



NEWS of April 2013

1. The Feast of Annunciation: (Sunday, April 7)

2. Baptism Sunday & Lenten Luncheon:

On Sunday, April 21, St. John Church celebrates Baptism Sunday; then the Annual Lenten luncheon right after the Liturgy. Tickets will be available for \$5 dollars on behalf of the needy families.



3. Palm Sunday: (April 28)

One Liturgy (English & Arabic):

7:30 a.m. Raising of Incense and procession, then the Liturgy from 8:30 to 12:00 noon, followed by the general funeral until 2:00 pm.

4. Covenant Thursday: (May 2)

Pascha prayers start at 8:00 a.m., followed by the Liturgy of the Water (washing of the feet), and the Liturgy of the Eucharist until 2:00 p.m. Evening from 5:00 – 9:00 pm.



5. Good Friday: (May 3)

The church celebrates that great Day of Redemption, from 8:00 a.m. - until 6:00 p.m.

6. Feast of the Resurrection (Sunday, May 5)

The Easter Liturgy will be celebrated on Saturday night from 7:00 p.m. until after midnight.

7. Apparition of St. Mary in Zaytoun:

On Tuesday, April 2, St. John Church celebrates the Apparition of the Holy Virgin Mary above her church at Zaytoun, Egypt on 1968. Liturgy from 10 am to 12:30 pm.

8. St. John's Annual Family Convention:

St. John Church holds her 24rd Family Convention at Marriott Hotel in San Diego during the Memorial Day weekend from Saturday, May 25 to Monday 27, 2013 under the auspices of H.G. Bishop Serapion.

The guest speakers will be H. G. Bishop Apollo and Fr. Boulos George. Reservations are in the church bookstore. There will be an English program for the youth and children.

9. St. John's Annual Book Fair: St. John Church's Book Fair will take place from Wednesday, May 29 until Sunday, June 2nd. The program of the book fair will include revival meetings, liturgies and food for the Feast of Christ's Entry into Egypt on Saturday, June 1).



10. H.H. Pope Tawadros II:

On Sunday, March 10, 2013 Pope Tawadros ordained seven Bishops for new dioceses mostly on Giza, Egypt and surrounding areas and St. Makar Monastery.

11. H.G. Bishop Serapion:

+ On Sunday, March 17, 2013, His Grace Bishop Serapion of Los Angeles, celebrated the first year commemoration of the departure of H.H. Pope Shenouda III, at St. John Church in Covina, California. The formal celebration, from 3:00 to 4:15 p.m., was attended by representatives, Metropolitans and Bishops, of the Syrian, Armenian and Antiochian Churches, as well as the Evangelical and Catholic Churches. Among the Dignitaries, were the Chief Sheriff Mr. Leroy Baca and the Chief of Homeland Security Division Mr. Edmond Sexton.



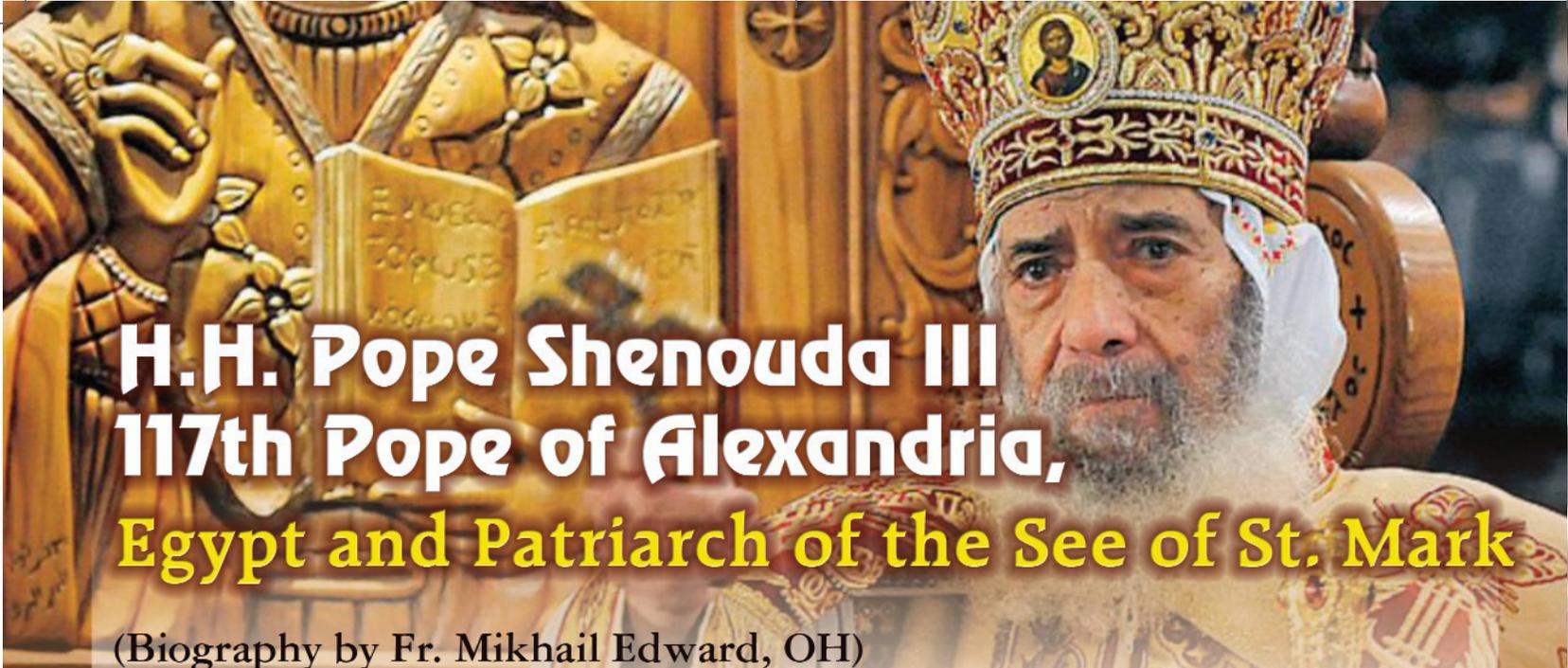
The program contained prayers, short talks and a song with guitar by Sarah Seif about Pope Shenouda.

+ Sunday, March 17, 2013 was a historical day, which continued 10 hours, from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. It was a spiritual day that started by Bishop Serapion baptizing a baby named Shenouda, then celebrating the Liturgy, ordaining eight deacons and promoting two Deacons, Thomas and Anthony to the rank of Archdeacons. Then the Bishop and the guests opened "Pope Shenouda Hall" in the first floor. He watched the exhibit of the books and pictures of Pope Shenouda and had a lunch. The big congregation watched videos about the visits of the Pope to Los Angeles dedicating churches and ordaining the Bishop and the priests. There were choirs from St. Mary, St. Maurice and St. John Churches participated in the event.

12. Fr. George Aziz returns from the Monastery: *

On Friday, March 22, our beloved Fr. George Aziz returned from St. Antony Monastery after spending the traditional 40 days of preparation for his new ministry at St. George Church in Hemet and St. John Church, Covina. The Vesper celebration took place at St. Maurice Church. May the Lord bless his life and service.





H.H. Pope Shenouda III 117th Pope of Alexandria, Egypt and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark

(Biography by Fr. Mikhail Edward, OH)

From the land of the great ancient Egyptian civilization, the land visited by Our Lord and the [Holy Family](#), and from the line of renowned predecessors such as St. Mark the Apostle, St. Athanasius the Apostolic, and St. Cyril the Great, comes the author of the renaissance of the Coptic Orthodox Church: H. H. Pope Shenouda III.

A distinguished and prominent religious leader, a profound theologian, a gifted preacher, a talented author, a spiritual father, a man of God his entire life. His Holiness was born Nazeer Gayed on August 3, 1923, to a pious Christian family in Egypt. By the age of 16, H. H. was active in the Sunday School movement, which wrought to enrich Christian Education in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

When H. H. graduated from Cairo University, he joined the Coptic Orthodox Seminary, and upon graduation, joined the faculty of the seminary. On July 18, 1954, H. H. chose the solitude of the Egyptian desert and the angelic life of monasticism over everything else, taking the example of St. Anthony the Great. As a monk, and later a monk priest, H. H. carried the name of the Christian monk and was known as Fr. Antonious El-Syrani.

Wishing to live in complete solitude and devotion to our Lord, he became a hermit and lived in a cave that he had carved out himself for a period of six years. On September 30, 1962, he was called by the late Pope Cyril VI to be consecrated Bishop of Christian Education and President of the Coptic Orthodox Theological Seminary. He was known as His Grace Bishop Shenouda. Through his leadership of the seminary, the number of students tripled.

On November 14, 1971, His Grace Bishop Shenouda was

consecrated as His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, the 117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark.

Since that blessed day, the Coptic Orthodox Church has witnessed a remarkable revival through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the pastoral care of H. H. Pope Shenouda III. H. H. conducts a weekly meeting, which is attended by over seven thousand of the faithful at the Cathedral of St. Mark in Cairo.

H. H. has been the editor-in-chief of [El-Keraza Magazine](#), the official publication of the Coptic Orthodox Church, since 1962. He became the first patriarch of Alexandria since the Fifth Century to have been Dean of the Theological Seminary and continues to lecture at the branches of the Seminary in Cairo, Alexandria, and abroad and the Higher Institute of Coptic Studies. He also established other branches of the Seminary in Egypt as well as in America, Australia, and the United Kingdom. His Holiness is the author of 120 books on a variety of subjects, over half of which have been translated into English, French, German, Italian, and other languages.

He has ordained more than 116 Metropolitans and Bishops and over 600 priests since 1971. He gives special attention to the youth of the church. H. H. has said many times, "A church without youth is a church without a future." And one of our youth once replied to H. H., "And youth without the church are youth without a future."

H. H. also gives special attention to the service of women in the Coptic Orthodox Church. H. H. said, and I quote, "We felt a great need of the work of women and we wanted women to have a certain order and service in the



church, not only to have girls as Sunday School teacher who give a part of their time whenever they can, but we want girls and women to give their whole life to God and serve the Church.”

Despite his many responsibilities, H. H. usually manages to spend three days a week in the monastery. His love of monasticism has led a monastic revival in the Coptic Orthodox Church. He has ordained hundreds of monks and nuns and reestablished many monasteries and convents. He is the first pope to establish Coptic monasteries outside of Egypt, which presently number nine.

One of the most remarkable things about the growth of the Coptic Orthodox Church is her expansion worldwide. When H. H. became pope in 1971, there were only four churches in North America. Today, there are over 100.

The year 1996 witnessed the installation of the first two Diocesan bishops for the United States, one for [Los Angeles](#) and the other for the [Southern United States](#). There are plans to further group the churches into regional dioceses in the near future.

H. H. has established mission churches in the U. S. Virgin Islands in St. Thomas, Bermuda, and St. Kitts. Moreover, he founded the first Coptic Orthodox Church in South America in Sao Paolo, Brazil, and the second in Bolivia.

Under his leadership, the Coptic Orthodox Church has also witnessed a growth in Australia and New Zealand, where there are currently twenty-eight churches. In 1999, we witnessed the enthronement of the first bishop over [Melbourne, Australia and New Zealand](#). In Europe, there are currently over fifty church and ten bishops. Africa currently has two bishops serving in missions in nine African countries. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III is well known for his deep commitment to Christian Unity. In an address

he gave at an ecumenical forum during the International Week of Prayer in 1974, he declared, “The whole Christian world is anxious to see the church unite. Christian people, being fed up with divisions, are pushing their church leaders to do something about church unity and I am sure that the Holy Spirit is inspiring us.”

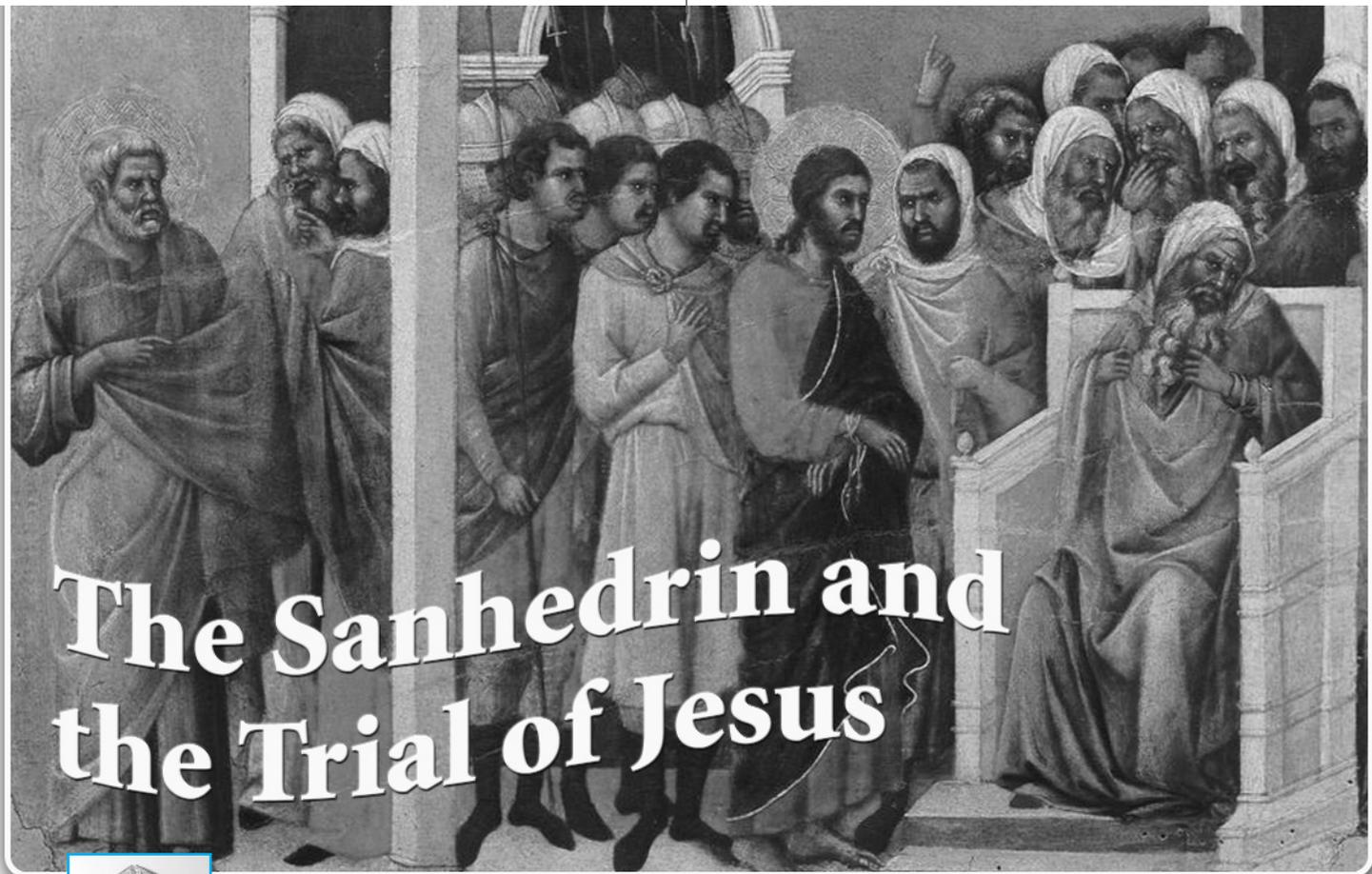
H. H. has emphasized that Christian Unity must be found upon a unity of faith and not a unity of jurisdiction. As a result, H. H. has paid many visits to the various sister Orthodox churches and their patriarchs, such as those of Constantinople, Moscow, Romania, and Antioch. A full communion of these churches with the Oriental Orthodox Churches is very close.

In 1973, H. H. was the first Coptic Orthodox pope to visit the Vatican in over 1500 years. In this visit, both H. H. Pope Shenouda III and H. H. Pope Paul VI signed a common declaration on the issue of Christology and agreed to establish joint commissions for dialogue on unity. There have also been dialogues with various Protestant churches worldwide.

On 2000, he established the first ecumenical office, in the Archdiocese of North America.

Under the leadership of H. H., the Coptic Orthodox Church is a full member of the [World Council of Churches](#), the Middle East Council of Church, the All-African Council of Churches, the [National Council of the Churches in Christ in the U.S.A.](#), the Canadian Council of Churches, and the Australian Council of Churches. His Holiness passed away on March 17th of 2012 after more than forty years as the Pope and Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Under his guidance, the Coptic Church flourished and saw an age of spiritual revival.





The Sanhedrin and the Trial of Jesus



By Fr. Gawargious Kolta

The word Sanhedrin means council. It was the main Jewish court in Jerusalem in the time of the Lord and His disciples. The high priest was the head of this council. This council had agreed that if any one confessed that Jesus was the Christ, he would be put out of the Synagogue (Jn. 9:22); yet many Jews believed in Him, even some priests (Jn. 10:42).

The History of the Sanhedrin: This council started during the reign of the Greek Empire, and it consisted of 70 members. The Jews followed the rite of choosing 70 elders to be officers of the people as in the time of Moses (Num. 11:16, 24). This council started its work in the time of Aftechos the great the Greek governor (223-187 B.C.), who gave the Israelites the freedom to execute judgment by their own way (2 Mech. 1:10). When Herod the Great reigned, he killed all the members of the Sanhedrin and appointed new members, loyal to him. When he and his son Archelaus died, this council became the main court, in the time of Jesus Christ and His disciples. This council came to an end after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D.

The members of the Sanhedrin: 1- **The high priests**, the old and the new ones. In the time of Christ Annas and his father-in-law Ciaphas controlled the Jews. They deviated from being religious leaders to rulers over all the Jews. 2- **The**

Sadducees, that meant the righteous, were elders and priests. They denied the concept of life after death and the resurrection of the body. They were secretly enemies to the Pharisees. 3- **The Pharisees**, considered themselves the rulers of the Jews, because they believed that they kept the Jewish traditions, and had great power in the court assembly. They tried several times to test the Lord and accuse Him of changing the Law of Moses in order to arrest Him. 4- **The scribes** were teachers of the Law of Moses (Mat. 22:35), and most of them were Pharisees.

The membership of this council was a life time. During the time of Christ, they were not authorized to put anyone to death (Jn. 18:31). The members of the Sanhedrin used to sit in half a circle, and the high priest in the middle, and the accused person stood in front of the council. The council tests the witnesses separately, and they condemn the person when two testimonies were the same.

The Sanhedrin and Christ's Trial: When the troops and the officers of the high priests arrested Jesus in Gethsemane, **they bound Him** and took Him to Annas the high priest. In the old times, Abraham bound his beloved son Isaac in order to offer him as a sacrifice, and he did not resist (Gen. 22:9); as he was in the hand of his father. Jesus was in the hand of His Father when He was bound with the chains of our freedom, and He did not resist (Jn. 18:11). They bound Him, who bandaged their wounds, healed their sick, and raised their dead. He was the Lamb who was bound by His free will to be a sacrifice for all nations; (Jn. 11:47-53); thus He surrendered to the officers.



+ **The First Jewish Trial:** It was before **Annas**, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas; the actual high priest (Jn. 18:13). This trial was illegal as Caiaphas was not the high priest, and he was exiled many years before (15 A.D.). **Josephus**, the Jewish historian said that he was the strongest man in the Sanhedrin. He added that Annas started to hate the Lord since Jesus cleansed the temple and drove the money changers and the sellers of oxen, sheep and doves out of the temple (Jn. 2:13-16), because it was Annas' business. Therefore Annas brought a witness against the Lord, saying that He said: ***"I will destroy this temple made with hands and within three days I will build another made without hands"*** (Mk. 14:P58). Josephus added that Annas was the person who **made the deal with Judas to arrest the Lord** and he was the one who sent the Roman troops and his servants with Judas to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. Also, Annas was the man who sent his servants to arrest the Lord, when He was teaching the multitude, but they loved Him and returned to Annas saying: ***"No one ever spoke like this Man"*** (Jn. 7:46). However, these witnesses could not speak in front of Annas during that trial.

+ **The Second Jewish Trial:** It was before **Caiaphas**, the actual high priest, under whom Jesus suffered. This happened when Annas sent the Lord bound to Caiaphas, who gathered the members of the Sanhedrin. St. John was a witness of that trial, as he entered with the Lord into the courtyard of Caiaphas (Jn. 18:15). He was known to the servants of the high priest; thus St. John mentioned the name of Malchus the servant, whom St. Peter cut his right ear (Jn. 18:10). **The meeting of the Sanhedrin** was in a court adjacent to the palace of Annas. Caiaphas started the trial by **asking the Lord about His disciples and His doctrine**. The Lord answered him: ***"I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in Synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who heard Me"***.

When He spoke these things, one of the officers struck Him with the palm of his hand, saying: ***"Do You answer the high priest like this?"*** Jesus answered him: ***"If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"*** (Jn. 18:19-23). The Lord spoke to the high priest bravely and gave strong answers. **St. Augustine** said that Jesus talked back to the one who struck Him, instead of turning the other cheek, but in reality He goes further in preparing not only His cheek but **His entire body to be struck with the nails of the cross**. **Many false witnesses came forward** and the council found none. They found no false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death because **He was blameless** (Jn. 8:46), but He kept silent as He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth.

At last two came forward and said, ***"This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and I'll build it in three days'"*** (Mat. 26:60, 61). The Lord had spoken of the temple of

His body (Jn. 2:21), but falsely they accused Him with those words. The Savior said: ***"destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"***, but they changed His words to ***"destroy God's temple and build it again"***.

Finally, the high priest said to Jesus: ***"I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are Christ the Son of God"***. The high priest unlawfully ordered Jesus to swear by the living God. **The Lord declared His sonship to God and that He is the Christ**, saying: ***"It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power, and coming on the clouds of heaven"*** (Mat. 26:63, 64). **Origen** said that these words signify Christ's enthronement and empowerment, as **He received all power from the Father**.

The high priest tore his clothes and said that He had spoken blasphemy and He was **deserving death**. He did this to enforce the accusation and to aggravate what he said by a symbolic action. The Lord did not say blasphemy, because He had said the same words before: ***"The Lord said to My Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"*** (Mat. 22:44, Ps.110:1). When the **high priest tore his clothes**, he deprived himself of priestly honor and dignity, as this was against the Law (Lev. 21:10). It was **a sign of the termination of the Levite priesthood**, and the beginning of the new priesthood started according to the rite of Malchizedek. He wanted to force the whole council to agree that Jesus deserved death; but one member of this council, Joseph of Arimathea, did not consent to their decision and deed (Lk. 23:50, 51).

They **spat in His face** and beat Him; and others **struck Him** with the palm of their hands. All these things had foretold by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ***"I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting"*** (Isa. 50:6). The Lord by suffering all this disgrace in our place **delivered us who were worthy to suffer**.

Origen said that St. Paul makes clear that the Savior humbled Himself becoming obedient all the way to death, even to death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). Nevertheless, **they were punished** with the destruction of their city Jerusalem, and burning their temple that not one stone shall be left upon another. They and their children and their women suffered so great hardships that did not happen all over the earth. When the morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the Jews, plotted against Jesus to put Him to death.

They led Him bound and delivered Him to Pontus Pilate, who started the civil trial. He found that Jesus did not deserve death, and he told them three times that he found no fault in Him at all (Jn. 18:38, 19:4, 19:6). He knew that the chief priests had handled Him over because of envy and he sought to release Him (Mat. 27:11-26, Mk. 15:10). They accused that Jesus was perverting the nation, preventing people from paying taxes to Caesar, and calling Himself a King.



While Pilate said that **he was innocent of that Just Person** (Mat. 27:24), the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes that they ask Pilate to crucify Him, saying: **“His blood be on us and on our children”**. So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him, and delivered Him to be crucified.

The wickedness of the members of the Sanhedrin: They committed many evil deeds towards Jesus Christ: **1-** They were **full of envy** towards the Lord because they were wicked vine-dressers and they did not care of the sheep of Israel, but of themselves (Mat. 21:33-44, Ezek. 34:2-31).

2- There was a **great hatred in their hearts**, as they found the whole world followed Him (Jn. 12:19), because He taught the Jews as one having authority and not as the scribes. They found that **the Lord was a competitor for them**.

3- They **made one of His sheep a wolf** to attack the Shepherd, as they gave Judas money to betray His Master.

4- They **plotted to put down Jesus to death before any trial** as they sent some Pharisees to catch Him in His words and deliver Him to the civil authorities (Mk. 12:13).

5- The **trial was fabricated**, in hurry, and far from the people. They did the trial **at night**, and they took the Lord to Pilate in the early morning to deliver Him secretly away from the eyes of the people.

6- They were **great hypocrites** as they did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, that they might eat the Passover (Jn. 18:28), while they **made illegal trial, using false witnesses, violating the Law of trials**.

7- While they did not like the Romans, **they claimed that the Lord was forbidding paying taxes to Caesar**.

8- The chief priests said to Pilate: **“We have no king but Caesar”** (Jn. 19:15). They proclaimed that they want Caesar to be their king, **refusing the kingdom of God**. The Lord agreed and He let them delivered to suffer from the Roman kingdom. They repeated the same mistake before, in the time of Samuel the priest (1 Sam. 8:7).

9- They made violations in the law during Christ’s trial:

+ It was illegal to perform a criminal trial **at night**, in the feasts and in the vespers of the feasts.

+ It was illegal to take a decision of accusing a suspect and sentencing him to death except **after one day or more**, after verification of the charges.

+ It was verified that they arrested the Lord by **using a bribe** that was the price of blood; Judas got it from the high priest (Mat. 27:3-10).

+ They tried to show that they were the ones who tried to protect the Jewish religion. **The Sanhedrin did not move for three and half years** since the Lord started His mission. This trial condemns the members of the Sanhedrin of **being slack**, when they found that the Lord was Blasphemer.

The Besieged city & the Poor Wise Deliverer

By Norbert Lieth

“There was a little city; and a great king came against it; besieged it, and built great snares around it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man” (Eccl. 9:14, 15).

A Rabbi knew the Old Testament by heart. Before he came to faith in Jesus Christ, he wrote to a friend, “It always seems to me as though the Holy Scriptures are lacking something- a focal point where all the divine beams come together. The building is splendid, but the spire seems to be lacking which should crown it.” Someone else said, “The Holy Scriptures are the “crib” in which the baby Jesus lies. Let us not forget, when contemplating the crib, to worship the Child. In this article on Ecclesiastes 9:14, 15, let us, therefore, see the Lord Jesus.

The Earth in Space:

“A little city and few men within it...” (v.14). Our world and the people inhabiting it are no more than a speck of dust in the universe. Compared with space, our planet is a little city in our galaxy alone there are 200 billion stars. The astronomers estimate the total number of stars in the observed part of our universe to be 10 to 25th power, but the real number is unknown. A computer which could count from 1 to 10 billion in a single second would take 30 million years to count the stars! What the prophet Jeremiah says is absolutely true, “As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured...” (Jer. 33:22). The diameter of the earth is 12,756 km. The largest star system, Alpha Herculis, has a diameter of 250 billion km. This is equal to 180,000 diameters of the sun. Our entire solar





system, with its average diameter of 11.8 billion km, would have room side by side 21 times. A rocket with a speed of 40,000 kph would take 700 years to fly through the Alpha Herculis.

The population of the earth in relation to the whole of the universe is no larger than a bacterium. A light-second is equal to 300,000 km. The farthest star, called a “Quasar”, in the constellation of Virgo is about 12.4 billion light-years away. And the well-known Andromeda Galaxy has an expansion of 150,000 light-years. If you were to stick a pin in a postcard-size photograph of this galaxy, the pin point would correspond to a hole of 600 light-years. If a jet plane could fly through this hole with the speed of sound, the flight would take 650 million years! “Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the balance; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing” (Isa. 40:15). Job says, **“What is man, that You should magnify him, that You should set Your heart on him.** How tiny we are compared with these dimensions, as individual people! **“How then can man be justified (or be righteous) before God? Or how, can he be pure who is born of a woman? If even the moon does not shine, and the stars are not pure in His sight, how much less man, who is a maggot (small insect), and a son of man, who is a worm?”** (Job 25:4, 5). God, in His infinite greatness, does not need us, and yet His love drove Him to set His heart upon us. He did this in Jesus Christ. It was not we who sought Him; it was He who sought us, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn.3:16). If the whole earth is almost nothing in comparison with the

universe, how much less is Israel or the city of Jerusalem? And yet it says in the book of Jeremiah concerning God and Jacob (Israel), “He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens at His discretion... Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge... The portion of Jacob is not like them, for He is the maker of all things, and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance: The Lord of Hosts is His name.” King Solomon said at the dedication of the temple, **“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!** (1 Kings 8:27). And yet God chose this people to accomplish His salvation for the whole world. As impossible as it is to measure the heavens, it is equally impossible for Israel to be rejected forever (Jer. 33:22; Isaiah 66:22 & Matt. 5:35). God chose Israel to be the center of the world, so that the Gospel could go in all directions to all the continents from there.

The Siege of the Enemy

“There came a great king against it, and besieged it and built great barricade against it” (v. 14).

Our world and every single person is besieged by an invisible enemy. Every person knows more or less what sin is and how we can be besieged by it. Sin can rule over the whole person; guilt can grow like bulwarks walls and snares- and attack the soul like an army. Everyone knows what compulsion is, addiction to the point of being obsessed and have suicidal thoughts. Everyone knows what inherited tendencies are, of a physical, spiritual or emotional sort. We can be so captivated by material things that we have no time for the true values



of human life. Our world is determined by wars, terror, murder and corruption.

Eighty percent of the daily media coverage is negative. The king who besieges mankind so cruelly is the devil, and his means of besieging is the sin we commit. Jesus called the devil **“the prince of this world”** in John 12:31.

The apostle Paul wrote of the devil in Ephesians 6:12, **“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”** In Ephesians 2:2 **“according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience;”** in 1 Cor. 12:2 **“You know that you were gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as you were led;”** and in 2 Cor. 4:4, **“in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which do not believe.”**

By whom and what is the world besieged? Where do the atrocities of Islam, the wars and terror in general, come from? Why is Israel surrounded by enemies? Why has this people been hated and attacked for centuries up to the present day, with such uncontrolled destructive rage? Once it was besieged by the Assyrians, then by the Babylonians, by Antiochus Epiphanes and later by the Romans, then by Arabs. Is it not because God has His eye especially upon this people, because there the Savior was born, died, rose from the dead and will return? Is it not so that you also feel besieged sometimes? Do you do things that you do not want to do? Would you like to be different, but you cannot free yourself? And yet where there is captivity and besieging, there is liberation. Where a prison door closes, there is a key that will open it.

The Deliverer of the little city:

“Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city” (v.15). Who was poor and wise simultaneously? Who is the Deliverer of our planet? Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah! He came out of the infinite heaven into our world. He was born in the little town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). He lived in the insignificant city of Nazareth (Luke 2:30). And He accomplished His work of redemption in the city of Jerusalem.

His Poverty: Jesus Christ, “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but had Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8). “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). The prophet Daniel prophesied concerning the coming of Jesus and His death on the cross; “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut

off, but not for Himself” (Dan, 9:26). Jesus said when He was on this earth, **“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head”** (Matthew 8:20). Women took care of His needs.

His Wisdom: Jesus Christ, “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). “But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). “But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

“And when the Sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue and many hearing Him were astonished, saying: From where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?” (Matt. 13:54). The poor wise man delivered the besieged city through His wisdom. It is Jesus Christ who can deliver people besieged by Satan and by sin. He Himself is the key that opens the door of their prison.” For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn.3:8). Astronomy has a symbol for every planet. The astronomical symbol for planet earth is a circle with a cross on top of it. It could not be clearer! As soon as the cross is planted in a person’s heart through faith, Satan has to withdraw, for that person receives forgiveness and the Holy Spirit enters his heart.

The Rejection of Jesus Christ:

“Yet no one remembered that same poor man” (v.15).

Only few Jews opened their hearts to their Messiah and believed in Him. The majority of the people despised Him. Isaiah prophesied concerning Jesus’ crucifixion, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). The psalmist wrote in the prophetic crucifixion psalm, “I am a worm...a reproach of men and despised of the people” (Psa. 22:6-7). It is a bitter truth that the greater part of mankind outside of Israel also despises Jesus. People mock Him, scorn Him, despise Him or write lies about Him. They turn to all possible sources but they turn away from Him. They seek help everywhere, just not in Him. The farther we progress in the end times, the more rejection there is of Jesus Christ. This is why the besieging is increasing. It is like what is written in Acts 28:24, “And some believed the things which were spoken and some disbelieved.”

The Lord Jesus Christ is everything we need, for Israel as well as for the Arab world and the Christian West-for the entire world. He has destroyed the barricades and snares of Satan’s siege. God sets His heart on us in Him. Without Jesus, we have no orientation; without Him we will not reach the goal. But with him all things are possible.



Reader's Corner

Frhanna,

On March 1, President Obama imposed the Sequester, a budget control act that could dramatically impact our military strength. Already, the Army is planning to cut tens of thousands of soldiers.

Yet three days later, on March 4, Secretary of State John Kerry announced \$250 million in new taxpayer aid for Egypt's hostile Muslim Brotherhood government, and our government could give \$1.5 billion more.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood government has implemented Shariah law, persecutes Christians, breaks its peace treaty with Israel, and obstructs our investigation of the Benghazi terror attacks.

Why are we sequestering our military while giving the Muslim Brotherhood an economic stimulus?

Now, we are launching a new campaign, demanding that our government cut the Muslim Brotherhood's budget before it cuts our own military. America must cut its budget deficit, but the first cut should be the jihadists.

Sign our Petition to Sequester the Muslim Brotherhood.

Jay Sekulow

ACLJ Chief Counsel

Frhanna,

The same radical atheist attorney who nearly succeeded in striking down the Pledge of Allegiance is attacking our National Motto – “In God We Trust.”

Atheist attacks on our national heritage are relentless. Again and again they go to court to strip our nation's parks, public buildings, and even museums of the symbols of our history and culture.

Now they're even taking on our currency, calling our money “discriminatory” simply because it contains these four simple words – “In God We Trust” – words that Congress recognized as expressing our very real traditions and beliefs.

The radicals are relentless, but we resolve to defend our history. The ACLJ is filing a critical amicus brief, representing Members of Congress and tens of thousands of ACLJ members.

Protect our heritage. Join our brief today.

[Join the Committee to Protect the National Motto.](#)

Jay Sekulow

ACLJ Chief Counsel

P.S. Our legal teams have never been more engaged, here at home and across the globe. If you give today, your gift will be doubled. Please consider giving today.



THE HONOR AND EFFECT OF COMMUNION



THE HONOR AND EFFECT OF COMMUNION

By H. G. Bishop Yoannes

Many are the blessings of the Almighty, abundant is His grace, strong is His might, and deep is His love... Truly what St. Gregory said in his Divine Liturgy, "Holy, Holy, O Lord and Holy in everything ...indescribable is the power of Thy wisdom, and **no manner of speech can measure the depth of Thy love of Mankind**"

St. John Chrysostom said, "How many of you say, 'I wish to see the appearance, looks and clothes of the Lord.' Here, you see, touch and eat Him, and then you desire to see His clothes although He gave you Himself, not only to see, but also to touch, eat, and take inside you." Meditate then on that great honor, the food which God offers you to enjoy! We eat Him and with Him we unite; Whom the angels wish to see but do not dare to look at because of His shining glory.

All God's works are full of majesty and glory but the

Sacrament of Communion is the greatest of them. If God has granted us spiritual weapons with which to fight and overcome as the apostle mentioned in Ephesians 6:11-16, **certainly this sacrament is the strongest of all the spiritual weapons in strength and effect.**

No wonder, for it is the extension of the sacrifice of the cross by which the Son of God redeemed the world and conquered the devil and death. St. Macarius the Great said, "Through this sacrament you are protected against the devil, and if anyone abuses this sacrament, the power of darkness will conquer him."

Through the Holy Communion we are strengthened to overcome the causes of sin, especially the inner lusts, the devil's temptations, and lusts of the world. Therefore the church calls it "the food of the strong."

St. John Chrysostom said, "We, who are sick, let us partake of this sacrament with faith, for those who touched the



border of His garment were healed; what about those who eat Him all.” He also said, “After eating this spiritual food, let us turn into lions which frighten the devils, inflamed with the fire of love.” St. Ambrosios said, “Let the Lord Jesus be your guest, Who will immediately drive the devil away and shut off the doors that lead to temptations.”

Our weapons in our spiritual battle derive their power from the divine grace we received through the Blood of Jesus. But this sacrament is the Blood of Jesus Himself and His Body. **In this sacrament, Jesus Himself conquers our enemies.** He said, “Whoever eats My Body and drinks My Blood dwells in Me and I in him” (Jn. 6:56). St. Paul said, “**I no longer live but Christ lives in me.**” (Gal. 2:20) **Therefore, when we overcome our enemy, it is the Blood of Jesus that conquers as it is written in Revelation, “They overcame him (devil) by the Blood of the Lamb (Christ)”** (Rev, 12:11) or as the prophet David prophesied in his immortal psalm, “The Lord is my Shepherd” he said, “Thou prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” (Psa. 23:5). This is the holy table which the Lord prepares for us to conquer our spiritual enemies.

The Holy Communion is food for our spirit and life. “The Lord has made His wonderful works to be remembered, the Lord is gracious and full of wisdom and compassion. He has given meat unto them that fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant. (Psa. 111:4-5).

St. Augustine said, “The one who wants to live with You and gain life, let him proceed and eat this Body.” **As the Israelites were fed with manna in the wilderness until they entered the Promised Land, so does this Holy Communion feed our souls and protect us in the world till we enter the heavenly Jerusalem.**

Let us think and meditate about Jesus’ promises that He left us while He was establishing the sacrament. “He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood **dwells in Me and I in him.**” (Jn. 6:56) How does this dwelling in Jesus occur? We do not know. All that we know are the blessings and effects of that dwelling. Jesus said, “**He that abides In Me and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit. If a man abides not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered and the withered branches men gather and cast into the fire and they are burned. If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.**” (Jn.15:5-7) Therefore through the Holy Communion, we dwell in Jesus and He dwells in us and we can say with St. Paul, “Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:3) How great, O Lord, is your generosity which you offered in this sacrament!

When You descended upon the Mount of Sinai with Your glory in the past, the mount was blazing with fire and smoke. “And if so much as a beast touched the mountain, it shall be

stoned, of thrust through with a dart. And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, ‘I exceedingly fear and quake.’” (Exod. 19, Heb. 12:18-21).

In the Old Testament, they could not dare touch the mountain upon which you descended with your glory. **In the New Testament,** the priest carries You in his hands as the pure St. Mary carried you in her arms, Moreover, we all eat You to dwell in You and to live by You... It is written that You are a consuming fire.” (Heb. 12; 29). So how is this fire which devours the evil ones changed to fire which purifies us from sins, burns all evil planted inside us, and inflames our hearts with Your love?

The blessings of this Holy Sacrament extend not only to this life but also to the life to come. The Lord Christ said, “**If any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever:** and the bread that I will give is My Flesh... Who so eats My Flesh, and drinks My Blood, **Hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.**” (Jn. 6:51-54) St. Cyril the Pillar of Faith said, “He gave us His Body and Blood so the power of corruption would disappear. He would live in us with Holy Spirit and we would become partakers of His holiness and be more spiritual than the heavenly creatures” He also said, “Because of Adam’s disobedience, our bodies became subject to corruption and death. However, because **Christ is inside us with His Body,** we will undoubtedly rise in perfection, for it is impossible that life does raise those in whom it is dwelling.”

When you partake of this Holy Sacrament, you receive Christ in your heart. Whenever Jesus enters a place, He blesses, sanctifies, and purifies it. He entered St. Mary’s womb and He made her Queen of heaven and earth. He entered Zachariah’s house and filled John the Baptist with the Holy Spirit, while he was still in Elizabeth’s womb. He entered the manger in Bethlehem and made it a sanctuary and a paradise for the angels and humans. He entered Egypt and broke its idols. He went into the Jordan River and sanctified its water. He entered Peter’s house and cured his mother-in-law. He entered Jarius’ house and raised his daughter from the dead. He entered Zachaeus’ house and saved him. He entered Mary’s and Martha’s house and they became saints.

If people have been able to preserve fruits and vegetables for longer periods of time without corruption, can’t the Body of Jesus and His Blood preserve our life from the corruption of sin?

HOW DO WE BENEFIT FROM THIS SACRAMENT?

So far we have discussed some of the blessings of this great sacrament, but we might wonder and ask ourselves, “Why don’t we feel all these holy blessings whenever we receive the Holy Communion?”



The answer is very clear. It is because we do not prepare ourselves well enough to receive this great sacrament. We do not spend the time or the effort in this preparation.

Noah had spent a hundred years in building the ark in which he was saved with his family. King Solomon spent seven years in building God's temple and made a feast to sanctify it which lasted eight days, and offered a thousand peace sacrifices. But we do not spend even half an hour to prepare ourselves to receive this great blessing!

We shall point now to some of the spiritual practices which help us with the grace of God to enjoy the blessings of Holy Communion. It is preferable to start these practices the night before Communion so that we may thoroughly prepare ourselves. These practices are to be followed in addition to examining ourselves and confessing.

First: Stir your emotions and prepare yourself:

The night before Communion, sit with yourself quietly to stir in your heart holy desires and emotions for your Beloved Jesus Christ who offers Himself to you in this Holy Sacrament. The more you prepare yourself, the more you will feel God's comforts and blessings filling your life after the Holy Communion.

When the disciples asked the Lord Jesus, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover?" He told two of them to go into the city to find **"a large upper room furnished and prepared."** (Mark 14:15). The Lord Jesus Himself had chosen the place where He ate the Passover with His disciples and established the Sacrament of the Eucharist. He had chosen an upper room, furnished and prepared. Let us think about each of these characteristics. **The Lord Jesus established this sacrament in an upper room,** that is, in a place which is upstairs, which refers to elevating ourselves up to heaven. Likewise, in the transfiguration, when the Lord Jesus wanted to show His glory to three of His disciples, He took them to a high mountain. (Mark 9:2) Therefore, anyone who wants to come in contact with God's glory has to lift himself upwards by meditating. Moreover, this upper room was furnished and prepared. The Lord wants our hearts to be prepared and decorated with virtues ready to receive Him. It is not enough to remove all the dirt from the roads whenever we want to receive great dignities, but we also have to decorate them. Therefore, it is not enough to clean our hearts from sin and evil, but we also have to decorate them with feelings of love and humility,

Sit with yourself and meditate on how your Savior desires through your participation in this sacrament to prepare a place in your heart so that He may be united with you and help you cast out your lusts and overcome all your enemies. His desire to unite with us is a result of His great love for us. But why did He love us? We do not know. All that we know

is that He loved us for no reason. He said, "My delights were with the sons of men." (Prov. 8:31)

By establishing this great sacrament, God lowered Himself from His glory, and offered Himself as food to satisfy our souls. He said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled." (Mat. 5:6) He also wanted to save us and unite with us. As Moses had made the tabernacle with incorruptible wood covered with pure gold just to put the two stone tablets of the commandments, how much more should our souls be free from the corruption of sin and decorated with the gold of divine virtues!

Joseph of Arimathaea put the Body of our Savior in a new sepulcher where no one had been buried before to honor Him so that the Holy Body would not be in a place where there were putrefied and rotten dead bodies. **Therefore, how can the Christian accept the Lord Jesus in a heart full of hatred, love of the world, and evil lust?**

Never proceed to this holy table while you are not ready and without the garment of the feast. The manna which God fed His people in the wilderness was a symbol of His Holy Body and Blood. Likewise, in the wilderness of this world, we too should eat the spiritual manna. The manna was given to the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt, the land of slavery, and their crossing of the Red Sea. Likewise, no one deserves to eat this spiritual food unless he has been freed from Pharaoh—that is, the devil—and has crossed the sea of repentance.

Second: Meditate on God's Great Love:

Meditate on the great love which God shows you in this sacrament. God did not only create you in His image, send His only Son to save you from the bondage of the devil and restore to you your original image, but He also gave you His Body and His Blood as food for you and as a cure for your spiritual ailments.

Think carefully **"When did God start to love you?"** Did He love you at the same time you started loving Him or when you were yet a child and your angel was always looking at the face of the Father in heaven? He loved you even before then. He loved you before your arrival in this world, even before its creation! As the pregnant woman prepares for her expected baby all that he will need even before he is born into this world, so does the love of the Lord Jesus Christ prepare for us.

Before you became a son of God, He had been preparing for all your needs and blessings. "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore, with loving kindness have I drawn you." (Jer. 31:3)

{To be continued}





“He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3).

This title and portrait of the Master is so permanently etched in the pages of the New Testament that it immediately stands out as one of the cardinal titles of Christ. Some notable men are men of wealth, some are men of fame, some are men of pleasure, but Christ was a Man of Sorrows. He was the King of Martyrs, the Lord of anguish, the Prince of suffering.

The last week of Christ’s earthly life, with its record of deep sorrow, looms most prominently in the Gospels. One third of the Gospel of St. Matthew, one-third of Mark, one-fourth of Luke, and one-half of John’s Gospel is devoted to the last week of the life of Jesus. This is in striking contrast to the few pages of biography covering the death of other men of history. An example is a biography of Abraham Lincoln with only 25 out of its 5000 pages relating the dramatic account of the assassination and death. The amount of space in the Gospels devoted to Christ’s suffering and death is so disproportionate as to underscore the paramount value of that period in His life and ministry.

Deity becoming incarnate is in itself a marvel of the ages. That incarnate Deity should be so predominantly characterized by sorrow makes us aware that, as we think on this title, we are entering into the Holy of Holies in the sanctuary of Christ’s life. We are standing before one of the most sublime and sacred truths of eternity. It is too deep for us to plumb its mystery and majesty.

The sorrows and anguish of Jesus defy description or definition. His love was wounded in betrayal and denial by those of His most intimate circle. He was burdened with the awesome responsibility for the redemption of the world. His soul suffered imputed condemnation for man’s transgressions. His body felt the torture of the cross. He had to endure humiliation, mockery, and the death of the cross. There was the negligence and loneliness of Calvary. Oh, to what fathomless

depths God descended to rescue a dying world!

A young girl one asked, “But if Jesus was God, why did He have to die?” As we contemplate the unexampled sorrows and sufferings of Christ, we cannot help but cry, “Why? Why?” Isaiah answers this question for us in immortal words:

*“Surely He has borne our griefs,
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed Him stricken,
smitten by God and afflicted.*

But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities;

the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

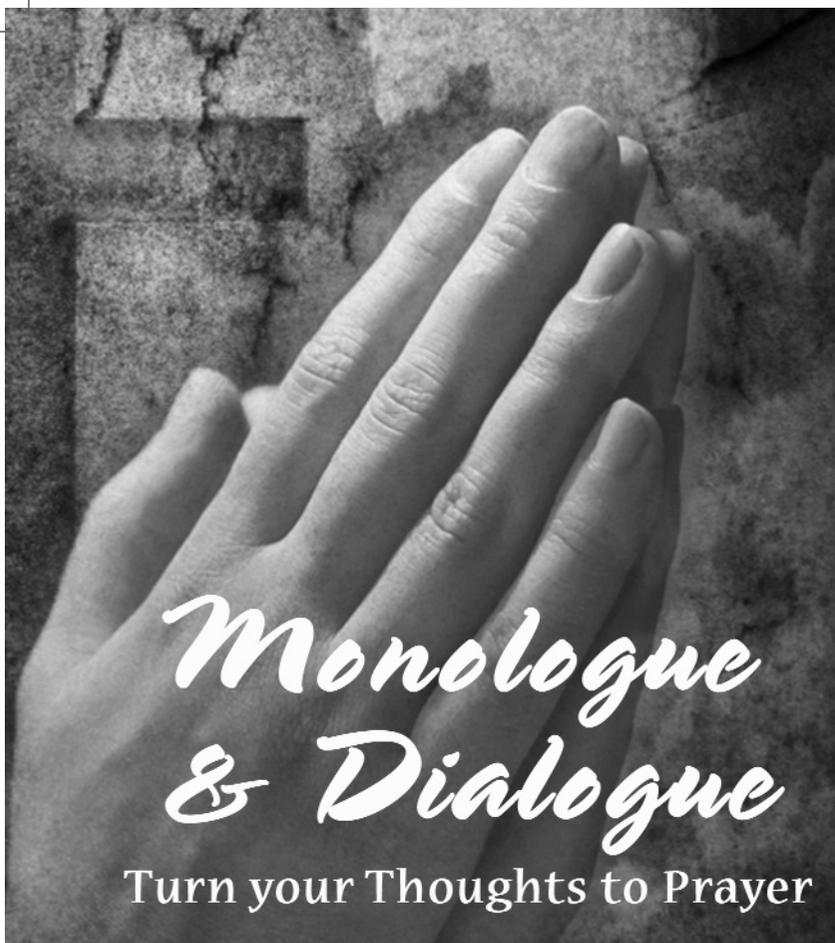
*All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned everyone to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

(Isaiah 53:4–6).

The nails that tore through His sacred hands and feet were our sins. The thorns that pierced His brow and marred His visage were our sins. The scourge that lacerated the flesh of His back to ribbons was our sins. The wagging heads that mocked Him and the tongues that vilified Him were our sins. “He was wounded for our transgressions.” As the Man of Sorrows He took on Himself our burdened and penalty of sin. He bore it for us. He carried our sorrow. He suffered our condemnation. He endured our agony. He died our death.

Dear Man of Sorrows, thank You for Your sufferings on my behalf. Save me from seeking comfort in place of the cross, security in place of sacrifice.





Monologue & Dialogue

Turn your Thoughts to Prayer

An old wise man suggests that we practice the presence of God by turning our thoughts over to God. Our minds are going all the time, thinking about all kinds of things: frivolous things; serious, loving, mean, painful, joyful things. He suggests that we turn these thoughts into prayers: “We convert our unceasing thinking into unceasing prayer,” he says: “When we move from a self-centered monologue into a God-centered dialogue. This requires that we turn all our thoughts into a conversation (with God). The main question therefore, is not so much that we think, but to whom we present our thoughts.”

Prayer is giving all our thoughts to God, opening to Him the secret places that we guard so diligently. It is like Nehemiah who, while talking to the king, was talking to God in the same time. The king asked Nehemiah, “What do you request?” and he said “*I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said to the king*” (Neh. 2:4). This is a vertical and horizontal talk in the same time! He carries on a conversation with God sharing with Him the aches and pains as well as his own thoughts. Another excellent example of prayer as a God-centered dialogue is the Psalms. David carries on a constant conversation with God in the Psalms. He lays bare, naked his soul before God.

In the Old Testament also, Hezekiah received a disturbing letter from his enemy. It was the kind of letter to cause a person to lose his sleep for nights. But, Hezekiah having read the letter, “went up to into the house of the Lord, and spread it out before the Lord.” Whatever the invading anxiety or worry is, we can always “spread it out” before the Lord in prayer.

Replace the Devil's Tomorrow with God's Today

The trouble is that when God says, “Today”, we so often say, “Tomorrow!”

Yes, tomorrow; for certain tomorrow.

Tomorrow I will repent.

Tomorrow I will confess my sins – not this Lent but the next one.

Tomorrow I will be a better father or mother or son or daughter.

Tomorrow I will spend more time with my family.

Tomorrow I will forgive my neighbor.

Tomorrow I will be a better husband or wife.

Tomorrow I will lay up treasures in heaven.

Tomorrow I will begin to pray regularly.

Tomorrow I should start reading and studying the Bible on daily basis.

Tomorrow I will “cast off the works of darkness, drunkenness, debauchery, quarreling, jealousy, smoking, *Shisha*, lying, cussing, judging others and swearing.

Tomorrow I will put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when the morrow comes, we are still saying,

“Tomorrow!” **But when death comes – then what? Then we cannot say “Tomorrow!”** The Lord Jesus said, “*Work while it is day; night comes when no man can work.*” To Christ, when He lifts His hand and says to you today, do not listen to the Devil when he says to you tomorrow. Therefore, repent and follow the Lord your Savior **NOW, TODAY, and NOT TOMORROW**, because tomorrow is not in your hands.



Congratulations



St. John Church Congratulates
Wael, Amanie and Helena Said on the Baptism of their son
George W. Said

On March 9, 2013

May our gracious Lord bless the child in all his ways;
grant him the grace to continuously grow in
his love and knowledge.



St. John Church, Covina, congratulates
Rev. **Fr. George Aziz** for the grace of his ordination
in Priesthood, and starting his service; wishing him every
blessing and success in his ministry.



St. John Church congratulates
Archdeacons Thomas & Antonious
for their promotion, praying that God may bless
their new service and fill them with the Holy Spirit
and all His fruits and gifts.



St. John Church Congratulates
the newcomers for passing the
English Class



Beatrice Andrawis
Congratulations on passing
Boot Camp Training and
going to the Navy. We wish
you much success in the
Intelligence Systems
Division (IT).
May God bless you and
thank you for your service-
**Mom Dina, Dad Raafat,
Ronnie and Caroline
Andrawis.**



Ordination of Fr. George Aziz



Archdeacons Thomas and Antiochus



