



NEWS of February 2013

1. The Feast of Presentation:

On Friday, February 15, the church celebrates the Lord's Minor Feast of Christ's Entry to the Temple at age 40 days. In that day, Simeon the Elder carried Him and said, "My eyes have seen Your Salvation", and prophesied about His cross which will be resisted, and also, the praise of St. Anna the prophetess (Luke 2:22-38).

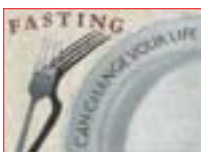


2. The Fast of Nineveh/Jonah (Feb. 25-27):

The three-day-fast of Nineveh starts from Monday, February 25, and ends on Wednesday 27. There will be daily Liturgies from 12 noon until 3:00 p.m. The feast of Jonah, Thursday, Feb. 28 and its Liturgy will be from 8:00 –10:00 a.m. May the Lord accept our fasting and prayers, especially for our persecuted church and Copts in Egypt.



3. Great Lent (March 11):



Great Lent starts on Monday, March 11, until the Feast of the Resurrection (Easter) on May 5, 2013.

4. Feasts of Church Saints during February:



These are some of the feasts of the famous saints and martyrs that the Coptic Orthodox Church honors in Feb.:

Feb. 3: Martyrdom of 49 elders of Sheheet (Scetis).

Feb. 7: Martyrdom of St. Sophia and her daughters.

Feb. 9: Departure of St. Paula, the first hermit.

Feb. 17: (Sunday) Martyrdom of St. James, son of Alphaeus and author of the letter of St. James.

5. Feeding the homeless:

St. John during the winter months feeds over 100 people every Wednesday and Friday in Pomona, CA, if you would like to contribute or serve, please speak with Fr. Daniel. May God continue to bless this service through your prayers.

6. H. H. Pope Tawadros II:

His Holiness Pope Tawadros celebrated the Feast of Epiphany at St. Mark Cathedral in Alexandria, Egypt according to the tradition as Pope Shenouda used to do.



7. H.G. Bishop Serapion:

His Grace Bishop Serapion blessed St. John Church in Covina, Saturday, January 12, celebrating the Liturgy of the Feast of St. John the Beloved and the intercessor of the church and ordained deacons.



8. Preparations for the first year Memorial of Pope Shenouda III (Sunday, March 17):



On Sunday, March 17, St. John Church celebrates the first year memorial of H. H. Pope Shenouda III from 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. The program will include some talks, clips from his life and sermons, Choir singing his poems and spiritual songs.

9. The Catechumens Weekly Meeting:

Fr. Daniel Habib teaches a catechumen meeting every Sunday from 12:15 -1:15 p.m. in church. If you or anyone you know is interested in learning more about our faith please speak to him. This meeting is offered until the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord.

On Tuesday nights, St. John Chrysostom's English Bible Study meets in the basement from 7:30 – 8:30 PM. They are studying the book of 1 Corinthians

11. St. John's Medical Clinic:

Voluntary physicians serve freely the sick that have no medical insurance twice every month, in the first and the third Sunday from 12 noon.

12. Valentine's Day (Feb. 14)

On February 14, America celebrates Valentine Day, known as the "Day of Love." Its historical background says that St. Valentine was a priest in the 3rd century, at the time of the Roman Emperor Claudius.

He was caught marrying persecuted Christians under-ground. He preached Christ to the Emperor and was executed in 269 ad. He became the patron saint of the engaged couples and happy marriages.



GOD in the Book of Jonah



By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

1. God Searched for Man:

In this Book we see that God is the One who searches for man and not vice versa. The life of repentance teaches us that man should return to God, as the prodigal son did. He addressed himself, saying: "I will arise and go to my father: (Lk.15).

But in the Book of Jonah we find that God is the One who searches for man in order to bring him to repentance. We see Him searching for all; He goes about seeking the souls that are His.

He searched for the souls of those in the ship in order to save them. He Himself searched for the lost souls of the people of Nineveh in order to make them repent and save them. He also uses every possible means in order to save Jonah the prophet. If man does not go to Him. He goes to man to reform him and reconcile him. As Saint James of Seroge on the occasion of Christ's Birth, said, "There was a dissension between God and man, and when man did not go to God to be reconciled, God came down to reconcile man to Him." God does not look at the action of searching for man and seeking his love as contrary to His honor. The great Creator finds pleasure in seeking the dust and ashes!

In searching for man, God used many different means among which are frightening, reproofing, convincing, showing kindness, discipline and punishment. The most important thing to Him is to reach man's heart and to find place there. We also notice that God does not leave man to his absolute freedom. What I mean is, to the extent, which carries the meaning of disregarding him. Caring not for his destiny, and if He says to him: "If you come, all right, and if not,

as you like!" No, but rather, "If you don't come to Me, I will seek you, run after you, and I will keep on doing so until I restore you." In this book of Jonah, we find God's search for man is very serious.

2. It is Possible to Use Punishment:

The compassionate God may use the means of

Punishment and frightening if they are useful for man's salvation. Here are three examples:

Giving a warning and chance:

This is what happened with the Ninevites. It was only a warning: I will overthrow the city after forty days, "Yet after forty day, and Nineveh shall be over-thrown!" , a warning given with a long respite.

The blow from outside:

This is what happened with the mariners of the ship and the passengers including Jonah. Here the matter was not just a warning, but it was carrying it out for a limited time. God gave orders to the winds to strike the ship so that it was about to be broken. But we notice that God put limits to the wind's blows: "Strike the ship from outside, but your water shall not enter it. Strike the ship, shake it, but do not harm any of its passengers....."

The punishment entered into serious danger:

The order was given to the great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah looked and found himself inside the belly of the whale!

These are the three ways of punishing, and God wants you to reach Him by any means that suit you or are convenient for you. Therefore, do not force God to use the severe ways to bring you back.





3. God is Prepared to Relent:

God is ready to relent if man returns from his wrong ways. The Bible said that the Lord returned from His hot displeasure: "The Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Exod. 32:12; Jer. 18). And in our story, the Bible repeats the same verse: "God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it"

God is the easiest Person you can deal with. One tear from you is enough to dissolve all His threats and punishments, if your tears are true and faithful. King Herod, because he had said a word, could not, revert it, but God is always prepared to relent from His warnings and abandons His threats when we repent.

4. God's Long Suffering:

No doubt God is very patient in winning sinners. He does not despair from anyone no matter how deep his wickedness is. He did not despond of Niveveh the corrupted wicked Atheist City, which could not discern between its right and left. He did not despond of Jonah, the hardhearted person who resisted God's will. He did not despond of the mariners who used to worship many gods.

5. God is for All:

One of God's beautiful attributes is that He takes all sorts of people and appoints for them portions in His kingdom. God's kingdom is likened to a net let down in the sea gathering all sorts of fish, good and bad. God is for all kinds of people.

God Likes Reasoning:

The Holy Bible gives us a marvelous picture of how God reasons with man. He says, "Come now, and let us reason together..." (Isa. 1:18). The story of destroying Sodom gives us a clear picture of how God reasoned with Abraham (Gen. 18). Also the Lord reasoned with Moses and accepted his intercession (Exod. 32). So also God reasoned with Jonah and asked him, "Is it right for you to be angry?" He gave us prayer in order to reason with Him.

The Gardener who neglected his Weeding!



By Fr. Augustinos Hanna

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding. And there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down." (Prov. 24:30)

There is a legend that says that in a hot summer day, the Lord Jesus Christ found a beautiful orchard and He had a nap under one of its big trees. After He had some rest, He praised the gardener and advised him to keep doing the good job of taking a good care of his neat garden. But the story went on saying that over three years, the gardener neglected his beautiful garden that the flowers died and thorns and weeds grew everywhere; to the point that when the Roman soldiers wanted to search for a crown of thorns to put on Christ's head mocking Him as the King of the Jews, they could not find better long and sharp thorns than those of that ruined neglected orchard! The same place, which once was a Paradise for Jesus to rest in; has become a place to torture Him because of the negligence of the gardener!

1. APRIL: "I went by the field...and by the vineyard!" What possibilities! The weather is getting warmer; spring is in the air. The trees are awakening after their long winter sleep, and all nature is beginning to sing. Today I passed by a vineyard, and it looked lovely. The owner, a self-satisfied man, was very proud of his possession. He seemed one of the sort who never takes kindly to rebuke or instruction. He knew it all! Yet I admired his vineyard, for it presented great opportunities. It was favorably situated, well sheltered, well watered. A man could make a lot of money in that vineyard. The young vines were very healthy. I envied that dreamy husbandman. I have a haunting fear that he might neglect his picturesque garden. Ah, it was so lovely; it reminded me of a man's soul.

(continued)





The Gardener who neglected his Weeding!

2. MAY: “And lo, the vineyard was all grown over with thorns.” **What problems!** Yes. I was really shocked. That lovely vineyard was unrecognizable. The well-kept paths had almost disappeared; the warm brown soil was hidden. That silly man had neglected his weeding. His garden is swiftly becoming a wilderness. What a fool! I saw him on the veranda of his house. Well! His snores betrayed his whereabouts. His long legs were stretched in front of his chair, and his big hat rested on his nose! I felt like shaking him; but after all, my being king, Solomon said, did not give me the right to interrupt a man’s siesta. But his is a fool, for all that. Those weeds and thorns will increase every day, and all the possibilities so apparent last month will vanish. What would happen in my soul if I acted similarly? Weeds will grow anywhere in very quick time. The snores of that man annoyed me!

3. JUNE: “And nettles had covered the face of the vineyard.” **What pain!** Well, well, well! I could hardly believe my eyes. I saw that vineyard again to-day, and this time it was worse than ever! The young vines were lost in a forest of nettles. Yes, nettles! They’ll take some getting out now. Somebody will be hurt before that garden is reclaimed. And would you believe it-the gardener was sleeping again. His feet were on another chair, his hat covered his face, his snores were as regular as the incoming waves of the sea. I looked at the blue skies; I felt the warmth of the glorious sunshine. It was wonderful to be alive on such a day, and yet he slept! Yes, it’s strange how that vineyard reminds me of a human soul. A little neglect, and weeds give place to thorns; a little more neglect and thorns give place to nettles. I think the husbandman has already lost his harvest. Nettles! Weeding will be useless now. Only immediate ruthless action will save the crop!

4. JULY. “And the stone wall of the vineyard was broken down.” **What peril!** Yes, I expected it! Other people have noticed the laziness of that stupid fool. He spends all his time sleeping. His vineyard is utterly neglected, and now he is being robbed. The encircling wall has been broken. I wonder who did

that? Now the foxes can get in, and anyone can steal the sleeper’s possessions. I had a look around the place, and soon detected evidence that thieves had been in the vineyard. I walked across to the veranda- oh, yes, he was there as usual. I was tempted to awaken him, but on second thoughts I left him. I am wondering if he will ever change his foolish habits. Anyhow, there he sat; his lower jaw was rising and falling on his heaving chest, and all the while his nasal organs produced discords! What would I have liked to do! It’s not safe to write that in any diary-some-day others might read my words!

5. AUGUST: “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, so your poverty will come...” **What poverty!** Cheers! A miracle has happened; the impossible has taken place, the dead has been resurrected. Yes, I was down there again today, and I could have laughed when I saw dismay written on the face of the husbandman. He had been across to witness the harvesting of the grapes in the adjacent vineyards, and was filled with remorse. He was calling himself by all the unholy names imaginable, but the nettles were higher than ever! Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.” Neglect can ruin any garden, even the garden of my soul. Have I been as foolish as the sleepy husbandman! I have looked at other vineyards and forgotten my own. I must get on with my own weeding. They’ve grown a lot lately! Negligence may not seem serious or a sin, but it is so dangerous. It might be a big sin that leads to destruction. When it is gross negligence it turns to a crime or a felony. When a driver drives his car with gross negligence or under the influence of alcohol and kills many innocent people; he will be condemned as a murderer.

In the spiritual realm, the Lord Jesus Christ kept advising and reminding us to be sober and watchful. In the parable of the Tares, He said, “**While men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat...**” (Matt. 13:25).

St. Paul also said, “**How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?!**” (Heb. 2:3).



The Glorious Feast of the Theophany

By Fr. Matthew Ateya (Sydney)

On Saturday the 19th January the Church celebrated the Glorious Feast of the Theophany. We renew the Covenant of Baptism, remembering that the baptismal font is both the **womb** (where we are born by water and spirit) and **tomb** (where we die to sin and are made alive to God).

What is the Impact of Baptism?

In Baptism.....I receive Salvation: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16).

In Baptism.....I receive my Second Birth: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." (John 3:5).

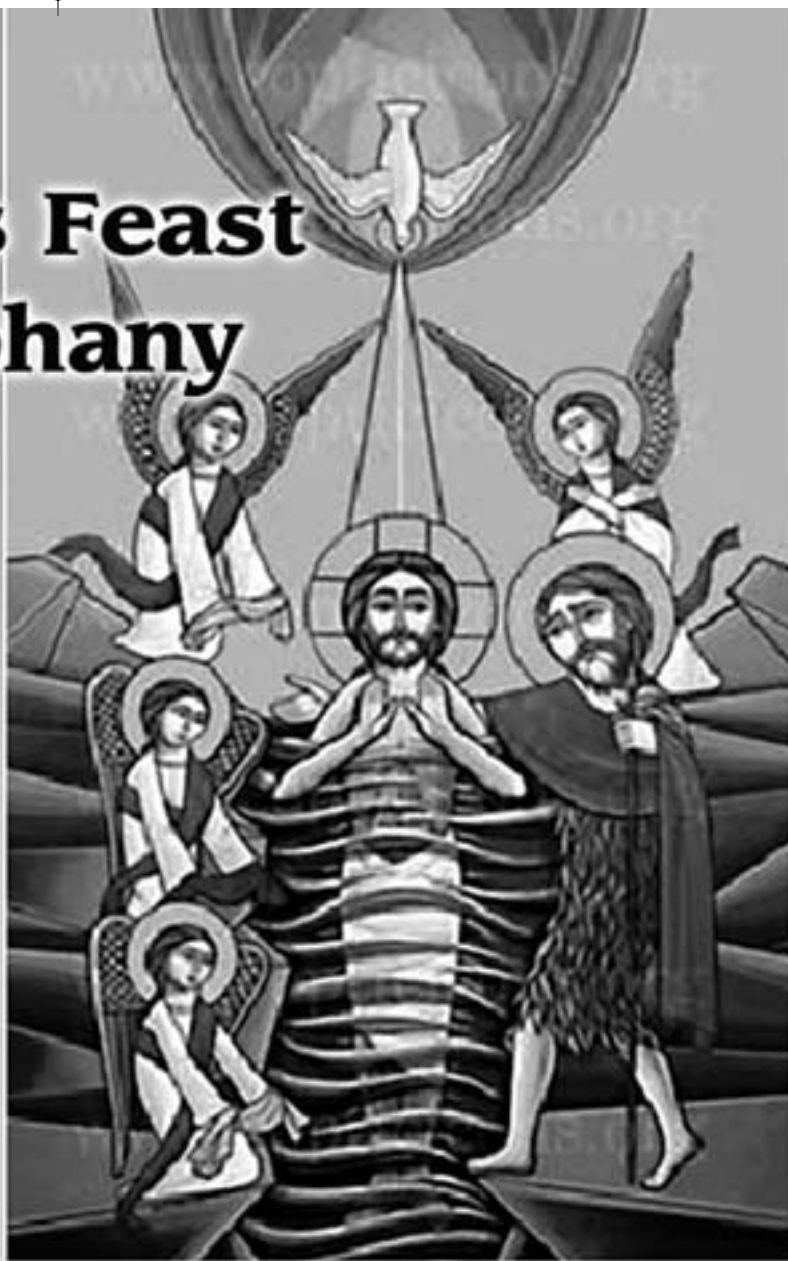
In Baptism.....I receive Washing Away of Sins: "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11).

In Baptism.....I obtain Forgiveness of My Sins: "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:37-38).

In Baptism.....I put on Christ: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:27). **put on The lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lust (romans13:14)**

In Baptism.....I become Members of the Church: "Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Colossians 2:12).

In Baptism.....I have Newness of Life: "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just



as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4).

In Baptism.....I become a New Creation. In Genesis 1:2-3, the Bible says, "The earth was without form, and void, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Then God started His new creation through the water and the Spirit beginning with the light. This is exactly what happened with us. After the fall of man, his life became void and the darkness of sin prevailed upon his heart, mind and conscience. Then God had to recreate him through the work of the Holy Spirit in the baptism. He gave him a new life, a new nature and made his heart a Paradise where He found His rest that He can say, "I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse." (Song of Songs 5:1). This is clear fulfillment to what St. Paul has said, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17).





CHRIST IN

By Fr. Gawargious A. Kolta

THE BOOK OF GENESIS (22)

Jacob blessed his sons continued (Gen.49)

11- Joseph:

Jacob blessed his beloved son Joseph, saying: ***“Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel, by the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessing of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers”*** (Gen. 49:22-26).

Joseph's name in Hebrew means “He will add”. He is the firstborn of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel. Jacob has blessed him more than all his brothers. He carried the seeds of two tribes; Manasseh and Ephraim. He has been **honest in his relationship with God, and he loved all; as a son, a brother, a slave, a prisoner, or a leader in the palace of Pharaoh**. That is why his father called him “a fruitful bough” twice.

Fr. Tadros Malaty said that Joseph represents the human soul, honest to God and not ceasing to offer spiritual love, despite the numerous oppressions and fierce spiritual wars. That soul keeps on being a fruitful bough, connected to the origin, according to the words of the Lord: ***“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit”*** (Jn. 15:5). It is the bough that is attached to the well of the water of the Holy Spirit that grants it life and fruits. It grows to become ***“branches run over the wall”*** He added that through abiding in Christ, and enjoying the work of the Holy Spirit, the soul faces Satan and his hosts ***“the archers”***, such a bitter war, should justify him and reveal his conquest.

St. Hippolytus said that Jacob has blessed Joseph more than his brothers, because he saw prefigured in him the mysteries which, would be **fulfilled in Christ**. Therefore Jacob did not praise Joseph but the **One** who was symbolized by Joseph.

St. Ambrose said the same and added that on this account he blessed Him who was awaited rather than him who was seen, saying ***“Joseph is a fruitful bough”***. Christ is the One to

be fruitful and increased (Jn. 3:30), because through His perfect and saving name, grace was piled up and abounded in this world. He added that as Joseph's brothers began to envy him, moreover He whom Joseph prefigured was also met with envy from those whom He loved more (Mat. 15:24).

St. Ephrem the Syrian said that just as Jacob depended on Joseph instead of Reuben his firstborn, so also **instead of Adam**, the firstborn and rebellious one, **the world had One Son of old age**, in the latter days of the world, so that the whole world might stand and lean on Him as if on a pillar. He added that as Joseph became a wall of plenty to his brothers in the time of famine, so also our Lord became the wall of knowledge to the world in the time of error.

Many Scholars interpreted the verse ***“the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessing of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors”***.

St. Ambrose said that Jacob spoke of the breasts, or the two Testaments, in one of which Christ was foretold and in the other He was revealed. He did well to say “breasts” because the **Son nurtured us** and offered us to the Father as people nourished on spiritual milk.

St. Hippolytus interpreted the verse ***“Blessings of the breasts and the womb & the blessings of your father”*** Christologically. That could be **referring to the divine and the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ**. He was born a second time from a mother's womb. The Lord said through the prophet: ***“Who formed Me from the womb to be His servant”*** (Isa. 49:5). According to the flesh, He took His origin in the latter times from the virginal womb of St. Mary after He was borne for nine months, so that He might appear to be visible. He added that since the Word was begotten both God and man, with good reasoning Jacob prophesied using the womb for a Father and a mother.

St. Ambrose also said that Jacob **anticipated the Lord's divinity and humanity**, when he blessed Joseph of the blessings of the father and mother. He interpreted the verse: ***“blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father”*** saying that it must be understood in a spiritual sense, as the womb of the Father indicates the innermost dwelling of



the Father's love and of His nature, in which the Son always dwells. It is mentioned that: ***"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him"*** (Jn. 1:18).

Fr. Tadros Malaty said that Jacob asked for his son Joseph every blessing possible, praying on his behalf to God; the Shepherd and the Stone of Israel, who will help him, asking from the Almighty, to bless him with the blessings of heaven above, and the blessings of the deep that lies beneath. He asked God to grant Joseph more blessings than given to Isaac by Abraham and to Jacob by Isaac. So Jacob loved his son Joseph more than himself. He prayed for him to be granted blessings that will cover **his soul** (blessing of heaven) and **his body** (blessing of the deep that lies beneath).

Joseph became eternally blessed more than his brothers, when Jacob said: ***"and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers"***. Fr. Tadros Malaty said that Joseph became a "Nazarite" among his brothers, interceding on their behalf.

12- Benjamin:

Jacob blessed his son Benjamin saying: ***"Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. In the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil"*** (Gen. 49:27). This prophecy refers here to the courage of the tribe of Benjamin and its might in the wars. It was said in the book of Judges, about the tribe of Benjamin: ***"Every one of them could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss"*** (Jud. 20:16). According to the Septuagint version the verse ***'divide the spoil'*** is translated: ***'divide the food'***.

Many Scholars such as **St. Ephrem the Syrian**, and **St. Ambrose** said that the devil has so many wolves that he sends against the sheep of Christ. They **referred to Saul of Tarsus**, who was from the tribe of Benjamin, he was a wolf when he scattered and devoured the sheep of the church. He was a wolf when he was Saul, when he went to the houses and drag men and women off to prison. He was a wolf when he breathed threats of murder against the disciples of the Lord and asked for letters from the chief priest to seize His humble servants (Acts 9:1-2). But afterwards, the Lord's compassionate love **turned the wolf, St. Paul from a persecutor to a disciple and teacher**, when he preached the word of God to the Gentiles and stirred very many to faith. He submitted and delivered himself to the church as food. He who had been a wolf, became a shepherd.

St. Jerome presented us with the same thought, saying that St. Paul, the persecutor of the church, who was a wolf coming out of the tribe of Benjamin to devour a prey, bowed his head before Ananias, one of the Christ's flock, to have his eyes healed, before the medicine of Baptism (Acts 9:17, 18). He added that in the morning St. Paul, the persecutor of the church, was a wolf that devours; but in the evening he became food to be offered submitted to the lamb Ananias.

St. Hippolytus said that the prophecy of Jacob **referred to King Saul**, who was from the tribe of Benjamin. He was like a wolf when he threatened to devour King David.

St. Rufinus said that the reference of the verse ***'at night he shall divide the spoil'*** could be understood of St. Paul, after being enlightened by the grace of the Lord separated the spiritual and the corporeal aspects of the law. He divided the letter from the Spirit, saying: ***"the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"*** (2 Cor. 3:6). It is said that he divides the food at evening.

Joseph reassures love to his brothers:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said: ***"Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us all the evil which we did to him"*** (Gen. 50:15). They asked him to forgive them. Joseph could not help himself before their humiliation, and he wept. **He did not see their evil**, but he saw God's hand that turned their evil into good for all. Joseph said to them: ***"You meant evil against me; but God meant it good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive"***.

St. John Chrysostom said that he calmed their fears, insisting on the role of the creative wisdom of God in all that had taken place. The coming back of the brothers to Joseph with repentance, **refers to the coming back of the Jews, at the end of days to faith**, through receiving the Lord whom they denied, after the consummation of the church of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:25-29).

Fr. Tadros Malaty added that this will happen when they ask for forgiveness for what they had done, forsaking their arrogance and their thoughts as a fanatic nation, but as believers, accepting Him, whom they have persecuted before.

Joseph's last days:

Joseph's age (110 years) was mentioned in the text in order to indicate that he had controlled Egypt for 80 years. This indicates that **how much greater were the rewards than the hardships he endured**. He nobly bore everything thankfully; i.e. the recompense was manifold. He is a good example for us, that we must bear one another's burden in order to fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

St. John Chrysostom said that Joseph's last request from the children of Israel was to carry his bones out of Egypt in their exodus. He lived the faith of his fathers, believing that his people would surely set forth to the land of Canaan; that is why he took an oath from them, saying: ***"God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here"*** (Gen. 50:25).

This was realized by the hands of Moses and Joshua. St. Paul said: ***"By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones"*** (Heb. 11:20).

(Ancient Christian Commentary on Genesis, II, p.320-351). (Father Tadros Malaty, on Genesis, p. 375-392).



The Letter to the Church of Smyrna When Suffering Strikes



By Fr. Augustinos Hanna
(Revelation 2:8 -11 & James 1:12)

It has been said that music is a universal language, so is suffering. Neither requires words in order to communicate; both penetrate deeper into our souls than words ever could. However, they have differences. Music can be enjoyed and appreciated by even the hardest heart. Suffering, on the contrary, is rarely welcomed by anyone, in fact we'll go to almost any length to avoid it. But there is not always an escape. No matter how short or long our lives, each of us will experience some degree of affliction. So how should we handle it when it strikes? This second letter of our Lord to the second church of the seven first-century churches, Smyrna, gives us some clues....

1. Instruction from a related verse:

James 1:12 closely ties into the message of Christ's letter to Smyrna (Izmir in Turkey):

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." There are two main thoughts in this passage:

(1) When we suffer a trial, we will receive a blessing, a special favor from God, we will be blessed. This divine blessing will consist of an increase in knowledge and growth in spiritual strength. Depending on God through suffering brings an understanding about life. This deeper insight gives us the ability to make some sense out of our anguish and to learn how to be content in spite of it.

(2) Once our trial is over, we will receive a special reward from God. This reward is called here "the crown of life", eternal life, where those who have chosen to endure for Christ on earth will be rewarded with a special degree of dignity, victory and happiness. So, God gives a two-part blessing to Christians who faithfully endure suffering (compare with what St. Paul said about the crown of righteousness which was given to him as a reward for all his toil and good fight, finish-

ing the race and keeping the faith (2 Tim. 4:5-8, and also what St. Peter said about the crown of glory for the faithful shepherds, in 1 Peter 5:14).

2. Christ's report on the condition of Smyrna's Angel (servant): The Lord Jesus mentioned three facts about the state of the church at Smyrna:

(1) **He said that He knew about her works and tribulation** (v.9). The Greek word for tribulation is a crushing pressure that often leads to death.

(2) **Christ stated that He knew about their deep poverty** (v.9). They were destitute, most probably because of economic pressure for their refusal to participate in Emperor's worship. Their faithfulness to Christian life forced them to sacrifice their legal and even their human rights. But in the sight of the Lord they were rich (v.9).

(3) **He said that He knew about their cruel persecution, that He referred to their persecutors as "a synagogue of Satan."** It was a common plot between the Jews and the Romans against His church.

3. Some encouragements as they suffer: Sometimes it is very hard for us to find a word to say to believers living under intense persecution and poverty. The Lord Jesus Christ here, began His words on encouragement with three exhortations:

(1) **"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer."** Fear is the thief of peace. Fear seriously damages the ship of courage, and can drown sailors of the faith.

(2) **It is a temporary hard time:** "Indeed the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation **ten days.**" (v.10).

(3) **The reward:** "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (v. 10). Christ's people are to be faithful until death, unto the end, and they will be given the imperishable crown of life. Only those who faithfully love Christ to the end of their lives will receive this honor (Rev. 2:10; James 1: 12). The Lord Jesus also promised these believers that **they**





would *"not be hurt by the second death"* (Rev. 2:11).

The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, the Angel of the church of Smyrna:

A) St. Polycarp was the church leader and Bishop of Smyrna.

B) He was a disciple of St. John the Evangelist and one of the Apostolic Fathers.

C) He refused to swear allegiance to Caesar and to blaspheme Christ.

D) The aged Bishop, at age of 86, rejected all threats and said his famous saying: "Eighty six year have I served Christ, and He never once wronged me; so how then shall I blaspheme my King who has saved me?!"

St. Polycarp was burned alive by fire. But right before his death, he preached the governor and the entire congregation saying, "You threaten me with fire, which burns for an hour and is soon extinguished; but the fire of the future judgment, and of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly, you are ignorant of."

Points for personal meditation:

- 1) Are you faithful to the Lord in your fervent love that you are ready to sacrifice your life for His sake?
- 2) Are you faithful to Him in your daily and worldly practices?
- 3) Are you faithful to the Lord in your daily prayers?
- 4) Are you faithful in your daily Bible readings and studies?
- 5) Are faithful in your fasting?
- 6) Are you faithful in your service and talents?
- 7) Are you faithful in keeping the Lord's commandments?
- 8) Do you seek the praise of people or the praise of God and the crown of life?



Frhanna,

American Pastor Saeed's sham trial in Iran began yesterday.

Iran claims that his conversion to Christianity and work in house churches politically undermines the Islamic Republic.

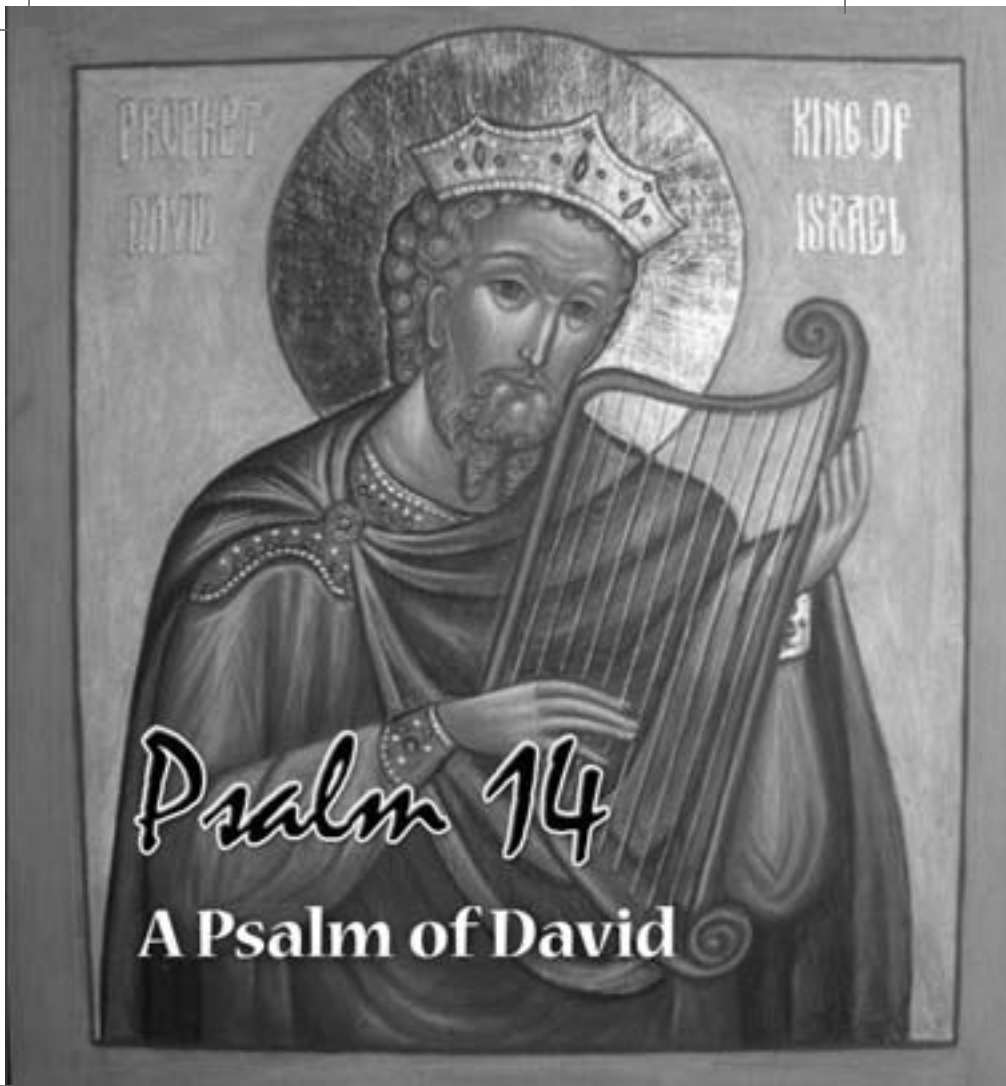
His Iranian attorney, who had less than 24 hours to prepare, strongly argued that Pastor Saeed's faith did not threaten Iran's national security.

This was Pastor Saeed's only day to present a defense, and his father was the only family member allowed at trial. The trial against him may continue, and a sentence, which could be long-term imprisonment or even death, is expected next week.

The U.S. State Department's response has been abysmal; it has failed to demand this American citizen's release. There is still time to speak out and call for international pressure on Iran. We must not be silent.

Jay Sekulow

ACLJ Chief Counsel



DIVISION

- The world's foolish creed, v. 1.
- Its practical influence in corrupting morals, vv. 1-3
- The persecuting tendencies of sinners, v. 4
- The sinner's alarms, v. 5.
- The ridicule of the godly, v. 6.
- A prayer for the manifestation of the Lord, to His people's joy, v. 7.

EXPOSITION

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." They are corrupt. They have done abominable works. There is none who does good.

1. The fool: the atheist is the preeminent and universal fool. He denies God because he is a fool by nature. Having denied God, it is no wonder that he becomes a fool in practice. Sin is always folly; it is the height of sin to attack the existence of the Most High. To say that there is no God, to ignore the plainest evidence, is obstinacy. To oppose the common consent of mankind is stupidity. To stifle consciousness is madness. If the sinner could by atheism destroy the God he hates, there would be some sense, although much wickedness,

in his infidelity. Denying the existence of fire, however, does not prevent its burning the one who is in it. Doubting God's existence will not stop the Judge of all the earth from destroying the rebel who breaks His laws. Atheism is a crime that provokes heaven. Atheism will bring down terrible vengeance on the fool who indulges it. "A fool's tongue cuts his own throat." In this case it kills soul and body forever. Would to God the mischief stopped there. Yet one fool makes a hundred others, and a noisy blasphemer spreads this horrible doctrine as lepers spread the plague. The word used here for fool is *nabal*, which means fading, dying, or falling away, as a withered leaf or flower. It is a title given to the foolish as having lost the juice and sap of wisdom, reason, honesty and godliness. Trapp hits the mark when he calls him, "That sapless fellow, that carcase of a man, that walking sepulcher in whom all religion and right reason is withered, wasted, dried up and decayed. Some translate it as "apostate," and others translate it as "wretch." We must shun the appearance of doubt as to God's presence, activity, power, and love. Mistrust is folly. Who would want to be ranked with the fool in this text? Yet never forget that all the unregenerate are essentially

fools.

The fool has said in his heart.

Many profess to believe, yet in their hearts they say the opposite. Are they audacious enough to utter their folly? Did the Lord look on their thoughts as words? Is this where man first becomes an unbeliever, in his heart not in his head? When he talks atheistically, is it a foolish heart speaking in an attempt to shout down the voice of conscience? We think so. If the affections were set on truth and righteousness, there would be no difficulty in settling the question of a present personal Deity. Because the heart dislikes the good and the right, it is no wonder that it wants to be rid of *Elohim*, the great moral Governor, the Patron of rectitude, the Punisher of iniquity. While hearts remain what they are, we must not be surprised at the prevalence of skepticism. A corrupt tree will produce a corrupt fruit. Everyone, while they lie un-renewed and unreconciled to God are nothing but mad. What wonder then, that they rave? Fools are common to all time and to all countries; they grow without watering and are found the world over. The spread of mere intellectual enlightenment will not diminish their number. Since it is an affair of the heart, this folly and great learning often dwell together. Answering skeptical frivolous objections is labor lost, until



grace enters the mind to make a willing to believe. Fools can raise more objections in an hour than wise men can answer in seven years. It is their game to set blocks for the wise to stumble over. Let the preacher aim at the heart and preach the all-conquering love of Jesus. The preacher, by God's grace, will win more doubters to the faith than any hundred of the best debaters who only direct their arguments to the intellect.

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.

So monstrous is the assertion that David hardly dared to put it as a positive statement. It is not merely the wish of the sinner's corrupt nature and the hope of his rebellious heart; he manages to assert it, and at certain seasons, he things he believes it. It is a solemn reflection that some who worship God with their lips may be saying in their hearts, No God, it is worth nothing that the fool does not say that there is no God. Deity in the abstract is not so much the object of attack as the covenant, personal, ruling, and governing presence of God. God as ruler, lawgiver, worker, and savior, is the target at which the arrows of human wrath are shot. How impotent the malice! Mad is the rage that raves and foams against Him in whom "we live and move and find our being" (Act 17:28). How horrible the insanity that leads one, who owes all to God, to cry out, there is no God!

They are corrupt: This refers to all, and we have the warrant of the Holy Spirit (Rom.3). Where there is enmity to God, there is deep, inner depravity. The words are spoken in an active sense, "They are corrupt." This reminds us that sin is not only passive in our nature as the source of evil, but that we actively fan the flame and corrupt ourselves. We make our own chains by habit.

They have done abominable works: When people renounce the Most High God; who can tell where they will end? Observe the state of the world before the flood (Gen. 6:12) and remember that human nature is unchanged. If you want to see a terrible photograph of the world without God, read that most painful of all inspired Scripture, the first chapter of Romans. Educated Hindus have confessed that the description is literally correct in India today. Were it not for the restraining grace of God, it would be so in England, but even here it is a correct picture of things done in secret. Things loathsome to God are sweet to some palates.

There is none who does good:

Sins of omission abound where transgressions are common. Those who do the things they should not have done are sure, to leave undone those things they should have done (Rom. 7:19). What a good, except where grace reigns. Humanity, fallen and debased, is a desert without an oasis, a night without a star, a garbage heap without a jewel, a hell without a bottom.

The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of

men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good. No, not one.

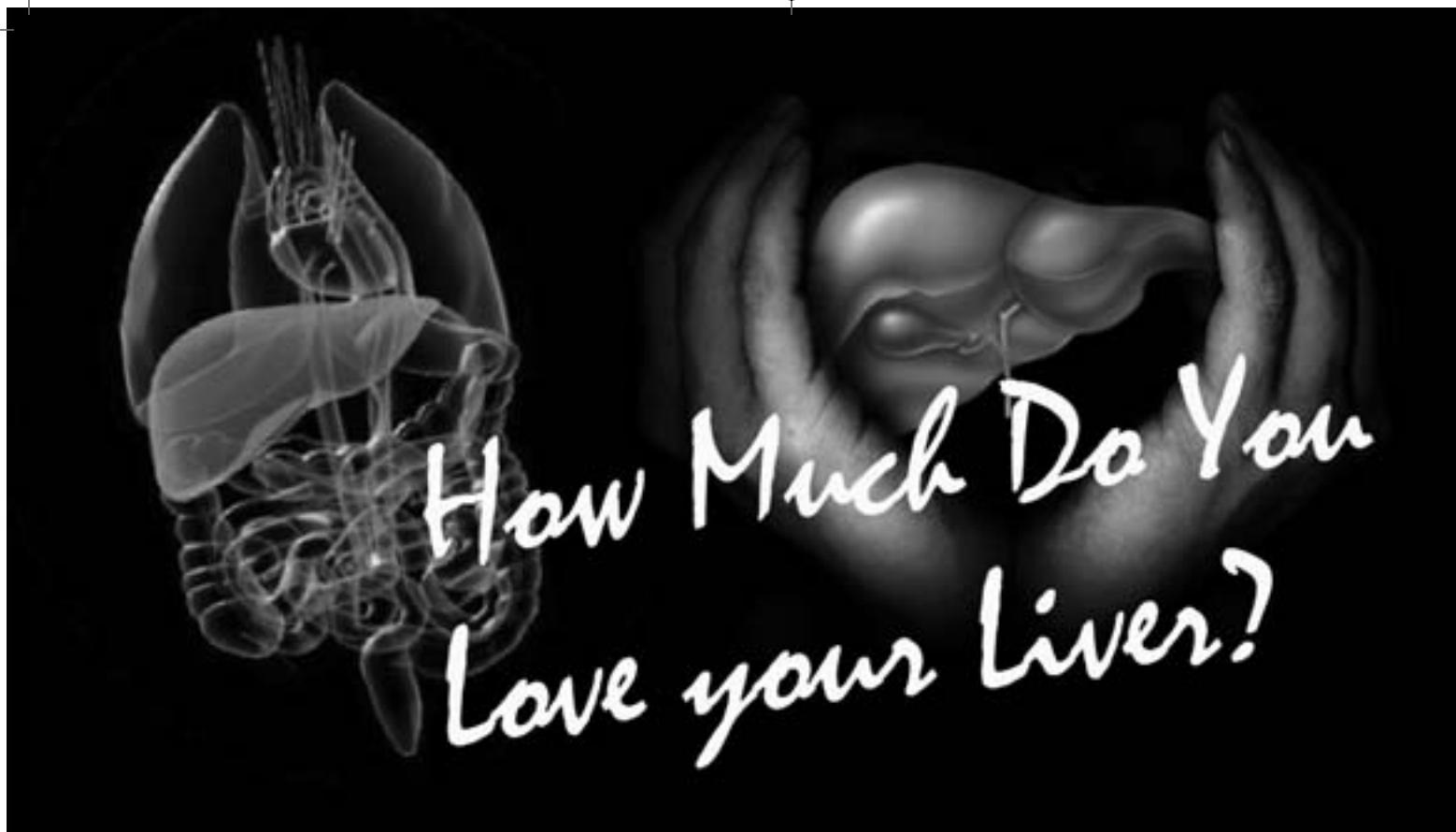
2. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men. As from a watchtower, or other elevated observation, the lord is represented as watching intently. He will not punish blindly like a tyrant that orders an indiscriminate massacre because of a rumor. What condescending interest and impartial justice are here! Sodom, visited before it was destroyed (Gen. 19:1), illustrates the careful way Divine Justice watches sin before taking vengeance. It searches out the righteous, so that they do not perish with the guilty. The eyes of Omniscience ransack the globe and pry among every people and nation **to see if there are any who understand, who seek God.** God knows the good, is quick to discern it, and would be delighted to find it. Yet as he views the unregenerate, His search is fruitless, for of all the race of Adam, every unrenewed soul, is an enemy of God and goodness. The objects of the Lord's search are not the wealthy, the great, or the educated; even with all they have to offer, they cannot meet the great Governor's demands. Nor is He looking for superlative eminence in virtue; **He seeks any who understand, who seek God.** He looks for any that seek God, any who are willing and anxious to find Him. Surely it is not too much to expect that, if they have any right understanding, they will seek Him, but even this low degree of good is not found by Him who sees all things. Humanity loves the hideous negation. "There is no God." With their backs to their Creator, the sun of their life, they journey into the dreary region of unbelief and alienation, a land of darkness, the shadow of death, without any order, where the light is as darkness.

3. They have all turned aside. All have apostatized from the Lord their Maker, from His laws, and from the eternal principles of right. Like stubborn heifers, they have sturdily refused to receive the yoke; like errant sheep, they have found a gap and left the pasture. The original speaks of the race as a whole; humanity as a whole has become depraved in heart and defiled in life.

Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge. Who ear up my people as they eat bread, and do not call on the Lord?

4. Hatred of God and a corrupt life are motivations that produce persecution. People without saving knowledge of divine things become slaves of iniquity. They have no heart to cry to the Lord for deliverance, but they seek to amuse themselves devouring God's poor and despised people. It is hand bondage to be workers of iniquity. A worker at the galleys, or in the mines of Siberia, is no more degraded and wretched. The toil is hard and the reward dreadful. Those who have no knowledge choose such slavery, but those who are taught by God cry to be rescued. **There they are in great fear, for God is with the generation of the righteous.**





How Can You Love it, if you don't know it?

Hi... I'm Your Liver! Let me tell you how much I love you...in 9 ways

By Behnam, MD, DS.

1. I store the iron reserves you need, as well as a lot of vitamins and other minerals.

Without me, you wouldn't have the strength to carry on!

2. I make bile to help digest your food.

Without me, you'd waste away to nothing.

3. I detoxify poisonous chemicals you give me, and that includes alcohol, beer, wine and drugs (prescribed and over-the-counter) as well as illegal substances.

Without me, your "bad" habits would kill you.

4. I store energy, like a battery, by stockpiling sugar (carbohydrates, glucose and fat) until you need it.

Without me, the sugar level in your blood could fall dramatically and you'd go into a coma.

5. I make the blood that got your system going even before you were born.

Without me, you wouldn't be here!

6. I manufacture new proteins that your body needs to stay healthy and grow.

Without me, you wouldn't grow properly!

7. I remove poisons from the air, exhaust smoke

and chemicals you breathe.

Without me, you'd be poisoned by pollutants!

8. I make clotting factors that stop the bleeding when you accidentally prick yourself.

Without me, you'd bleed to death!

9. I help defend you against the germs going into your body all the time. I take those cold germs, flu bugs and other germs you encounter, and knock them dead - or at least weaken them.

Without me, you'd be a sitting duck for every infection known to man.

That's how much I love you...but do you love me?

Let me tell you some easy ways to love me, your liver:

Don't drown me in beer, alcohol or wine!

Even one drink is too much for some people and could scar me for life.

Watch those drugs! All drugs are chemicals, and when you mix them up without a doctor's advice you could create something poisonous that could damage me badly.

I scar easily, and those scars, called "cirrhosis" are permanent. Medicine is sometimes necessary. But taking pills when they aren't necessary is a bad habit. All those





chemicals can really hurt a liver.

Be careful with aerosol sprays!

Remember, I have to detoxify what you breathe in, too. So when you are cleaning with aerosol cleaners, make sure the room is ventilated, or wear a mask. That goes double for bug sprays, mildew sprays, paint sprays and all those other chemical sprays you use. Be careful what you breathe!

Watch what gets on your skin!

Those insecticides you put on trees and shrubs not only kill bugs they can get to me right through your skin and destroy my cells, too. Remember they're all chemicals. Cover your skin with gloves, long sleeves, a hat and mask every time.

Don't eat too much fatty food!

I make the cholesterol your body needs, and I try to make the right amount. Give me a break. Eat a good, well balanced nourishing diet. If you eat the right stuff for me, I'll really do my stuff for you!

Insecticides are in the air or if you're handling them.



WARNING

I can't and won't tell you I'm in trouble until

I'm almost at the end of my rope... and yours.

Remember: I am a non-complainer. Overloading me with drugs, alcohol and other junk can destroy me! This may be the only warning you will ever get.

Take My Advice, Please!

Check me out with your doctor.

Blood screening tests can identify some trouble.

If I'm soft and smooth, that's good. If I'm hard and bumpy, that could mean trouble.

If your doctor suspects trouble, ULTRA SOUND and CT scans can look into it.

My life, and yours, depends on how you treat me.

Now you know how much I care for you.

Please treat *me* with tender loving care.

Your silent partner and ever-loving lover...LIVER.



The Family Table

It had been said that the most important piece of furniture in the house is the family table. Edmund Barbotin calls it, "...the social furnishing. It is made for reunions. Being accessible from all sides, the table is made to be surrounded...It is here that the family, daily scattered is daily reunited."

However well or poorly made, the table is the family's treasure. Gathered at table, every meal is called to be a communion in the sharing of food, in our conversation, in our prayer. The great religious festivals of the Old Testament were celebrated, and are still celebrated today by our Jewish brethren, around the family table. We often forget that we Orthodox Christians come out of the Old Testament. Our roots are there. We need to reclaim the practice of celebrating the great festivals of the Church year in our home around the family table. This is how they become real and indelible to our children.

St. John Chrysostom in a sermon instructed husbands in the procedure for the family meal: "After eating they are to stand up with their wives and children and sing hymns together. The whole proceedings are to conclude with a prayer.

Dr. Lee Salk, Cornell's popular child psychologists, writers, "Mealtime is incredibly important. People used to talk and listen at meal time, but now they sit in front of their television set with their TV dinner. I don't care how busy you are- you can take that time with your children. You can talk about your dreams; you can talk about your day; you can talk about your frustrations. The busier you are the more valuable mealtime is for your child. If we don't spend this time with our youngsters, they are not going to develop healthy attitudes toward family life.

Security in Christ

St. John Chrysostom, who favored reforms, was challenged by the Empress Eudoxia, and threatened with exile.

- "I will banish you," said the Empress.
- "No, you cannot banish me from Christ, because it is written, "The earth is the LORD'S", said Chrysostom.
- Then I will take your life."
- "You cannot. I live and have my being in Christ."
- "I will confiscate your wealth."
- "You cannot," was the response, "for in Christ I have all riches."
- At last the Empress said, "I shall cause you to lose all your friends, and you will be an outcast."
- "But you cannot, for I have a Friend that sticks closer than a brother."

* * *

Yes, Christ is our security

+ "Mary has chosen the good part, which will not be taken away from her" (Lk. 10:42).

+ The Lord Jesus said, "I give them-my sheep- eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hands" (Jn. 10:28).





Dear Fathers,

Thank you again for your help with Anna's baptism and for participating in the prayers. We are thankful to have the blessing of H.G. Bishop Serapion in the baptism. We were also blessed to have our fathers who raised us in our church participate in our baby baptism

ANNA IRINI ISKANDER

Please remember us in your prayers and pray for Anna to grow in stature, grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and His church.

Love, Drs. John and Elizabeth Iskander

St. John church congratulates Drs. John and Elizabeth Iskander for the baptism of their baby

ANNA IRINI ISKANDER

May the Lord bless the child and her grandparents, Magdy and Amal Iskander; Makram and Fawzia Shehata and family.



St. John Church congratulates Peter and Miral Beshay for the baptism of their baby girl

Rachel

May the Lord Jesus bless her and grant her growth, health and strength and keep her in His care.



Congratulations



St. John Church congratulates
Steve and Maryann Yacoub

On their wedding, praying the Lord to bless their future life together and grant them every spiritual and physical blessing and a house built on Christ the Rock and His word.



Our dear **Holly and Michael,**

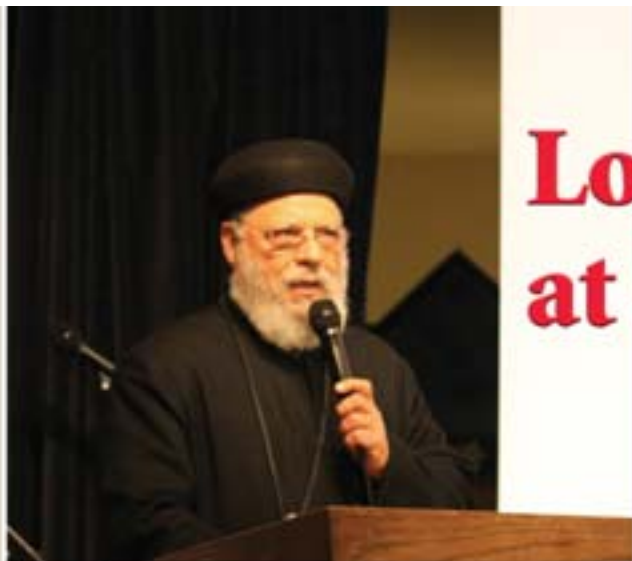
Congratulations on your engagement. We pray God blesses your future together so that He may complete His Work in you.

We wish you all His blessings on the road to Holy Matrimony -**Love, Adel Farag, Michelle, Amye, and Rebekah Farag**

Our beloved son **Michael and daughter Holly,** Congratulations on your engagement. God bless you both and grant you joy and peace for your future marriage -
Love, Adel & Layla Soliman, Farid & Rania

St. John Church in Covina congratulates
Holly Farag and Michael Adel on their engagement. May the Lord Jesus complete their marriage in joy and peace.

Logos TV Banquet at St. John





**Congratulations for those new comers
who finished the first course in adult English language**

