptic monks sent missions to different parts of the world. History tells us of monks who went to Switzerland and the seven monks who went to Switzerland and the seven monks who reached the North of Ireland and preached the Gospel there and they were great in art and language. In the Irish liturgy, there is a prayer for them: "Remember O Lord the Egyptian monks who brought us the true faith". In the Coptic Church, we remember St. Anthony who resisted the Arian heresy and Anba Shenouda (St. Shenouti) the Archimandrite (head of Anchorites) who was the leader of a rare spiritual, social and patriotic movement of renaissance in Egypt.

Monasticism is a challenge to luxury and worldly life

There was a time when the Christian church took to aspects of luxury after the end of the periods of persecutions. The church began to compete the kings of the earth in the material wealth and authority. At that time, the monks, in their monasteries, challenged the world by leading a life of abstinence and voluntary poverty. There is no doubt that their defiance was to the position of the world which affected the Christians' life and kept them away from the original model of the Lord Christ who was meek and modest and who had no place to rest His head in and who gave us the greatest example of the life of abstinence and simplicity in food, clothing and property. Those are the monks and the fathers who left the world behind their backs and sold all they had, deprived themselves of money and went to the desert to worship the Lord and pray to God the whole night, to have the sweetest talk between the lover and the beloved they dwelt in the wilderness, in the mountains and in the caves. All this was because of their great love for King Christ.

Christianity needs monasticism nowadays

Monasticism is the practical incarnation of the Divine Love. It is love for God that is superior to any other love and sublimates with the soul in the life of hymns and prayers. It is love for the people who were created in God's image and after his likeness. It is love that leads to sacrifice and giving.

The Life of a Monk

Because of his love for God, a monk lives in solitude to worship and contemplate and keep his mind and feelings for the love of God. He gives up the worldly cares, and the joy of his heart and the desire of his soul are for God only and no one else. Because of his love for his brethren, he gives the world all what he has. He has no material things to give, but he has spiritual gifts with which he can serve humanity, "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).

St. Augustine says: "There are two facts which each man can see: the first is 'work' and the

second is 'contemplation'... The first makes us toil and work hard to purify the hearts and the second we become quiet so we can see God (Tell your children the story of Anba Bishoy who carried out the Good Savior).

St. Gregory says: "The Lord Christ, glory be to Him, set two kinds of life through his behavior. The life of service and work, and the life of calmness and contemplation. So each one of us needs the two kinds of life: Service and Contemplation.

The World needs practical models of holiness

God desires that each Christian would be a saint, who consecrates his own senses, body and soul. A monk devotes himself to the life of virginity to get rid of the means of earthly attractions, so his soul walks easily and happily in the way of Christ, and enjoys a perpetual wedding without end. The married people also can practice the life of holiness if they live with a holy heart and pure feelings as marriage is a holy Sacrament. But a monk who has dedicated his life to God prefers virginity to devote his heart to Christ and to serving his holy name. He has chosen God in whom he rejoices (In the Old Testament there were sacrifices and burnt offerings. Why do we call the holy laity a sacrifice and the holy monk a burnt offering?)

The World needs prayers

We all pray but the monk who left the world devoted his life to service, prayers and hymns. He does not offer these for himself only but also for the world and for all the people. While people are asleep, the Congregation of monks raise their prayers like pillars of light. You remember Anba Macary who saw a pillar of light coming out of the mouths of St. Maximus and St. Domadius as they were praying so that God might destroy wars, epidemics, evil deeds, things that cause people to stumble, doubts, suspicion and evil images. They were praying that the Lord might send his mercies to you and to the whole world.

The World needs discipleship

1. Through a model: The world is in need of high ideals to raise the standard of conduct. Monasticism is struggling to reach the Christian perfection. Who can read the Garden of the monks and does not long for virtue? Who can read the memoirs of saints and does not desire holiness? St. Isaac said, "Reproach the evil doers by the chastity of your conduct not by words". For example, remember St. Augustine, who, while he was in Italy, was an evil man, "but thanks to the memoir of the Egyptians saint, Anthony, he was attracted to the life of repentance and became one of the bishops of the church".
2. Growth in virtues: Monasticism gives us models of virtues showing the possibility of carrying out Christ's commandment. A man with a demon struck a monk on his cheek, and when the monk turned his other cheek to receive the second blow, the demon went out of the man's body crying: "Woe be to us O monks, you terrify us by your obedience to the commandments of Christ".
3. Discipleship to the writings of the fathers and their life: The church regards the writings of the fathers as treasures, as they are the fruits of the practical tests of their daily life. These tests were the results of their continuous relationship and long fellowship with God. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. We have to bear in mind that the fathers' teachings in their simplicity are the greatest source of Christian teachings. The service of the monks was not confined to the teaching through books and letters, but they also

transmitted this precious scientific and spiritual heritage to the next generations through discipleship. Whenever a monk was known for his knowledge and holiness, groups of disciples rushed to him in great numbers. Hence the idea of a university arose. One of the writers of history said: “The renaissance that arose in the world of literature and thought during the 12th and 13th centuries, was associated with the rise of human sciences and universities in the Middle Ages”. That renaissance was the fruit of those old monasteries, which were established by St. Pachomius the founder of the Coenobitic System.

4. Monasticism was, and still is a spiritual power in the church. This spiritual power supports the church by prayers and provides it with religious and dogmatic researches and when necessary, the monks leave their monastery and go to the world to serve the people through spiritual power.
5. Obedience: A monk obeys God, the Holy Scriptures and the church and his slogan is “We must obey God rather than men” and through his obedience he offers a good method that suits the present generation and emphasizes the value of spiritual obedience, which is the basis of sound relationship in the family, society and church.

Questions

1. What are the main elements of monastic life? Show how monasticism was a challenge to the corrupt positions of the world.
2. St. John Chrysostom says, “The monk’s vow should also be offered by the married people” How can this be?
3. Can a Christian lead a life of contemplation and a life of service at the same time? How can a monk do that? Mention some famous monks who performed great services to the church.
4. How can the church benefit from monasticism and monasteries nowadays? What do we want them to do? How is the world greatly in need of them?

Activities

1. Pay a visit to a monastery and together with some monks discuss the benefits of monasticism for society.
2. Sit with one of the holy monks and try to benefit from his experience. Go into retreat in the House of Retreat.
3. Pay a visit to the Monastery Library and read the our manuscripts.

Recitation

- “I stood on the top of the world when I desired nothing and feared nothing” St. Augustine.
- “The soul is truly wise and pious and this appears in man’s look and the way he walks, talks and smiles. The mind that loves God is like a watchful guard in keeping away the evil thoughts” (St. Anthony in the Philocalia).

Second Week of August

(49) The symbols of the Virgin in the Old Testament

References

- + The Daily Hymn of Praise
- + “The Second Heaven” Anba Bemin
- + “Our Lady and Queen of us all, the Holy Theotokos Saint Mary” Fr. Youssef Asaad
- + “St. Mary in History, rite and Creed” Fr. Sidaros Abdel Messih
- + “Virgin Mary” Fr. Tadros Yacoub

The Lesson

Aim

The value and importance of the Virgin in the church and in the Holy Bible.

Introduction

Christ is the pivot of the Old Testament. Prophets prophesied of incarnation and crucifixion. We shall speak of the symbols and signs of the Virgin in the Old Testament in brief. Many of the symbols of the Old Testament stand for the Virgin and refer to her order and role as she gave the Lord the dough of humanity. There were many symbols and signs that were interpreted by the fathers and understood by the following generations.

The following are the symbols of the virgin in the Old Testament in brief:

1. The woman’s seed (Genesis 3:5): The prophecy did not say that salvation would be by a man, but it said that salvation would be by the woman’s seed and this indicates that Christ has no human father and the evidence of the virgin’s conception is clear “He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel”.
2. Noah’s dove (Genesis 8:11): “The dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf”. This refers to the beautiful dove that gave birth to the Prince of Peace.
3. Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28:12,13): “... there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it”. This stands for Mary as she conceived the Lord in her womb and the Lord rose on the cross and opened the heaven and united the heavenly and the earthly into one (in her hymn of praise the church says: You are the Ladder that Jacob saw set on the earth, the top of it reached to heaven and the angels of God are ascending and descending on it).
4. The Bush (Exodus 3:2): “And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed”. This refers to Mary who bore the fire of Godhead and was not consumed and her virginity was kept. This also refers to the unity of the Lord’s Divinity and Humanity, as the Lord’s Humanity is One with His Godhead without mingling, without confusion, nor alteration (In this, the church says in her hymn of praise: You are the bush that Moses saw burning yet not consumed and Godhead did not consume your body).
5. The Rod of Aaron (Numbers 17:8): “The rod of Aaron had sprouted and put forth buds, and produced blossoms and it bore ripe almonds”. This refers to Mary who gave birth to the Lord Jesus at a miraculous level.
6. Aaron’s censor (Numbers 16:46): “And Moses said to Aaron: Take your censor, and put fire therein from the altar, and lay incense on it...” The censor of pure gold is Virgin Mary and the ember (glowing coal) stands for the bush that Moses saw in the wilderness,

the bush was on fire. The bush refers to Blessed Mary the Mother of Light who bore the fire of Godhead in her womb for nine months without being harmed. The incense (the Godhead) is our High Priest who offered himself as a sacrifice and an acceptable oblation on the cross, the scented fragrance rose up to the heavenly Father from Golgotha in the evening... The scented fragrance that spread is the Nativity of Christ and His Preaching to the world.

7. The Ark of Testament (Exodus 25:10,11): “And you shall make an ark of acacia wood; two cubits and a half shall be its length... and you shall overlay it with pure gold, within and without shall you overlay it...” The wood that never rots refers to her perpetual virginity; overlaying it with pure gold within and without, refers to the purity of Mary and to the fact that the Lord’s Divinity and His Humanity never part. The manna in the ark refers to Mary when she conceived Christ, the True heavenly manna.
8. The Jar of Manna (Exodus 16:33): “And Moses said to Aaron: Take a jar and put an omen of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations”. Mary is the golden jar of manna. She carries the mental manna, the Bread of Life.
9. The Rock of Horeb (Exodus 17:6): “I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink”. This refers to the Virgin who gave birth to Christ in a miraculous way and Christ is the Living water and whoever drinks of it never thirsts.
10. The Prophecies of Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14): “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel”. Another prophecy is, “Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt” (Isaiah 19:1).
11. The Outer Gate (Ezekiel’s prophecy, Ezekiel 44:1,2): “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; therefore it shall remain shut”. This refers to the perpetual virginity of the Virgin. In the hymn of praise, the church says: “Virgin Mary is the gate that Ezekiel saw and it was shut. It shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; therefore it shall remain shut”.
12. Daniel’s Dream (Daniel 2:34): “As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand”. The stone that was cut out by no human hand, refers to Christ who was born of the Virgin, the everlasting mountain, without human seed. His kingdom will replace the fourth kingdom. This kingdom will never be destroyed and shall stand forever. The church says: You are the mountain that Daniel saw. The stone that was cut from a mountain by no human hand and filled the whole earth is Christ.
13. All what is said of Zion in the Psalms of David (Psalms 49:2, 75:1, 131:10, 86:5).

In conclusion

The Virgin was a model of the dwelling of God in man. So that Christ may not only be with us but also in us. This demands a higher level of purity and a higher standard of piety. No one could reach that level except Mary the Virgin...but we are all invited to reach that level so that we may be like Virgin Mary, a dwelling place for Christ... not in a symbolic way but in a practical way. He dwells among His people, abides in them, and be their God and we become his people and His beloved.

Activities

- ❑ Draw all the symbols and write about how they refer to Virgin Mary.
- ❑ Read the church hymns that refer to the order of the Mother of Light and the Symbols that refer to her.
- ❑ Make a wall Chart to elucidate the symbols of the Virgin in the Old Testament and write your own contemplations on each symbol.
- ❑ Intercede with the Lord in your prayer and study some hymns that honor the Virgin.
- ❑ Practice glorifying the Virgin before her Icon in the church under the supervision of the priest, the deacons and the psalmist.

Third Week of August

(50) The Poor

References

- + “The Garden of the Soul” Part 2, Anba Youannis
- + “Our love for our brethren the Poor” Fr. Tadros Yacoub
- + “The Life of Anba Abram, the Bishop of Fayoum” Al Mahaba Library

The Lesson

Aim

As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

How great the poor are!

+ It is said that the Lord Christ appeared to one of the Pious believers and talked to him and encouraged him to continue his struggle and during their conversation, a poor man knocked at the door and the man politely took permission and went out to give the poor man his needs. When he came back, he apologized for leaving his Master...but the Lord said to him: “You are blessed my beloved, if you had not left me to serve him, I would have left you to serve him”. No body knows the value of the poor except he who has the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to Him, who made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men for us to make us free from the bondage of sin. He was made in the form of a poor man to enrich our souls with His righteousness and the gifts of His Holy Spirit and in this way, the poor makes us free from the bondage of material and the selfishness of our ancient man.

Amos and Jams are the Prophets of Justice

In the Old Testament, Amos reproached people for their injustice and for robbing the poor and the weak of their money. He said: “Hear this... you who bring the poor of the land to an end. saying... that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the refuse of the wheat” (Amos 8:4-6).

In the New Testament. we read the epistle of James the apostle: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to

keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27). “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled; without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:14-17).

Bishop who serve the poor

The church history tells us that Anba Sarabamon, Bishop of Menoufyia (in the 19th century) used to walk in disguise at night carrying a heavy basket full of needs for the poor. One of the servants of the Patriarchate in Cairo took him for a thief so he walked behind him, till he saw him stand at a door. The bishop knocked at the door and the door opened. The bishop gave the basket to the man who opened the door and went back without saying a word. The man whose name was Hanna the Carpenter, arrested him, but to his astonishment he saw that he was Anba Sarabamon the Bishop of Menoufyia. The Bishop used to carry flour and wheat to the poor families that were too shy to ask for charity.

Pope John II the Merciful devoted two days per week to serving the poor and visiting the patients. Anba Abram, the Bishop of Fayoum used to leave his door open for anyone who needs charity. He used to raise his cushion and say to the poor men, “Go in and take what you want”. God blessed his alms and his cell was always full of money and presents. It was also crowded with the poor who took what they needed and rejoiced.

Anba Sarabion the monk went to Alexandria one day and there he saw a needy man in the market and the man was without clothes so he said to himself, “How do I, who am considered patient as a monk, wear clothes and this man is naked. I am sure that this man is Christ and he is suffering from severe cold. With a brace heart, he jumped up and took off his clothes and gave them to that needy man. Then he sat on the ground and the Gospel was in his hand. A rich man passing by, saw him in that state and said to him, “Anba Sarabion, who undressed you and made you naked? Anba Sarabion pointed to the Gospel and said, “It is this that made me naked”. After the man had dressed him, Anba Sarabion left the place, but he found a man in debt and the creditor was taking hold of him and the man had no money to pay back his debt, so Anba Sarabion sold his copy of the Gospel and gave the price to the man who was in debt. When his disciple saw him he said, “Teacher, where is your Gospel?” He answered and said, “My son, I sold it. It always said to me: Sell your property and give the needy”.

Why we care for the poor

1. The Lord ordered us to care for them as they are His brethren. The Lord said, “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me”. It is He who said that on the day of Judgment, He will say to the righteous, “I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was naked and you clothed me...Lord when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and gave You 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).
2. Because almsgiving is one of the works of the Holy Spirit, and an indication that we have attained brotherly love, the apostle says: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep”.
3. Almsgiving is an evidence of our living membership in the Body of Christ: “If one

member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honored all rejoice together” (I Corinthians 12:26). The apostle wanted three things of us: to be completely united, not to be divided and to care for others.

St. Augustine

When he spoke about the spiritual and social cooperation among the believers that when gazelles wander in the pastures, each one of them leans her head on the other. The first gazelle walks before them as a guide and the others follow it, each one of them leans its head over the one before it. When the gazelle in front feels tired, it goes behind the cattle to have rest by leaning its head over the gazelle in front of it and so on each in its turn. In this way our teacher St. Paul addresses us saying: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Activities and Exercises

1. Gather some essays about the problem of poverty from newspapers and magazines.
2. Practice visiting others and carrying presents and good things to the Brethren of Jesus and dedicate a part of your income to the service of the needy.
3. Pray for the poor so that the Lord may give them what they need.
4. Encourage the rich people and their relatives to employ the unemployed and to give them what they need.
5. Think of some social projects for fighting poverty.

Recitation

“If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you say to them: Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith is by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:15-17).

Questions

1. The Lord gives the poor a great position in the church, what is it?
2. Tell us some stories from the History of the Church to show that the church cares for the poor.
3. Why does the church care for the poor?
4. What is the best way that should be followed in serving them?

Fourth Week of August

(51) Social Injustice

References

+ A Sermon delivered by H. H. Pope Shenouda III about Social Justice.

The Lesson

Aim

The Role of the Christian in Society.

Introduction

+ When you look around you, you will find many people treat one another with injustice. Some try to control others and misuse the authority given to them by the Society and they make use of this authority for their personal benefit at the cost of others and at the cost of the other groups and classes of their society. The rich become richer and the poor become poorer. In some societies, individuals are not considered equal because of differences of race, religion or the social class they belong to. There is no doubt that distinction between individuals for any of these reasons is wrong and not just.

Religion calls for Equity and justice

1. Religion calls all persons to achieve equity and justice in their society. Religion makes a pious person free from fear and helps him to recognize the aspects of social injustice and resist them. The Old Testament gives us examples of the prophets who stood against kings when those kings exploited their authority and took to themselves what the other poor people had: King Ahab and his wife Jezebel (took possession of a field that belonged to a poor farmer named Naboth of Jezreel. Prophet Elijah met the king and severely reproached him saying: “Have you killed, and also take possession?” (Read the story in the Holy Bible 1 Kings 21).
2. Prophet Amos called people to treat one another with justice and warned them that the Lord will punish those who take possession of others' possessions and do not care for the poor. Amos said to them: “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes. That they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted” (Amos 2:6,7).
3. John the Baptist was a voice crying in the wilderness; he reminded people of their sins; he called people to treat one another with justice. He said to them: “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”. Some tax collectors asked him and he said to them: “Collect no more than is appointed you”. Soldiers also asked him.. and he said to them, “Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:9-14).

The Lord Teaches about Justice and Equity

1. The Lord Jesus cared for the poor and the needy. He spent most of His time with them His family was a poor family and He learned to work as a carpenter. His disciples were of the poorest classes of society. The Lord Jesus reproached the scribes and the Pharisees because they neglected the orphans and widows and scoured them for their tyranny and oppression.
2. He said to them: “Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers, therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation... Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:13-24).
3. The disciples and the apostles obeyed the commandments of the Lord of glory and were against injustice among men.
4. James the apostle, wrote sharp words in his epistle attacking the rich people who treat the poor workers with injustice “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that

are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (James 5:1-4).

The church is concerned with establishing Social Justice

1. In the history of the church, there are many examples that show that the church is concerned with social justice. St. John Chrysostom, the Patriarch of Constantinople stood by the poor and the needy. He supported them and defended them. In his sermons, he used to reproach the rich who neglected the poor. He used to remind them of the fact that when they neglected the poor, their brethren, they destroyed the Body of Christ. He asked them to feed the hungry first and then to decorate the altar of Christ with brodered cloth and gold vessels.
2. St. Basil the great called the rich to care for the poor. He used to say to them: “The food that you hide is not yours, but it is the food that should be given to the hungry men. That cloak which is inside your store is the naked’s dress and the money you keep at home is for the needy.

The duty of the Christian towards social justice

1. A true Christian rejects any unjust treatment that causes others’ suffering. He himself may endure oppression that may afflict him as he follows Christ’s example, but he always defends the oppressed and scours the oppressors.
2. When a Christian knows that some of the poor, the needy and weak people are oppressed, he stands in the name of Christ and resists the unjust authority and declares what is right. He stands against the oppressors and calls them to do justice. He is aware of the different social situations and attitudes and the injustice that may prevail in society. He himself explores and finds out the unjust treatment in everyday life.

What a Christian should do to fight injustice

1. He can help the oppressed in their fight against tyrants.
2. He can request the unjust authority to establish the rules of justice and equity in society.
3. He can play a part and share in the activities performed by the movements and the advanced institutions that stand against injustice and he can also help those institutions.
4. He can help others to see aspects of injustice in their life and in the life of society.

Activities

1. Study the situations in which social injustice appears, in the environment where you live and try to stand against injustice. Make use of the means suggested above.
2. Discuss the problem of cheating in the examinations and show how cheating leads to corruption and injustice.
3. Mention other examples of social injustice from the Holy Bible and write down what was said about them.

Questions

1. What does “Social Injustice” mean? Give examples from everyday life.

2. Why does the Lord hate social injustice?
3. How does the church resist social injustice in the world today?
4. What is your role in resisting social injustice?

Recitation

“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream” (Amos 5:24).

Fifth Week of August

(52) Bribe and Corruption

The Lesson

Aim

Resisting social diseases.

The falling nature of man

God created man in His image, in the image of God. The Lord said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”. When God created man, God saw that it was good. When Adam was in the garden, he enjoyed happiness, love and freedom. Although man was created of dust, yet God gave him a great authority as he had the breath of life as God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. God’s purpose was that man would enjoy His good things as a lover rejoices when he sees his beloved happy in his life. Adam enjoyed the good things of God but when he failed through the envy of the devil, he was separated from God and God’s Image in him was destroyed and the unity within man and the unity between man and others disappeared and through sin, corruption, division and selfishness changed the nature of man.

In his epistle to the Romans St. Paul says: “All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one” (Romans 3:12). In the same epistle, the apostle throws light upon the corruption, which changed the name of man saying: “they were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covertness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless” (Romans 1:29,30).

In spite of this corruption, man still keeps within him that Divine image which was deformed by sin. He also kept within himself conscience, Spirit and inner longing for sublime and spiritual life. Thus conflict between good and evil within man arose conflict between the bright image of God in him and the law of sin, which is not of his nature. In this St. Paul the apostle says: “But I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death” (Romans 7:23-24).

Bribe is one of the phenomena of corruption

- Bribe is considered one of the phenomena of the corruption that changed the nature of man. For this reason, the Lord gives us a very important commandment in the Law of

Moses in the Old Testament. The Lord said, “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). In the Book of Deuteronomy, the Lord says: “Cursed be he who takes a bribe” (Deuteronomy 27:25).

- ❑ The Old Testament gives us examples of corrupted persons who took bribe. An example is the example of Eli’s sons whom the Lord refused. The Lord cursed the whole household of Eli because the man neglected the instruction of his sons and because of the bad conduct of his sons. The Scripture says about them: “But his sons did not walk in his ways, they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribe and perverted justice” (I Samuel 8:3).
- ❑ Prophet David describes the wicked as “Men in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes” (Psalm 26:10). David praises the righteous saying: “Who does not put out his money at usury, nor does take a bribe against the innocent” (Psalm 15:5).
- ❑ Solomon praises and beautifies those who refuse bribe saying: “he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days” (Proverbs 28:16), and describes him by saying that he is honest and pure: “He will accept no compensation nor be appeared though you multiply gifts” (Proverbs 6:35).

Simonism is a dangerous disease

In the New Testament: Simon the magician wanted to give Peter money (a bribe) for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but Peter said to him, “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 8:20,21). Thus Simonism became a dangerous sin. The teachings of the apostles warn every bishop against taking bribe or any money for giving what is taken without money, i.e. the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

What are the phenomena of bribe in our present Society?

1. The person who gives some money to officials or people of authority to get or obtain things, which are not his right, or to get any privilege or special favor through unjust ways in different domains.
2. The person who gives money or presents to receive unjust decisions or civil or church judgment.
3. The children who pay their teachers a big sum of money for private lessons expecting them to give them high marks in the exams.
4. The official who pays the doctor’s fee in the doctor’s private clinic to facilitate giving him sick leave.

The danger of bribing from the Christian and social view

1. It is an aspect of social injustice.
2. It is the source of the corruption of society and perverting justice.
3. It causes the spirit of murmur, anxiety and doubt to spread.
4. It is against the Christian principles. It corrupts the spiritual being of both those who take and who give the bribe.

How to resist bribe?

1. Do not encourage those who ask for a bribe whatever the circumstances may be.
2. Take a decisive decision against those who take bribes especially if we have authority to do so.
3. People should be aware of the dangers of a bribe and should refuse it.
4. Developing the good conscience in individuals and in this way they will refuse it.
5. The government should punish severely those who take bribes.

Questions

1. Bribe is considered a spiritual and social disease. Explain.
2. What are the causes of bribe and corruption in the world?
3. What are the phenomena of this dangerous disease within the scope of your private experience?
4. How can you resist a bribe?

Activities

Write a circular to be distributed among people calling them to resist bribes. Collect what is written in newspapers about the bribe crimes and its dangers. Holding a public debate about this phenomenon and its dangers. Make a study of the legislation and laws concerning bribes and make them known in your environment.

Recitation

“Do not gather my soul together with sinners, nor my life with blood thirsty men, In whose hands is a sinister scheme, and whose right hand is full of bribe. But as for me, I will walk in my integrity; redeem me and be merciful to me” (Psalm 26:9-11).