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AUG. 2 Feast Day of St. Joseph
The Carpenter



AUG. 21 Feast Day of the Martyr
St. Marina

St. John Coptic Orthodox Church

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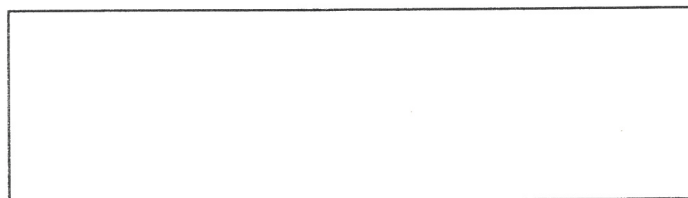
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THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

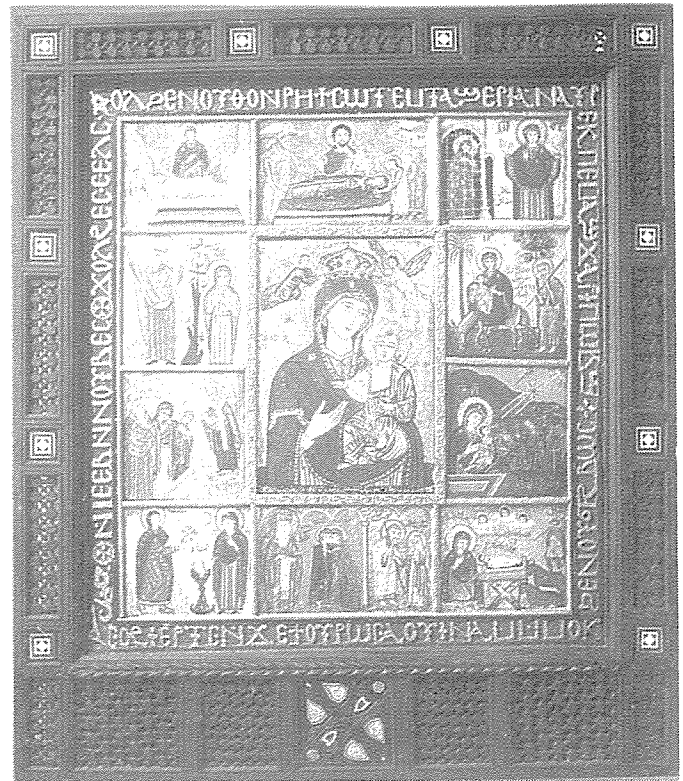
“At Your right hand stands the queen” (Ps. 45:9)

From the book: THE LIFE OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

After the dormition of the Virgin Mary the disciples carried the bier on which her sacred body lay and went to the place known as the field of Jehoshaphat to bury it. On their way, the Jews saw them and ordered a man named Tawphina to snatch the bier and await them at the top of the mount where they would burn the body. Tawphina walked behind the Apostles and before they reached the mount, he advanced, stretched out his impure hands and held the bier. With his fiery sword, the angel of the Lord struck him on the shoulder, cutting off his arms which remained attached to the bier while he fell on the ground screaming and begging the disciples, “Have mercy on me; I did this in my ignorance, forced by the wicked Jews. My name is Tawphina and I am the man who was paralysed for thirty-eight years at the Pool of Bethesda. When the Lord healed me, He ordered me not to return to sin lest I be afflicted with worse. But I have now fallen into greater sin. Please pray for me and ask the Lady to have compassion on me a sinner.” The Apostles prayed for him and, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, he was healed.

When the disciples laid down the sacred body of the Virgin in the tomb and rolled a stone over its mouth, a great light shone around them and they smelled a sweet fragrance and heard a voice saying, “Blessed are you, O full of grace. The Lord is with you.” The apostles fell down and the angels took the body of the Virgin and ascended with it to heaven without being seen by the apostles.

St. Thomas was the only apostle who did not attend the Virgin Mary’s dormition and burial. He



was in India hindered from attending that sacred event by a certain reason unknown to the apostles. The Lord willed to reveal to him the great mystery of our Lady’s Assumption. On his return from India, he was carried by a cloud to the field of Jehoshaphat. While on the cloud he saw the Virgin’s body being carried by hosts of angels who told him that that was the body of the Virgin Mary who had reposed and the Lord commanded them to lift it up to Paradise. He greatly rejoiced and invoked the Virgin to pray for him and bless him. Suddenly a belt dropped on him. He picked it up, kissed it and kept it.

Then the cloud alighted St. Thomas at the place where the apostles were gathered. He told them that he had a great desire to see the body of the Virgin Mary.

The apostles escorted St. Thomas to the tomb where they laid her body. They rolled the stone and



entered the tomb but could not find the body of the Virgin. They were astounded and puzzled, not knowing what had happened. St. Thomas started to explain to them, saying, "Do not be sad, my brethren, because today I saw the body of my Lady the Virgin Mary carried by angels to Paradise according to the Lord's command. When I asked her to bless me, I found this belt dropping on me. St. Thomas took out the belt and showed it to the apostles. With great astonishment they examined it and recognized it as the same belt which they themselves had wrapped around her sacred body.

On the 15th of Mesra, seven months after the Lady's dormition, the apostles gathered in the tomb and spent the whole night in vigil, singing and praying to be blessed with an appearance of the Virgin Mary's Assumption. At dawn of 16th Mesra, they heard the sound of a great thunderstorm and host of angels appeared to them. Then the Lord Jesus Christ, carried on the cherubim, appeared to them with the holy Virgin His mother at His right. He gave them peace and they worshipped Him, giving Him glory for his mercy and tender care.

WHAT'S YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE ?

Do you sometimes wonder if you have what it takes to be a leader? You may ask, "Can I do it? What kind of leadership could I give?"

People have different leadership styles based on personality and experience. Most, however, fall into one of two groups: A *task-oriented* person who thinks, "It's important for me to; complete a job I've started," or a *relationally oriented* person who thinks, "It's important to me that people get along harmoniously.

Every group needs both styles of leadership. This test will reveal your style and guide you to volunteer in areas where you'll thrive. From the key, choose a response for the following questions.

When I'm a member of a group:

1. I give facts, ideas and opinions to help the group in the discussion.
2. I encourage the quiet members to participate. I am open to all the ideas in the group, and I let the members know I value their contribution.
3. I ask for ideas from other group members.
4. I use good communication skills, and I help everyone understand what others have said.
5. I help the group moving and do not get side-tracked.
6. I help the group enjoy working together. I tell a funny story or do something to break the tension when it arises.
7. I sum up what's been said, pulling together various ideas.
8. I observe the way the group is working and point out to them what's happening so we can work together better.
9. I keep the group motivated to work toward its goals.
10. I bring out into the open any conflicts between members and try to help them resolve them.
11. I ask others to summarize group discussions and decisions to be sure they understand what's been said and done.
12. I express my appreciation for other group members and for their contributions.

A REIGN OF TERROR IN THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC OF DAIRUT

Isn't there an End to this Nightmare?

By: Antoun Sidhom

Those were the captions of two leading articles published in WATANI, the Coptic Sunday newspaper on 6/28/1992. Mr. Sidhom received a message from one of the residents of Dairut, a city in Upper Egypt. Mr. Sidhom, however; selected not to reveal the writer's name in order to protect him against reprisals by the extremist Moslem fundamentalist. Following is a translation of the highlights of the letter:

- A number of Moslem fundamentalists for the selfstyled "Gamaat El Islamiya" set upon and insultedd His Grace Bishop Barsoum of Dairut and snatched his pastoral staff and cross. This incident, however, was kept under lock and seal.
- It is prohibited for any priest or Christian religious man to walk in the streets of Dairut and adjacent villages, Sanabu and Menshiet Nasser; otherwise, punishment is immediately inflicted upon him by spitting or stonning.
- Christian youth are kept under surveillance by the Islamic group. Those who daily go to Church to attend the liturgy are intimidated. Letters with the symbol of the Gamaat El Islamiya are sent to them, but if they do not stop going to Church, they are beaten by chains and iron pipes. Bones in some cases are smashed and some have become bed ridden forever.
- At El Saieh mosque in Dairut, a Kangaroo (judgment or punishment given outside of legal procedure) trial is held for Christians every Friday evening. The sentence is usually either to smash the bones of some or to tear down the flesh of others.



أنطون سيدم

The register of the Central Dairut Hospital is an irrefutable evidence of such incidents.

- Christians are not allowed to celebrate any religious festival or visit the Moharaq Monastery of the Virgin Mary at Quosia, Assiut. The Moslem fundamentalists spread everywhere blocking the way of Christians and forcing them to return.
- Every Sunday morning and during the religious meetings held at the Church, some fundamentalist boys carrying bottles filled with tar and ink splash the clothes of women on their way to Church, thus forcing them to return. If a Christian, thereafter files a complaint with the police, the answer is that he has to complain to the "Amir" or prince of the Gamaat El Islamiya as the police is powerless before them; an answer of laxity, incompetence and indifference.
- The Christian pupils in Dairut and surrounding villages suffer at the hands of their Moslem teachers. Christian teachers are subjected to various levels of intimidation and humiliation being called infidels with the word written on blackboards by their own Moslem pupils. Lessons on Islamic religion have become lessons in ways and means of undermining the morale of Christian teachers and pupils.
- Even our messages and telegrams, according to the writer of the letter, to the authorities are routinely censored and not delivered. The text of those messages and telegrams shows up thereafter in the hands of the member of the Gamaat El Islamiya.
- Atrocities, brutalities and butchering of Copts is the order of the day in the streets of Dairut.

According to the correspondent of the Los Angeles Times (Sunday, July 12, 1992), "The

Gamaat became the law in Manshiet Nasser. Nearly 70 Christian shops were burned and ransacked... doctors and shopkeepers were murdered. A Christian was murdered and then hacked up with butcher knives in nearby Sanabu". A foreign diplomat stationed in Egypt commented, according to L.A. Times, "The events in themselves are scary

enough, but they are indicators of some underlying trends that are even scarier. It is hard for me to be as optimistic about the future of this country as I was a month ago... You should ask the question, Has the government lost control of Upper Egypt? It is not an impossible proposition."

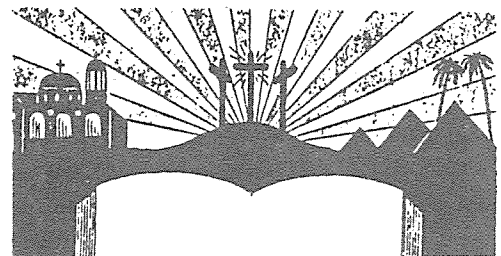
CHURCH NEWS AND SCHEDULE

August 92

1. **The fast of St. Mary** is 15 days starting from Friday, August 7 to Saturday 22. The liturgy of **St. Mary's Feast** will be celebrated on Saturday the 22nd from 8:00 - 11:00 A.M.
2. During St. Mary's fast, there will be two week-day liturgies, on Wednesday and Friday from 8:00 - 10:15 A.M. And during the second week there will be Revival Meetings every night from 7:30 - 9:00 P.M.
Notice that we do not fast for St. Mary but for God, because fasting is one of the means of worship (Matthew 6:16-18), and worship must be directed only to God according to the Scriptures, "*For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'*" (Matthew 4:10)
3. **The Feast of Transfiguration** is on Wednesday 19, there will be a liturgy and vespers. The story of the Transfiguration is found in Matthew 17, Mark 9 & Luke 9.
4. **The Papal Visit of H.H. Pope Shenouda III**, is expected, God willing, to start with New York on the 4th of September. His Holiness, will visit Boston, Cleveland and may be Canada, Florida, other states, and reach **Los Angeles about the 16th of September**. He will hold a two-day conference with all the priests of U.S. and Canada in L.A., and two-day Lectures in Los Angeles Coptic Seminary. He will pray only one liturgy in the Consecration Service of the Cathedral of Archangel Michael at Orange County on Sunday the 20th, holding some meetings with the youth, the ministers, committees, and the

whole congregation, visits St. Antony Monastery and leaves L.A., on the 24th of September.

5. **The Youth Summer Club, during August** will be 3 days only, **Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday**, and will close at the end of August. Every evening there is a **Bible Study which begins at 8:30 P.M.** The spiritual part is mandatory to all participants who are over 16 years old.
6. **The Youth 3rd Annual Conference** will be held in Arrowhead Springs, CA from August 10 to August 14 under the leadership of H. Grace Bishop Moussa, H.G. Bishop Thomas and the West Coast Clergy.
7. **The Monthly Clergy Meeting** will be held with the Bishops during the youth convention at **Arrowhead Springs**.
8. **The Arabic youth meeting** held a two-day conference at Arrowhead Springs on July 25, 26.



"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG..." (Ps. 44:22)

by Maged Mikhail

68 A.D.

"The mob forced its way into the Church and seized the saint (St. Mark), put a rope around his neck, and dragged him about the streets. With the connivance of the authorities, St. Mark was incarcerated for the night... On the following day, he was again dragged over the cobbled roads of Alexandria, his body becoming lacerated and his blood covering the ground, until he finally died... it appears that St. Mark was decapitated after his martyrdom." (Coptic Encyclopedia)

4th Century

"And we ourselves also beheld,... many all at once in a single day some of whom suffered decapitation, others the punishment of fire; so that the murderous axe was dulled and , worn out, was broken in pieces, while the executioners themselves grew utterly weary and took it in turns to succeed one another "... (Esubious)

8th Century

"Incarceration, flogging, amputation of limbs, and even outright murder of a delinquent subject were customary punishments... Copts were to be branded with the mark of a lion "... (Coptic Encyclopedia)

14th Century

"A procession entered its (Cairo) gates consisting of a great stream of men and women,... who as they marched, cried aloud, 'We are Christians! We renounce Islam and its Prophet! with shame we confess that we deserted Christ for fear of persecution!'... When it was found that not one of

them would yield either to threat or promise, it was determined to make an example of the men first. One by one they were beheaded, before the eyes of the women. These, however, remained firm, crying the more that they preferred death to the betrayal of their Lord. The chief Kadi,... ordered the guards to take all the band of women to the foot of the citadel and there behead them all." (Modern Sons of the Pharaohs)

June 1992

"Muslim attack on Copts leaves 14 dead... the fact that there had been an attack did not stun the authorities. Such attacks take place nearly every week in Cairo"... (New York Times)

"We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8-9). This has been the story of the Copts.

We should thank the Lord, for through this gift our dogma, rites, and faith have remained as pure as the day St. Mark delivered them to our fathers the martyrs. Also, we should thank Him, for no other Church has been granted the honor of suffering, up to this day, for His Namesake.

As the Lord remembered Abraham and saved Lot; may He also remember the blood of our fathers and have mercy on our souls.



What Is

The Greatest Discovery ?

“The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” (Matthew 13:44).

The Lord Jesus speaks in this vers of a man who suddently found a great treasure in a field. When he saw what it was, he covered it up. With great joy he went and sold all he had and bought the field.

What do you think that treasure was? It must be the greatest discovery in that man’s life.

What is the greatest discovery in your life, and in the history of the whole world?

Some people may say:

- + The discovery of America by Columbus.
- + The discovery of penicillin which has saved so many lives.
- + The T.V.
- + The car, airopplane and telephone.
- + Reaching the moon and the outer space....etc.,

But are these the most important of all discoveries ?

When Jesus tells the story of the man who found a great treasure hidden in a field, He is trying to tell us that the greatest treasure of all is GOD, the creator, the LORD JESUS CHRIST the redeemer Himself.

If you asked any true believer, why is Jesus considered the greatest of all treasures ? He will give you at least ten immediate reasons:

1. Jesus gives us salvation and forgiveness of

sins.

2. Jesus conquered satan and death, our most dangerous enemies.
3. Jesus gives us heaven and eternal life as a free gift.
4. Jesus tells us that we are God’s children and hiers, He adopted us and chose us to be His bride.
5. Jesus shows us God’s great love,mercy and care.
6. Jesus is the light of the world.
7. Jesus is the bread of life.
8. Jesus is the Good Shepherd.
9. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.
10. He is Emmanuel, God with us all days, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 1:23 & 28:20).

In order to gain the Lord Jesus Christ, the treasure of treasures, you must discover His great love and sacrifice on the cross for you. Then you will taste how good, beautiful and adorable He is. With great joy, you will sell all the vanities of the world as all saints do. And you will sing with St. Paul:

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” (Philippians 3:7,8).

You can discover the Lord Jesus as your greatest treasure of your life through your daily Bible readings, prayers, communion, serving the needy and winning souls for Him.





by Mark Hanna

IN THE NAME OF ORTHODOXY

In the name of Orthodoxy many think that they will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In the name of Orthodoxy many believe that fighting is the way to preserve the right faith. In the name of Orthodoxy many wrongs are committed in order to be called Orthodox. In the name of Orthodoxy many brake the basic Christian duties in order to seem true to Orthodoxy. In the name of Orthodoxy many make everything so complex that at the end people are overwhelmed to the point of leaving the Church. In the name of Orthodoxy many believe that everything should be played by ear or through blessing everything will be OK (*bel baraka*). In the name of Orthodoxy many believe that it is not important to be organized since Orthodoxy is not something shown by appearance. Finally in the name of Orthodoxy many believe that they are indeed saved since Orthodoxy is so strict upon the its members.

The list like paragraph above is merely a sample of the many fallacies, misconceptions and errors in understanding *Orthodoxy*. In fact we are Orthodox in faith and belief, we are also Coptic Orthodox Christians. As Coptic Orthodox Christian we take pride in the fact that only our Church was mentioned, prophecied about, and its people blessed in the Holy Bible (Isa. 19:19 & 19:25). But one thing which is very important to remember is that we hold three titles: 1. Christians 2. Orthodox 3. Copts. Before everything else, we are Christians, the adopted Children of God. Secondly, we have Orthodox beliefs and correct faith. Finally, we are Copts (Egyptians) the sons of the Pharoahs and the martyrs. Throughout history the Coptic Church has defined the true way, the more pressured and persecuted we became, the more we held to the

Lord's promisses and the true Orthodox way. Unfortunetly at the times that the Lord willed that persecutions would ease, we too sought after an easier way of life. So, if the Church might seem as if it has become weaker, it is due to the current recession in persecution which we here in the foreign countries are feeling. It is very interesting to note that outside Egypt, away from our Patriarchate and our Pope, many define Orthodoxy in the way which they believe is right. Unfortunetly, it is these people who do most damage to our Church and its faith.

Orthodoxy is not ruling with an iron fist, but Orthodoxy is Christianity under the microscope. In order for it to be experienced to the fullest, it must be understood correctly. Orthodoxy is not contrary to Christianity, but on the other hand they both go together hand in hand. Orthodoxy is indeed a certificate of salvation to all those who practice true Christianity and the true correct faith in belief and dogma. Our Coptic Orthodox fathers demostrated unbelievable examples of how to walk the extra mile, how to turn the other cheek, how to love ones enemies, how to bless ones cursers, and finally how to lay down ones life for the sake of their Savior and in order to protect the Orthodox faith. In all these examples, we can see that our forefathers gave, sacrificed, persevered, endured and loved, thus it is an insult to Orthodoxy to be hostile towards those who don't share our same beliefs and say that we do it in the name of Orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy is love unending, faith unshakable, hope awaited, constant readiness and vigil, prayer without ceasing, respect to authorities, submission to Church leaders, help to all who need it, and unity in thought, belief, prayer, and voice.



All that is mentioned in the first paragraph is unorthodox. Let it never be thought that in the name of Orthodoxy, let things happen on their own (*bel baraka*). Our Church is indeed blessed, but this is no reason to be unorganized and say that in Orthodoxy appearance is least since God seeks the hearts of his people. Orthodoxy is organization, God is a God of organization, the Coptic Church is full of rites which organize everything from the birth of the individual into this world, his/her life on earth, with God until his/her departure from this world.

Orthodoxy is not being stubborn, but humble. Orthodoxy is showing respect to elders. Orthodoxy is being respectful to our fathers the priests, bishops, metropolitans, and our venerable father the Pope. Orthodoxy is hanging and preserving carefully every rite, practice, custom, order, teaching, and tradition, set by God, delivered through His apostles and handed down to us.

Let no wrong occur and justify it by saying that it is done in the name of Orthodoxy.

OUR STRUGGLE BETWEEN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

by Jackie Mikhail

Growing up in an American society as a Coptic Orthodox youth is very difficult. In many issues and youth meetings, the youth have numerously complained about the freedom they receive from their parents. We always ask for more liberty to do what we want but we never look at the consequences we might suffer when we are trapped by society's evils. A majority of the things American youth enjoy are considered sins or paths to sin in the eyes of the Copts. For example: dancing, all night parties, and male-female relationships.

A bad or unruly childhood results in a bad adulthood. This is why many American families result in broken homes due to substance abuse, unfaithful spouses, teen pregnancies, illegitimate children, and divorces. When our parents set rules for us it's not because they don't want us to have fun it's because they want to protect us.

As children of Christ, we must conduct ourselves as the Holy Bible teaches us to. We must abide in God and trust that He will protect us from these worldly pleasures. Our Lord has given us our bodies

as a temple and dwelling place in which sin should not enter. And with the strength of our Lord may we always be strong in fighting these evils.

WHY?

Why do we grieve when we should be in delight
Why do we worry when we should be comforted
Why do we get angry when we should be patient
Why are we in remorse when we should be in assurance

Why do we feel pain when we should be in pleasure
Why do we cry when we should be rejoicing
Why do we even lie when we should be living in the truth

Finally why do we sin when we should be pure
Simply because we are human, and no matter what we do, think, or feel, we should always be joyful because we are the children of God

The Blessings And Rewards of Giving

“Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38)

Someone once said, “What motivates people to neglect health, lose family, and totally ignore their spiritual and eternal life in order to increase income? And when you ask how much is enough, the answer is, ‘just a little more!’”

Greed and accumulating money are selfish desires for more and more. You cannot violate the principles of God’s word without suffering the consequences.

The Psalmist had this in mind when he warned us that it is vain, unproductive, and worthless to rise early, retire late, and eat the bread of painful labors, that is, to wear ourselves out in the process. (Psalm 127:2) How foreign all of this is to the method Jesus explained for gaining what we need and what we desire in life.

Giving Is The Way To Receiving

Jesus said that giving is the way to receiving (Luke 6:38) When we examine this promise, notice that Jesus did not identify what we are to give. He simply says, “it.” Jesus said this because it does not matter whether we give time, help, counsel, encouragement, money, loyalty, comfort, friendship mercy or love, the promise is still the same.

When we give, God multiplies our gift so that it comes back to us in a greater portion. “Good measure, pressed down, shaken together” refers both to the amount and the quality of it. There is no useless filler in God’s return for our generosity and thoughtfulness toward others. “Running over” means that we will always receive more than we give and more than we expect.

While God assumes the responsibility of rewarding us for following His principle of giving, we choose the quality and the amount. “For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” Again, the “it” refers to whatever you are giving. Jesus says that this return on your giving “will pour into your bosom.” By whom? Many of those to whom you give may not be able to give in return. The channel through whom God returns the gifts is not your concern. You will seldom, if ever, be able to predict how God will honor your obedience to this amazingly profitable principle.

The world’s system is “Get all you can.” This approach gives you no promise of succeeding. God’s way gives you His irrevocable, unfailing promise of an abundant return. Following His principles, you get the best return on your investment.

According to St. Paul, the Lord Jesus said: *“IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE.” (Acts 20:35).*

And according to the Book of Malachi, man will deserve curse instead of blessing, if he robbed God, but if he honored His commandment in giving the tithes, he will reap the fulfillment of His amazing promise, *“I will open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it..” (Mal. 3:7-12).*

SMILE AND LAUGH

1. George: My wife treats me like an idol !
Mark : Why do you say that ?
George: She feeds me burnt offerings at meals.
2. To give you an idea how difficult my wife can be, she bought me two ties for my birthday. To please her, I wore one. She yelled, "What's the matter ? Don't you like the other one ?"
3. Doctor: I have some good news and some bad news.
Patient: What is the bad news?
Doctor: We had to cut off both of your legs.
Patient: What is the good news?
Doctor: There is a lady upstairs that would like to buy your shoes !
4. - "I just found out your uncle's an undertaker. I thought you told me he was a doctor."
- "Nope, I just said he followed the medical profession."
5. Two men drove their cars toward each other on a narrow street. Neither could pass.
One leaned out and shouted:
- "I never back up for a stupid idiot!"
- "I always do!" Shouted the other man, shifting into reverse.
6. A Scotsman and an Englishman were leaning against the counter in a store when a bandit walked in and brandished his gun.
The Scot, a quick thinker, handed his money to his English friend.
He said, "Here's the ten dollars you lent me!"
7. "Will you lend me \$ 20:00 and only give me ten of them? That way you will owe me ten, and i'll owe you ten, and we'll be straight!"
8. - Can you keep a secret ?"
- "Sure."
- I need to borrow \$ 100.00.
- Don't worry. It's just as if I never heard it !"
9. The five "B's" of old age are:
Bifocals...Bridges...Bulges...Bunk fatigue...
bulges...and baldness.
10. Barber to a customer with a lot of grease on his hair: "Do you want it cut or just an oil change ?!"

11. "It was a terrible day at the office, dear. The computer stopped and we all had to think !"
12. When I was a boy, I was told anybody could become president.. I'm now beginning to believe it !

I'M FINE

I'm fine, I'm fine.

There's nothing whatever the matter with me,
I'm just as healthy as I can be.

I have arthrities in both of my knees
And when I talk, I talk with a wheeze.
My pulse is weak and my blood is thin
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.

My teeth eventually will have to come out.
And I can't hear a word unless you shout.
I'm overweight and I can't get thin
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.

Arch supports I have for my feet
Or I wouldn't be able to walk down the street.
Sleep is denied me every night,
And every morning I'm really a sight.
My memory is bad and my head's a-spin
And I practically live on aspirin.
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.

The moral is, as this tale unfolds,
That for you and me who are growing old,
It's better to say, "I'm fine," with a grin
Than to let people know the shape we're in !



Olympic Competitors Seek the Holy Crown

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown." (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

This summer, athletes from around the world will gather in Barcelona, Spain, to compete in the 23rd Olympics. Male or female, they share the common denominators of discipline, devotion and perseverance- qualities that Christians everywhere emulate in the quest for an enduring crown. A Christian magazine, named "Vertue", asked some Christian women who have gone for the gold as members of former U.S. Olympic teams to talk about how they integrate sport with their faith, the race for the holy crown. Here are their stories.

Just call Debbie Brown, a team player. As head coach of the women's volleyball team at Notre Dame University in Indiana, she emphasizes "pulling together to play the game." In childhood, she "played around with tennis and track"- solitary sports where she competed, alone, against an opponent.

"Really, I prefer sports that require being with people," she says. "Volleyball requires special team work: Good communication, respect for those next to you and a need to learn to get along."

In the 70's when athletic scholarships for women were rare, Debbie worked toward her goal of playing in the Olympics and was rewarded with a spot on the U.S. team. She moved to Colorado Springs in 1978, a few months after dedicating her life to the Lord Jesus through a friend.

For the next four years, Debbie devoted herself to volleyball: training, competing around the globe and eyeing the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. Later on, Debbie became an assistant coach for the women's 1988 volleyball team. As a Coach, Debbie strives to nurture a team spirit with Christian values: using love as the strongest motivator; leading her team in prayer; and treating women with respect, understanding and compassion.

"My players watch me closely," she says. "They see the way I make my decisions, how I live out my life."

When 8- Year-Old Nancy Marshall did a backhand-spring into a window and landed outside, her mother said, "We've got to get that girl in gymnastics before she ruins our house."

Six years later, in 1972, Nancy competed in the Munich Olympics. She was the youngest American at that time ever selected for the gymnastics team. When she talks to adults and women's groups, Nancy shares her Olympic experience: the joy of family support, how she was marked by companionship with athletes around the world. This past has shaped her future, Nancy says. It led her to pioneer in sports broadcasting as a female athletics analyst for NBC, and to write a book, encouraging athletes to use biblical principles to overcome emotional hurdles in athletics (like envy, doubt, strife and loneliness). It teaches you about life, to channel your energies, pursue excellence, deal with failure. Now when I face adversity, I remember how God worked in my life before, and I have confidence He will do the same again."

Kelly Lunda, 30, who was raised by a family of skaters in Madison, Wisconsin said: "I used to think that if I skated fast, people would like me and I'd be happy." Kelly sensed there was more to the meaning of life than achievements. She felt an emptiness that awards could not fill: "In high school, through young life, I realized only Jesus Christ could."

In 1983, a second speedskating race in the Olympic trails left Kelly, then 22, devastated. She had placed second consistently throughout the year. Then in one quick minute, slipping on the ice, she was knocked from Olympic delegate to alternate. "My world fell apart. That was the hardest thing I've ever gone through." Only belief in Jesus and the hope of God's promises, glories to come in life eternal, kept her from a nervous breakdown, she says. Kelly never tires of sharing her hope through fellowship of Christian athletes and chapel services that she leads at the University of Washington in Seattle.

She openly tells of the victories and defeats that she once kept to herself and points all of this to a sustaining faith in Christ.

Now working as a physical therapist, Kelly has hung up her skates, but she continues to use the qualities she cultivated as a top athlete: discipline, energy, optimism and prayer for her clients as well. "People think that winning a gold medal or becoming a corporate vice president or getting married will make them happy. But God taught me at an early age that only He can do that."

The Choice Is Ours

By
Dalia Atalla

Since the creation of man, God has given him the knowledge of right and wrong, and the free will to choose between them. When the Lord God created Adam and Eve, He informed them about what they should and should not do. God gave them a very wide range of choice with only one restriction explaining or rather warning that if they did not believe, they *"will surely die"* (Gen. 2:16, 17). God however, did not guard the prohibited tree to make sure they would not disobey Him, but gave them the free will to obey or disobey. And when they disobeyed, they fell from the Paradise, and were exiled.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us the same freedom in choosing our paths. He, however, did not leave us blind in making our choices, but provided us with many resources, such as the Bible, that inform us of good and evil, yet, the final decision is ours. If we choose the right path we will ultimately reach safely the paradise, but if we don't, we bear the responsibility of our wrong choice and will be exiled *"into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matt. 8:12).

The manner by which our Lord grants us free will is characterized by the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15).

God gave us certain gifts that we must explore and utilize with the help of the Holy Spirit in order to grow in knowledge and in spiritual life and produce good fruits. He gave us His great and infallible word which *"is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the*



man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

God gave us His Holy Spirit to guide us, His Body and Blood to dwell within us. He gave us His Church as the greatest institute and university in the world, *"to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."* (1 Timothy 3:15). *"He has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."* (2 Timothy 1:7).

Therefore, if we by our free will, misused this freedom, and chose not to benefit of these wonderful gifts, we are disobeying God, our great Father and creator, pulling away from Him, and thus we will be uprooted (*see the parable of the unfruitful fig tree in Luke 13:6,7*).

So, if we choose to refuse our gifts, we are refusing God, the path of righteousness, and ultimately our Citizenship in the Paradise, but the choice is ours.

Although God knows the outcome of our lives, and whether or not we will enter the Heavenly Jerusalem, He still provides us with the free will to choose the best choice, and helps us to make it.