

SAINT

VOL 27 No. 291

March / April 2016

A COPTIC CHRISTIAN BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

COVINA, CA



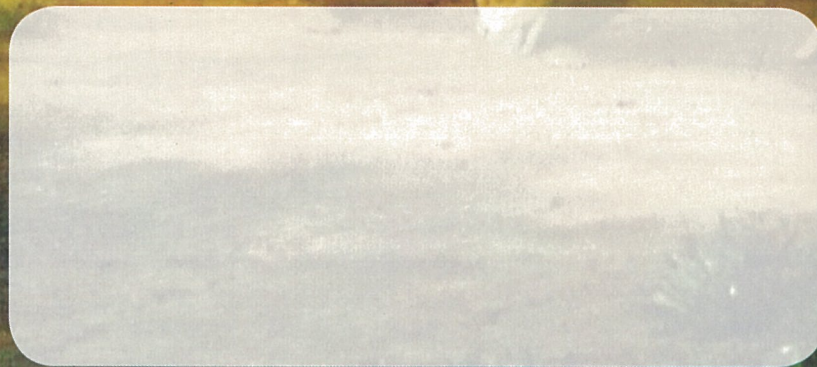
JOHN

“فَانْفَتَحَتْ أَعْيُنُهُمَا وَعَرَفَاہ...”

(لوقا ٢٤ : ٣١)

“AND THEIR EYES WERE OPENED,
AND THEY KNEW HIM”

(LUKE 24:31)



**A CHRISTIAN COPTIC ORTHODOX
BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE
PUBLISHED BY**

THE APOSTLE
SAINT JOHN
COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH
COVINA CA

(ISSN # 1530-5600)

21329 Cienega Ave. Covina, California 91724,

a parish of the Christian Coptic Orthodox

Patriarchate of Egypt under the Papacy of

H.H. POPE TWADROS II

The 118 Patriarch of Alexandria and the Dio-
cese of Southern California and Hawaii under

H.G. BISHOP SERAPION

St. John reflects the Biblical, doctrinal, and
spiritual views of the early Church in English
and Arabic.

Editor in Chief:

Fr. Augustinos Hanna

Customer Service:

(909) 592-8847

Annual Subscription

\$50:00 in U.S.A

\$75:00 in foreign countries

(as a suggested donation).

"Periodicals Postage paid at Covina, Ca.

and additional mailing offices

*Postmaster:

Send address changes to St. John

P.O. Box 2144 Covina, CA 91722-8144

*Verse
of the Month*



*"You have crucified Him whom
God raised up"* (Acts 2:23,24).

IN THIS ISSUE

Schedule & News.....	3
Today you will be with Me in Paradise.....By Pope Shenouda	4
Chronicle of Crucifixion	5
Events of the Holy Week.....	6
See the Salvation of the Lord.....By Mark Hanna	7
Raising our Children.....By Fr. Gawargios Kolta	8
Endure	10
Life, Free Will and Truth.....By Dr. Emil Goubran	11
Nobody Teaches you How to Die, Except Jesus....Fr. Anthony Coniaris	12
How should I Respond to Failures and Setbacks.....	14
The Barren Fig Tree.....By Fr. Augustinos	15
Does Satan Cause all of our Adversity?...../ Fearful Tears	16
Lessons from Palm Sunday.....By Fr. Augustinos Hanna	17
I Don't Understand God's Will /Justice and Mercy Combined.....	18
Commemorating the Coptic Martyrs in Libya By Fr. Benedict.....	20
The Paschal homily	21

**SCHEDULE of MEETINGS and EVENTS
for the MONTH of March & April 2016**

SUNDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
+ English Liturgy 8:00 - 11:00 a.m.	+ Liturgy 9:00 a.m. -12:00 During Lent	+ Liturgy 12:00 - 3:00 p.m. During Lent	+ Liturgy from 8-10 am
* * *	+ Thursday Morning + Senior Citizen Club 11:00 - 3:00 a.m.		+ Vespers; Bible Study 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. + Beginners' Deacons- Meeting 5: 30 p.m. + Elementary Meeting 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.
+ Arabic Liturgy 8:00 - 11:15 a.m.			
Servants' Meeting + 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. 2 nd & 4 th Sunday. + Boy Scouts 12 pm	+ THURSDAY Family Meeting 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. Fr. Augustinos	+Arabic Youth Meeting 8:00 - 10:00 p.m. Fr. Gawargios	+ New members Fr. Daniel 3-4 pm + College Youth Meeting 7:30- 9:00 p.m.

Tutoring for new
students 6:00-8:00 pm
for girls & boys on
Thursday 6-8 p.m.

High School & J. High
Meetings 7:15 - 9:00 p.m.

Email your articles/comments/requests to Frhanna @mystjohn.org

Or visit us online @ www.mystjohn.org

Fax : (909) 592-5088 / Tel: (909) 592 - 0475 / Church Tel: (909) 592-8847

Church Book Store: (562) 900 -2694 & (909) 730 - 9976

NEWS of

March & April 2016

1. The Holy Lent:

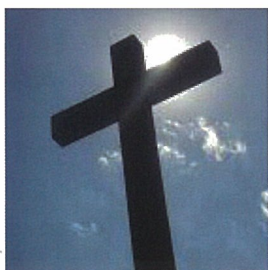
The Holy Lent starts on Monday, March 7, until the Feast of the Resurrection on Sunday, May 1, 2016. Daily Liturgies during the Lent are as follows:

- + **Wednesday: 9:00–12:00 noon.**
- + **Friday: 12:00– 3:00 p.m.**
- + **Saturday from 8: 10 a.m.**



2. Appearance of the Holy Cross:

On Saturday, March 19, the church celebrates the Feast of the Appearance of the Holy Cross. The Liturgy will be in festal tunes of Palm Sunday. The procession of the cross takes place during matins. Vespers, Friday, 7 pm.



3. March & April Famous' Saints:

- (1) March 9: Departure of Pope Kyrellos 6.
- (2) March 17 Departure of Pope Shenouda III
- (3) Saturday March 21: Departure of Fr. Bishoy Kamel.
- (4) March 28: Departure of Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim.



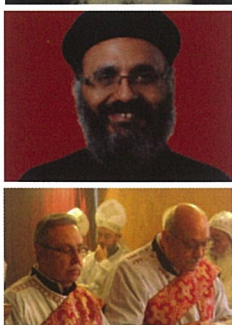
4. The 35th. Anniversary of Fr. Gawargious Kolta:

St. John's priests, congregation and the Board of Deacons congratulate the very Rev. Fr. Gawargious on his ordination in priesthood on March 15, 1981; wishing him health, strength, fruitful service and long life.



5. The 3rd Anniversary of Fr. George Aziz and Archdeacons Thomas and Antonious' Ordinations

St. John church congratulates Fr. George and Archdeacons Thomas and Antonious on their third anniversary, praying the Lord Jesus Christ to grant them every blessing in their life and ministry.



6. The 4th Commemoration of H.H. Pope Shenouda III:

H.G. Bishop Serapion, the Clergy and the people of the diocese of Los Angeles are holding a special prayer in commemoration of the fourth year of the departure of our beloved father the Thrice Blessed Pope Shenouda on Sunday, March 20, 2016 at 12:30 p.m. at St. John Church, Covina. All are invited to have the blessing of the occasion.



7. H.H. Pope Tawadros II:

+ His Holiness presided a big celebration in honor of late Fr. Salib Sorial as a role model of ministry.

+ He also attended the funeral of Deacon Dr. Makram Mehanney and praised him as the "Saint of Medicine" in Egypt, who established many companies and factories of medicine competing with foreign industry and donating large amounts of medicine to millions of the poor and sick.



8. H.G. Bishop Serapion:

+ On January 31, His Grace Bishop Serapion travelled to Egypt to attend the committee of the Coptic/Russian relations.

+ He also headed the regional Committee for the Family Council of North America at New Jersey.

+ On Sunday, February 28, Pope Tawadros promoted Bishop Serapion to the rank of Metropolitan.



News of April 2016

1) Apparition of St. Mary at her church in Zyoutum, Egypt:

Wednesday, April 2nd Liturgy is from 9 a.m



2) Feast of Annunciation:

On Thursday, April 7, the church celebrates this Lord's Feast with the Liturgy from 8:00-10:00 a.m.



3) Baptism Sunday & Lenten Luncheon:

On Sunday, April 17, St. John church celebrates Baptism Sunday; then the Annual Lenten Luncheon will follow right after the Liturgy. Tickets will be available in the Book Store on behalf of the needy.

4) Palm Sunday: April 24

St. John Church celebrates this Major Lord's Feast on April 24, in one Liturgy. The service starts from 7:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon, followed by the general funeral until 2:00 p.m.



5) Covenant Thursday: (April 28)

Pascha prayers start at 8:00 a.m., followed by the rite of washing the feet, then the Liturgy of the Eucharist until 2:00 p.m.

The evening Pasch is from 5:00-9:00 pm.



6) Good Friday: (April 29)

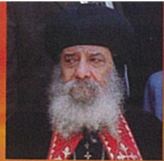
The church celebrates this great Day of Redemption and Salvation from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.



7) Feast of the Resurrection (May 1):

The Easter Liturgy will be celebrated on Saturday, April 30 from 7:00 p.m. until mid-night, followed by the Agape meal in the Church Hall.





By Pope Shenouda III

Today you will be with Me in Paradise

Say to yourself, 'if I wish to have that promise from the Lord Jesus Christ, ***I should say as that penitent thief has said: "For we receive the due reward of our deeds."***

That thief on the right side of the Lord did not rebel against the torment he was subjected to. On the contrary, all what he wanted was to be forgiven in eternity. This is an example to follow and not that of the other convict who asked that Christ would come down from the Cross and let him come down also, or as he said, "Save Yourself and us." What a wretched fellow he was!

For Christ to come down from the Cross would have brought the damnation of the entire world. If that thief was seeking salvation of his spirit, he would have said, "Would you please, Lord, stay a little on the Cross for my sake, so that I may not perish. Please, Lord bear up your pain for my sake, endure until death, so that you may pay the price of all my sins."

Be spiritual, my brother, as the thief on the right side who was anxious for his eternal life and not be as carnal as the thief on the left who cared for nothing but to save his body.

Also, do not shun or rebel against any crisis in your life, but you should say as the penitent thief has said, "For we receive the due reward of our deeds."

If you ask the Lord to remember you in His Kingdom, by the same token you should remember Him on earth and cling to Him with love and adoration.

Do not ask the Lord to remember you only on earth but also in His Kingdom. No matter what the earth has in store for you—nails, crosses or suffering—the only thing that counts is your future life in the heavenly kingdom.

It does not matter if we spend our life on earth nailed to a cross; the only thing that matters is to be with the Lord in his Paradise. Do not seek to come down from your cross, but persevere and endure.

The Lord has said to the thief: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise"; ***because He accepted his faith, confession and penitence.***

As for you, brother, did you offer God faith, confession and penitence in order to be worthy of His company in Paradise? If you have NOT done so already, start now. Take part in His suffering so that you may be glorified with Him also.

Remember that the words: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" are very reassuring and apt to fill you with joy and hope. If the thief has

gotten a promise to be in Paradise, you should be in no way discouraged whatever your sins may be. ***If the thief's repentance was accepted in the last moments of his life; you should not give up even if all your past life has been a waste.*** The Lord's promise to the thief illustrates fully how fast God's response to our prayers could be. As soon as the thief said, "Remember me, Lord", he received an immediate answer: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise". Thus, persevere in your prayers and supplications and keep reciting: "Lord, remember me"...say this over and over, from the bottom of your heart and with faith, and be sure that God will respond to you quickly. ***Do not surrender to the Devil and let shame or pride preclude you from asking.*** The tax-collector in his deep shame said, "Lord, have mercy on me." The thief in his acknowledgement of his sins, said however: Lord, remember me".

In the same manner, in spite of all the shame we experience because of our sins, and in spite of the fact that we have no means of defense or excuse, we would still recite the words: "Lord, remember me" because we have much more faith in His love and forgiveness until we get a pledge to be with him in Paradise. The Lord did not promise the thief to be in Paradise only, ***but He pledged further that the thief will be in His company. Actually, the best thing in Paradise is to be with the Lord. Truly, Paradise without the Lord is nothing, because the real bliss is to be with the Lord.*** When the Lord is among His people they enjoy His love, company, parenthood and kindness. For that reason do not ask for Paradise but ask for the Lord Himself. Desire to be with Christ to enjoy looking at His shining, joyful face. Truly, David said, ***"Your face, Lord, will I see; hide not Your face far from me."*** A few hours spent with the Lord were enough to offer him the company of the Lord forever in Paradise.....

Chronicle of Crucifixion (Good Friday)



SEXT

Simon a
Cyrenian
bore the cross.

Mocked Jesus
and led him out
to be crucified.

Put on his head
a crown of
thorns.

Stripped Jesus
and put on him
a scarlet robe.

Scourged Jesus.

Father forgive
them for they
know not what
they do.

Today shalt thou
be with me in
paradise.

Woman behold
thy son behold
thy mother.

My God, My God
why hast thou
forsaken me?

I thirst.

It is finished.

Father into thy hands
I commend my spirit.

From the sixth hour there was
darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour
D A R K N E S S

TERCE

NONE

Jesus was led
to Pontius Pilate
(second time).

Jesus was led
to Herod.

Jesus was led
to Pontius Pilate
(first time).

The cock crew.

Led Jesus to
Cai-A-Phas.

They laid hold
on Jesus.

Morning trials

Compline Vespers

Joseph of
Arimathae-A
takes the
body of our
lord from
the cross.

Joseph laid
the body of
our lord in
his own
new tomb.

PRIME





Events of the Holy Week

By Fr. Augustinos Hanna

All the days of the year to the Christian Orthodox believer are holy. And the 40 days of the Lent are the most holy days in the year. But the Holy Week is the holiest week in the Lent and it is the Holy of Holies."

The gospel writers devoted many pages to the events leading up to the crucifixion of our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ. The final week of His earthly ministry began with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the "Hosannas" of the crowd which soon changed to cries of "crucify Him" before the week was over. Jesus apparently spent most of the week teaching in the temple area during the day. His evenings were spent in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany.

Significant events during this week included the plot of the Sanhedrin, Jesus' betrayal and arrest, the trials of Christ, His journey to Golgotha and His glorious Resurrection.

WITH CHRIST DAY BY DAY

DAY	EVENT	BIBLICAL REFERENCE
SUNDAY	+ The triumphal entry into Jerusalem	Matthew 21; Mk. 11; Lk.19 & Jn.12
MONDAY	+ Cleansing the temple + Cursing the fig tree	Matt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk.19 Matt. 21:18; Mk. 11:12
TUESDAY	+ The Sanhedrin challenges Jesus' authority + Jesus foretells the destruction of the Jerusalem and signs of His second coming. + The parables of the vineyard, the wedding of the king's son, the ten virgins & the talents.	Lk. 20:1-8 Matt. 24, 25, Mk. 13, Lk.17 Matt. 20, 21, 22 & 25
WEDNESDAY	+ Mary poured a fragrant oil on the head of Jesus + Judas bargains and conspires to betray Jesus	Matt. 26:7; Jn. 12:2-7 Matt. 26: 14-16
THURSDAY	+ Jesus washes His disciples' feet; institutes Last Supper (Eucharist), the farewell speech; long prayer + Christ's sorrow and prayer in Gethsemane + The arrest of Christ + Peter denies Jesus three times	Jn. 13 - 17 Matt. 26:36-40; Lk. 22 Matt. 26; Lk. 22; Jn. 18 Matt. 26:69; Lk. 22:57
FRIDAY	+ The trials of Jesus and His crucifixion	Matt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23 & Jn. 19
SUNDAY	+ The resurrection of Christ from the dead	Matt. 28; Mk. 16; Lk. 24 & Jn. 20



WHEN THE WEAK & HELPLESS CRY TO GOD GOD SAYS "DO NOT BE AFRAID. STAND STILL, AND *See The Salvation of the Lord*"

BY MARK HANNA

When the helpless Israelites escaped from Pharaoh and found the Red Sea ahead of them and the fierce, pursuing Egyptian army behind them they cried to Moses, the man of God, and he said to them: "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever" (Exodus 14:13). When Samson stood humiliated before the Philistines with his eyes put out, his hair shorn, his strength gone, and in utter weakness, he cried to God and God whispered to him, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD."

When King David, the anointed King of Israel fled from King Saul or his own son Abshalom, with a small band of supporters, and cried to God, He sustained him by these words: "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD."

When Queen Jezebel sought to kill the Prophet Elijah, he fled and cried to God and God strengthened him saying, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD."

When the three holy youth were thrown into the fiery furnace they cried to God and He stood with them and said, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD."

When Haman wanted to annihilate the Jews during Esther's time, the helpless Jews cried to God and He saw and heard their fasting and compunction and like unto their forefathers God said, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD."

When Saul of Tarsus breathed "threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord," the Church cried to God and He reassured them, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD."

When King Herod wanted to destroy the emerging Church by killing St. James and imprisoning St. Peter, the Church prayed fervently and cried unto God and He defended her and said, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD."

When El-Moen Le Din El Alla El Fatimi wanted to execute the Copts for not being able to move Mount Mukkattam as the Bible says they could "if they had faith." When the Copts fasted and prayed, crying to God, God said, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD." When President Anwar El Sadat of Egypt exiled Pope Shenouda III, arrested and sought to arrest many loyal bishops, priests and laymen, the Church mourned, fasted and prayed and God told her, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD." When the dragon of the Book of Revelation tried to kill the pregnant woman, God heard her cry and sheltered her and encouraged her saying: "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD."

Those who killed the Lord Jesus by crucifying Him thought they had wiped away even the remembrance of Him from everyone's mind. Confusion and fear took hold of all the Lord's disciples when they saw their teacher hung on the cross with His holy hands, feet and side pierced and crying loudly unto God, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" and the Father told Him and all of us, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD." "And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken. And it will be said in that day: "Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:8-9).

Prayer

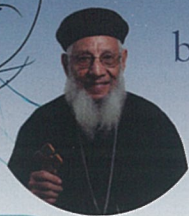
You will keep him in perfect peace,
Whose mind is stayed on You,
Because he trusts in You...

LORD, You will establish peace for us,
For You have also done all our works in us...

Strengthen the weak hands,
And make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are fearful-hearted,
Be strong, do not fear! (Isaiah 26:3, 12; 35:3-4).

How to raise your children

by Fr. Gawargious Kolta



In the previous volume of this magazine, we started to discuss the different properties and needs of children in different age stages, and we mentioned that Sophie Koulomzin mentioned in her book *"Our children and our church"* 7 stages that children pass through in their life. We are going to continue the study of the middle age childhood (6-10), in relation to church education.

3- Middle age Childhood (6-10) (cont.):

It is important to teach the children in this stage **how to pray**. In this age, the action of standing or kneeling, or making the sign of the cross and of repeating certain words is sufficient to establish for the child the fact of prayer. In this age, **their daily private prayer hovers between a dutiful repetition of prayers learned by heart** and an occasional spontaneous prayer of asking God special needs; such as "Please God let me get a bicycle for my birthday", "let my mom get well". These aspects of prayer are legitimate and valid, but something more is needed. This 'something more' cannot be imposed by any one; but is born within the child. The parent's task is to **make that habit of prayer remains as a kind of discipline**, and that the procedure of prayer does not become mechanistic to the point of obstructing the possibility of authentic prayer.

In this age, **group prayer** in Sunday school is often quite a problem. It is very difficult to establish a prayerful attitude at this kind of gathering, as some children like to joke or talk to each other. It is helpful to say a word or two to focus the children's attention and **establish quite time before the prayer is sung or read**. Before starting to sing a group prayer, we must remind the kids, that when we are praying, the Holy Spirit is in our midst, and He fills with life all things. We can say: "Let us see whether we can sing the prayer in a way that will show that there is life in it".

Children within this age, find it **more difficult to attend church services**. They often find them **extremely boring**, as there is an obligation to remain completely inactive and quiet for a long time. They are diverted by watching the lights, the bright colors of the people, hearing the songs, but for them to follow the service they need to understand the order of the liturgy and the sequence of the major moments. It is effective to find an **opportunity for the children to participate actively in the service**; for example whenever a procession is held, it is important to involve the children. We can also direct their attention before the liturgy to the prayer books, to all things on the altar, the saints on the iconostasis, the incense and the sensor.

With the children in the seven to ten ages, we can **explain the meaning of the Holy Communion**, emphasizing on the Last Supper, and on what Jesus did and said. As they count on gifts, think about gifts and expect gifts, we can tell them that the Holy Communion is Jesus Christ's gift to us. He accepts gifts, and we try to bring Him our small gift, by trying to live the way He wants us to live.

We can admit the children in that age to the **sacrament of confession**. This sacrament, like baptism and chrismation, is given without demanding understanding on their part. Practicing this sacrament is not accidental, but it presupposes that a child of seven or eight has reached the **"age of reasoning"**. He can make a conscious choice between what is good and what is bad; thus he can sin and repent. The main problem with this age in relation to confession is the dual **character of the child's approach to God**: 1- God gives laws which we must obey and we must be good. 2- God forgives us and loves us and never puts us off, if we are sorry and try to be good; but still we must be good. The child must learn to face badness in himself, and to realize that he will fail and still must keep trying. With God's help we can succeed.

Children within this age accept the **principle of obedience**. They know that "To be good" means to obey God, one's parents and one's teachers. To disobey means "to be bad". They recognize and accept the principle of **"fair and unfair"**, and they protest against unfairness to them. They recognize that breaking rules, doing anything forbidden, or carelessness resulting in disaster, is a sin. However, we must help them to realize the meaning of sin as a "break in relation", rather than breaking of a rule. The child has to experience what it means to "be trusted" and to "trust", to understand what other people feel and to be compassionate and friendly, to forgive and be forgiven, to receive help and to help.

4- Late Childhood (10-13):

The children the more they grow, the more complex they become, and the less open they are with strangers and the church school teacher. **The cultural and ethical standards of the family have influenced their attitudes** and made them different from each other. Their situation in the family affects their personality; jealousy, rejection, possessiveness and competitiveness.

In this age, pre-adolescent stage, **rebellion begins to work** at home and at school. They fanatically follow the way things are done in their home, but in the same time they are critical of the way their parents treat them and they are easily irritated by their

brothers and sisters. In many times, they are **not in agreement with the concepts of their parents**. As the Orthodox parents usually have received in their childhood very little (poor) instruction regarding their church, the Sunday school teachers have difficulty in conveying to the kids any progressed concepts of religion. They have to show great understanding to the matter, and respect the elements of truth in whatever beliefs are held at home, correcting wrong adding and expanding the ideas he wants to convey to them.

In this age, **the relation between boys and girls** is very self-conscious. Occasionally mutual attraction may be felt by a boy and a girl, and it becomes a subject of testing. They have been influenced by the over-emphasis on sex in everything they see (TV programs, commercials, films, etc.). The boys' idea of masculinity and the girls' idea of femininity are greatly affected images they see. Girls will use make-up and boys collect dirty pictures and dirty books. In addition, **the sex education** in public schools is not helpful, and usually given with deep emotions with conscious feelings. The physical aspect of sex belongs to an area of intimacy. Man-woman relationships must be told to them as a part of God's plan for man-woman relationship and can be seen in the light of religious concept of life of human beings.

Concerning **the meaning of Salvation**, the teacher must have a real theological maturity to be able to put down things clearly, simply, briefly and yet in a way that will allow the seeds of doctrinal idea to grow to a better fullness. We can tell them that before Jesus Christ everyone went to hell, and after He came, died and rose from the dead, everyone can go to heaven, indicating the great love of God to man.

In this age, many kids experience a **conscious separation of knowledge into two parts**; one that they learn in school, read in books and hear about on TV, and the other is that taught in church. They learn in school **the theory of evolution**, and they learn in church the story of Adam and Eve. We have to tell them that there is no conflict between the two. One is in science favor, and the other is the truth of the Bible.

The children's **knowledge of the Bible is very uneven**. Although they do not know the meaning of the Scriptures, they dislike hearing the same stories of the Bible again and again. They might hear some stories from the Old Testament, but they do not know that the New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament. They may think that the Last supper was a Jewish feast. They may **ask some questions that the teacher will find it difficult to answer precisely because they need very simple answers**. During this period, the task of Christian instruction must be relevant to their experience in life, to their interests and curiosity, to the secular knowledge they are acquiring in school.

In this period, the following themes should be instructed:

- + **God the Creator**: Creation of man and theory of evolution.
- + **Jesus Christ the Savior**: Son of God and Son of Man, and His role in one's own personal life.
- + **The meaning of Salvation** should be taught that it is real

and meaningful in our life today. They are ready to experience the reality of the Lord, even if this reality is brought to them in an incomplete or distorted way. It is a real challenge to our teaching.

+ **The Holy Spirit**: Children in this period know and have learned about the Holy Spirit before in stories of Epiphany and Pentecost. The idea of the Holy Spirit is usually associated with events of the past. By the age of 11 or 12, children are capable of grasping the idea of the Holy Spirit and the life-giving power that affects their personality.

+ **Sacraments**: One of the critical themes of this period is learning to understand the meaning of sacraments; what are sacraments? **What they do to me?** How my life is made different by receiving sacraments? It is important for this period to develop the idea of the Holy Spirit as a real presence within their own experience.

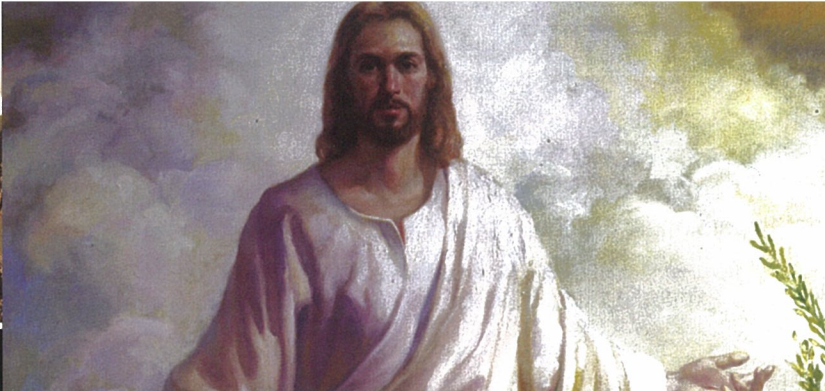
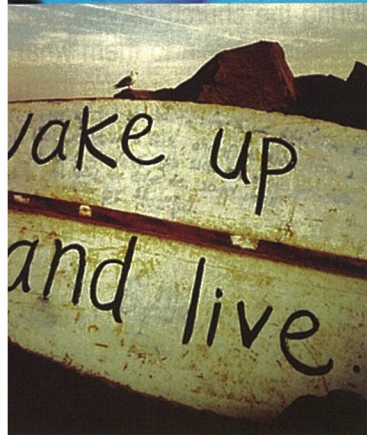
+ **The Church**: The children at this age have the experience of the Divine Liturgy, of the Holy Communion and of confession. They know that they are a minority living in a non-Orthodox society. Many of their friends are not even Christians. Some are Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and may be agnostics. In the Church and at home, they can say that the Orthodox Church is the one true church, but outside the church their own experience with people tells them that the Orthodox is no better than others. In church teaching we simply ignore the existence of plurality in Christianity.

+ **The Church Worship**: Familiar prayers, like the Lord's Prayer can be discussed in depth, **illustrating the meaning of each petition**. We can teach them the meaning of the church rites in a simple way. Church feasts can provide opportunity for the children to express their own thinking. This age is a good time to train the children how to use the Bible especially the New Testament and to tell them the parts used during the church service. We should tell them about the **church feasts, explain to them what they mean and let them share the celebration**. We prepare them for calendar events, presenting their meaning for us now. They can deep understand of the **Theotokos**, the young mother who was not afraid when she heard "**a sword will pierce through your own soul also**". These lessons should be given ahead of time, so that when the feast comes, the children know what it means.

We have to respect the inner spiritual and moral life of our children and how it works, even when they remain mysterious to us. It is important to give **special Christian narratives** to our children in this period; Biblical and historical, and from the lives of the saints. This will be successfully achieved through questions and discussions, which raise issues that help them to get better perspective and receive new points of view.

Because the children in this period have reached a greater degree of maturity and independence, a new important experience can be introduced into their **church life, such as church, summer camps, retreats, monasteries and pilgrimages**. This can offer opportunities to learn through experience in personal relationships and in shared responsibilities.

(To be continued)



Endure

DO NOT FORGET TO MEET ALL
YOUR DIFFICULTIES WITH LOVE AND LAUGHTER.

Be assured that I am with you. Remember, remember it is the last few yards that tell. Do not fail Me. I cannot fail you. Rest in My love.

How many of the world's prayers have gone unanswered because My children who prayed did not endure to the end. They thought it was too late, and that they must act for themselves, that I was not going to act for them. Remember My words: "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."

Can you endure to the end? If so, you shall be saved. But endure with courage, with Love and laughter. Oh! My children, is My training too hard?

For you, My children, I will unlock the secret treasures hidden from so many. Not one of your cries is unheard. I am with you indeed to aid you. Go through all I have said to you, and live in every detail as I have enjoined you. As you follow implicitly all I say, success -- spiritual, mental, and physical -- shall be yours. Wait in silence awhile, conscious of My presence, in which you must live to have rest unto your souls, and Power and Joy and Peace.

"I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name." Isaiah 45:3





Life, Free Will and Truth

Is there a relationship?

By Dr. Emil Goubran



In a speech before a Virginia Convention in 1775, right before the revolutionary war, Patrick Henry said **"Give me liberty, or give me death!"** What he was saying is that life has no meaning or purpose without free will, and it is better to be dead than living without freedom.

Freedom gives us control and ownership of our lives. Without freedom we are under control of the one who exercises his will over us and we become slaves to this master who, in effect, owns our lives. So even though we exist, we don't own our lives and we are socially dead. Therefore, the mere existence does not necessarily mean life. This understanding has its spiritual application in Christianity, which is the purpose of this article.

When God created us he gave us life and freedom of will. However, to exercise our free will we need to be able to make the right choices that lead us to the intended goal we are willing to achieve. Since our choices have consequences, some of which may be fatal. It is important to acquire the information and knowledge that guide our choices in order to avoid any negative consequences, i.e., we should be able to make informed decisions/choices.

Consequently, the information/knowledge has to be accurate or "True". False information could lead us in a totally different direction from what we originally intended. Therefore, we need to be sure about the credibility of the source of information before we accept and put our confidence (trust) in that source.

We have a good example in the book of Genesis, which tells us the story of Adam and Eve. They were commanded and warned by God who said to them "but you shall not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17).

However, the serpent (devil) said "You shall not surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat of it, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as God, knowing good and evil." (Gen 3:4-5).

Adam and Eve had opposing statements from two sources, and had to make a choice which to believe. They trusted and accepted the information given by the serpent (devil) and disregarded the knowledge (warning) given by God.

Even though the will of Adam and Eve was to live and not die, however, by accepting false information and trusting in the devil, they made a deadly choice.

Accordingly, in order to really exercise our free will, we need to base our choices on true knowledge. This relationship between freedom of choice and truth has been highlighted in the Bible in this verse: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

The next logical question would be "where do we find the truth?" According to the Bible, the truth is found in our Lord Jesus Christ who said "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). He also said, "Therefore if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." (John 8:36). This means that the Lord (the son of God) is the truth, and He is the one that makes us free indeed. And if we are free then we also have life since without freedom we don't own our lives.

After Adam and Eve, chose to follow the counsel of the devil, the human race became enslaved to the devil and lost their freedom and hence their life. This is described in the Bible as eternal death. However, the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ and His subsequent resurrection broke our bondage and slavery to the devil and brought back our freedom and eternal life for everyone who puts back his trust (faith) in the Lord.



By Fr. Antony Coniaris

NOBODY TEACHES YOU HOW TO DIE EXCEPT JESUS

In the film, *The Proud and the Profane*, an army nurse is assigned to Iwo Jima, where her husband was killed in World War II. She finally gets up enough courage to get out to the cemetery where her husband is buried. The soldier who cares for the cemetery was with her husband when he was killed in action. She asks him many questions, and then inquires, "How did he die?" The soldier replies, "Like an amateur. They teach you how to hurl a grenade and how to fire a mortar, but nobody teaches you how to die. There are no professionals in dying. Nobody comes back to tell you how."

Since the Gospel lesson today talks about death (Jesus raising the only son of the widow of Nain), we, too, shall talk about it, since it is the one experience in life we shall all have to go through. If there is anyone in life who can teach us how to die, it is our risen and living Lord Jesus.

Coming to Terms with Death

How does one come to terms with death? There are some people who think they can kiss a cross, an icon or a Bible on their death-bed and by so doing make up for a life of sin. They forget that preparation for death does not begin on the death-bed. It begins as soon as we are born. **"All life," said Shakespeare "is preparation for death."** Montaigne had this in mind when he said, "He who would teach men to die must first teach them to live." For we ordinarily die as we have lived. When St. Francis was asked what he would do if he knew he was going to die at sunset, he replied, "I would finish hoeing my garden." He needed no special preparation for death. **He lived each day the way he wanted to die.**

A person cannot practice indifference to God all his life and suddenly be ushered by death into joyous fellowship with Him. Such a sudden, unpracticed facing of God would be hell rather than heaven and sheer torture rather than joy. For the person who walks with Christ every day, the final home-going is somewhat of a glorified repetition of what he has been doing daily, entering into God's presence. That is why we say that **heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people.**

The Road That Makes Death a Fulfillment

Dag Hammarskjöld writes in his book "MARKINGS", **"Do not seek death. Death will find you. But seek the road that makes death fulfillment."** There is only one road that makes death a fulfillment and that is to live each day the way we wish to die; the books balanced; the record clear; **walking hand in hand with Jesus the Lord of life and death.** Those who believe in Jesus and who have died and risen with Him in holy baptism are no longer slaves to the fear of death and its power: through His death Jesus destroyed "him who has the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14,15).

Leaving Everything in Dying Condition

When a city visitor said to a Vermont housewife, "Does your house always look this neat?" she replied. "Of course! I never go to bed without leaving the house in dying condition." I wonder if our fear of death would be as great if every day we left everything in dying condition, especially our relationship to God and to our loved ones.

Stephen Vincent Benet said once, "Life is not lost by dying! Life is lost minute by minute, day by dragging day, in all the thousand, small, uncaring ways."

"Many people," said George Bernard Shaw, **"are dead at 30 but buried at 60."** When a person removes God from the center of his life, he removes the spokes from the wheel. The wheel collapses.

St. Isaac the Syrian Wrote:

"When it is time for sleep and you approach your bed, say 'Bed, perhaps this night you will become my grave. I do not know.' In your heart always be ready for the moment of your departure. If you are wise, you will expect it at every hour. Each day say to yourself; 'perhaps the messenger who comes to fetch me has already reached the door. What am I doing sitting here? I must depart for ever, I cannot come back again.'

Go to sleep with these thoughts every night, and reflect on these things every day. And when the messenger arrives, go joyfully to meet him, saying: 'come in peace. I knew you would come, and I have not neglected anything that could help me on my journey.'"

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh adds:

“The injunction ‘be mindful of death’ is not a call to live with a sense of terror in the constant awareness that death is to overtake us. It means rather: ‘Be aware of the fact that what you are saying now, doing now, hearing, enduring or receiving now may be the last event or experience of your present life.’ In which case it must be a crowning, not a defeat. If only we realized whenever confronted with a person that this might be the last moment either of his life or of ours, we would be much more intense, much more attentive to the words we speak and the things we do. Only awareness of death will give life this immediacy and depth, will bring life to life, will make it so intense that its totality is summed up in the present moment. All life is at every moment an ultimate act.”

It is for good reason that St. John Climacus calls the remembrance of death a gift of God.

An old lady admitted to her grandchildren one day that she had never ridden on train and expressed a desire to do so. They promptly bought her a ticket to ride to nearby town to visit a friend.

The old lady boarded the train loaded down with packages. She arranged her packages and settled down on a seat. Soon she noticed that the upholstery was soiled. Grumbling, she gathered her belongings and moved to another seat near the front of the car. But there she was annoyed by a crying infant across the aisle. Again she moved, this time to the rear of the car. But she found that the sun too bright in that location; so once more she picked up her packages and moved to the other side. She sank back at last to look at the lovely countryside.

At that moment the conductor called the name of the town where she was to get off. The poor woman sat for a moment in stunned dismay, then remarked: “well! If I’d known the trip would be so short, I wouldn’t have spent so much time finding fault!”

Double Vision

Life is a brief journey through time on a jet plane. It goes fast, too fast to waste time finding fault.

The Christian goes through life with double vision. He keeps one eye on this world and one eye on eternity. St. Thomas a Kempis put it this way, “The sons of God, standing upon things that are present, do contemplate those things which are eternal. They look on transitory things with the left eye, and with the right do behold things of heaven.” It was this “double vision” which enabled St. Paul to say: “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is

being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

It was “double vision” which enabled one old Christian to say, “By God’s grace I’m going to really live until I die; and then I’m going to live forever.”

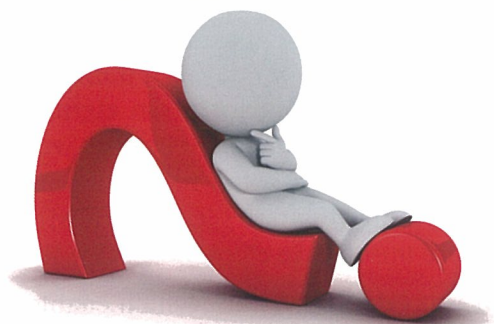
Our Father Will Meet Us

A little boy sat quietly by himself on a train speeding through the countryside one dull day. A dear old lady asked him sympathetically, “Aren’t you afraid to be on this train alone?” The boy looked up with a smile and said, “No, ma’am, I don’t mind it too much, because my father is going to meet me when I get to the end of it.” By bringing back to life the son of the widow of Nain in today’s Gospel the Lord Jesus demonstrated that He is Lord of life and death. When we come to the end of the line, He will meet us, to take us into another world where “eye has not seen...what things He has prepared for us.” We can say as He said, ***“I came from the Father and have come into the world; again I am leaving the world and going to the Father”*** (John 16:28). When the end comes, our Father will be there to meet us.

The Transfiguration of Death

Dr. Kubler Ross wrote a book entitled “On Death and Dying.” In it she described the steps a dying person goes through before death. She described them as denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. To these steps the Christian would add one final step which for us would be the most important step of all: belief in the transformation, the transfiguration of death by Christ. The mere acceptance of death by the terminally ill patient can be terribly stoical, passive, and even depressing unless we have faith in Christ and His resurrection.

When the Lord Jesus approaches the widow accompanying her son’s coffin to the cemetery. He does not try to console her by saying what we sometimes say, “This death is God’s will. You must accept it.” How can death be God’s will when Jesus - who is God - wept at the tomb of Lazarus? Not death but the total destruction and transfiguration of death into life eternal - this is God’s will for us. So Jesus says to the widow with great compassion, “Do not weep!” And touching the coffin, He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the young man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. When the people saw this they glorified God and said, “God has visited His people!”



How should I respond to failures and setbacks?

Dr Charles Stanley

When the men of Israel returned in defeat from Ai, Joshua needed some answers and so turned immediately to prayer. He tore his garments, an act of grief, and fell on his face in humiliation before the ark of the covenant until nightfall. All of the elders joined him. Joshua cried out to God, "O Lord GOD, why did You ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?" (Joshua 7:7).

Joshua asked the wrong question - a question many of us ask when unexpected trouble strikes. Often our first impulse is to ask why or to blame God for the tragedy or problem that overwhelms us. We cry out, "Why me? What did I do to deserve this? Why did You allow me to get into this mess?" Though all of us have asked them, these are not the right questions. When difficulty comes, we need to ask the Lord one question: "What do You want me to learn in this situation?" We can express our hurt or frustration, but the bottom line must always be one of surrender and openness to His will for us.

Sometimes, we may need to change a habit or correct a bad attitude. Or perhaps we need to deal with some area of sin or poor judgment. When Joshua stopped pouring out his frustration, God said, "Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. Therefore the sons of Israel cannot stand before their enemies" (Joshua 7:10-12).

When we go to the Lord in prayer, we must be willing to hear what He says. Often, we don't stop to listen to Him. We must learn to wait to hear His response when we voice our petitions.

This is especially true when we pray in the aftermath of a setback or defeat. It is also vitally important when we are tempted to blame God or become angry over our troubles. We must be willing to accept His assessment of our situation, which often includes Him correcting an ungodly behavior or attitude within us.

Once the Lord reveals to us what we need to do, nothing more needs to be said. We must accept God's will and immediately move to obey Him. Our obedience may include asking Him to forgive us and to help us to obey Him in the future. It may also require that we make

amends or take specific actions that will help right the wrong. Whatever the case, our submission to His direction must follow quickly.

With love & prayers

Mona & Bhupinder Singh

His Prayer House

(www.hisprayerhouse.org)

Quote of the Week

Remember that God does not have to bless anyone at your expense. Nor does He have to bless you at anyone's expense. We don't have to be jealous of each other. There is a portion that God gives to you which no man can touch because it has your name on it. Our God is a rich God. He owns the whole universe. He has contacts and blessings you do not know of and which are reserved just for you! There is more than enough for everybody with plenty of leftovers. In fact, you will not be able to take it all because when the blessings start coming in, they will come a net-breaking, boat-sinking style. You will have to call for your friends in the other boats to come and help you! (Luke 5:1-7) That is the kind of blessings that our God gives. So get ready for your blessings and overflowing abundance!



One of the famous events that took place in Monday morning during the last week of the life of our Lord Jesus, was the story of the fig tree. It is mentioned in the first two gospels Matthew 21 and Mark 11(I will tell you an easy way to know its reference, in each, it is in Mt. 21:21 & in Mark 11:11)! It was repeated today in the morning readings twice in both gospels.

The fig tree was one of the favorite trees in the OT. The picture of the promised land was the picture a “a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees” (Deut. 8:8). It showed the rich fertility of the land (Numbers 13:23). In the time of Solomon, it was mentioned to show peace and prosperity ‘that every man will sit under his own vine and his own fig tree’” (1 kings 4:25 and also Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10). When the Bible wanted to show God’s wrath, it was said that He would smite and destroy the fig trees (Pslam 105:33; Jer. 8:13Hosea 2:12). So, the fig tree is the symbol of fertility and peace and prosperity.

The story of the fig tree is a puzzle:

1. How come Jesus curse?

2. How come He curses a tree and curse is a punishment and that needs a person that is sane who has mind and free will and can be responsible for his actions.

3. The problem seems more complicated when Mark tells us, it was not the season for figs”!

THE BARREN FIG TREE

Therefore, in order to understand the situation, we must know some background of the fig tree.

The fig tree is unique in that it bears two full crops in the year. The first is borne on the old wood. Quite early in the year little green knobs appear at the end of the branches. They are called Paggim and they will one day be the figs. These fruit buds come in April but they are quite uneatable. Bit by bit the leaves and the flowers open out, and another unique thing about the fig is that it is in full fruit and full leaf and full flower all at the same time; that happens by June. No fig tree ever bore fruit in April; that is too early. The process is then repeated with the new wood; and the second crop comes in September.

The strangest thing in this story, it tells of a fig tree in full leaf in April. Jesus was at Jerusalem for the Passover; the Passover fell on 15th of April. It is also strange that Jesus looked for figs on the tree where no figs could possibly be; and Mark says, “For it was not the season for figs” (Mk. 11:13).

Lessons:

1. Jesus was hungry: The Humanity of Christ
2. Hypocrisy: (Matt. 23)
3. Barrenness & /Fruitless ness (Luke 13)
4. Bad and sour fruits
5. The false excuses
6. The characteristics of the perfect fruits God require of us:
 - (1) Good fruits
 - (2) Plenty fruits
 - (3) Continuous fruits

How can we bear these spiritual fruits?

1. Abiding in Christ (Jn. 15)
2. Being filled with the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22)
3. Investing our talents in serving God.

Does Satan Cause all of our Adversity?

The quick answer is, “No.”

While the Book of Job makes it obvious that the devil can and does afflict us, some of our adversity comes simply because we live in a fallen world. All people - believers and nonbelievers alike - suffer adversity not “caused” by anything we or others have done.

In Luke 13:1-5, Jesus declared that victims of two separate local tragedies died not because they had sinned worse than anyone else in Jerusalem, but simply *because they were at the wrong place at wrong time. In a fallen world, any of us could die at any time - and that is why we must always be ready to stand before God.*

Adversity can also come into our lives as a result of personal sin. Each sin we commit carries some consequences, a natural outflow of adversity tailored to the nature of our disobedience.

In cases like this, we can't blame God, the devil, or others. We must follow David's example and say, “I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight.” (Psalm 51:3-4)

Let's say that I hear a juicy rumor and choose to gossip about it. Then imagine that the “news” turns out to be completely untrue. The result? No one trusts me anymore. I am rightly seen as a malicious gossip. I have destroyed my public witness. I can't blame anyone else for what happened; it was my own fault!

Finally, some adversity comes straight from almighty God. We don't like to think about this one, but let's be clear: God is ultimately concerned with our spiritual growth, not with our happiness or momentary pleasures. He always has the big picture in mind whenever He allows or sends adversity into our lives. So David wrote, “I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.” (Psalm 119:75)

Unfortunately, adversity is often the only thing that will get our attention. I once heard a fine teacher explain it this way: *God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience but shouts to us in adversity.* If God doesn't get our attention through His blessings or by stinging our conscience, then He will certainly put us flat on our backs in adversity so that we can get the message!



Fearful Tears

John, the great apostle and the one Jesus loved, was reduced to tears. In a vision he received while imprisoned (Rev. 5: 1-12) he found himself in God's throne room as future events unfolded. In heaven, John saw God hold up a sealed scroll. He wept because as he observed the glories of God's of God's presence, he saw no one who could open the scroll—no one with the power to reveal God's final revelation and to complete the concluding chapter of history's drama.

As an apostle, John had observed the power of sin in the world. He had witnessed Jesus' life and death on earth to conquer sin. He had seen Him ascend to heaven. But now he was fearful when he saw that no one was worthy to open the scroll and vanquish sin forever.

Imagine the drama of what happened next. An elder approached John and said, “Do not weep, and pointed him toward Someone he knew: “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” John looked, and he saw Jesus—the only One with the power to take the scroll, open the seals, and complete the story. Soon John's tears were dry, and millions of angels were proclaiming, **“Worthy is the Lamb!”**

Are you crying? Behold, John's friend—Jesus. He is worthy. Turn things over to Him.

Our Lord is worthy all our days, of all our love and highest praise; He died to take our sin and shame—Oh, bless the Savior's holy name!

10 Lessons from Palm Sunday

By Fr. Augustinos Hanna



Palm Sunday is one of the Lord's Major Feasts and one of the most cheerful occasions to the children of God from their early childhood. Here are some of its lessons:

1. Four Prophecies Fulfilled:

Review these prophecies (Genesis 49:9-12; Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 8:2; Psalm 118: 24-26).

2. Jesus Christ is God:

The multitudes cried out saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21: 9). The word "Hosanna" (Aramaic) means "Save us now." The mere name of Jesus means, "God Saves"; "Because He saves His people from their sins" (Matt.1:21). And God is the only Savior.

3. Christ is the King:

The prophecy says, "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey'" (Zech. 9:9, Matt. 21:4). Jesus is the "King of Kings and the Lord of Lords" (Rev. 19:16). He is the "King of Glory", the "King of Righteousness", and the "King of Peace". Do we crown Him a King on our lives, home and submit to Him in love, obedience, loyalty and service?

4. Christ is the Humble Savior:

The prophecy describes Him, "Lowly and riding on a donkey." The Lord Jesus didn't use a horse as the military commanders do, but only a donkey as a symbol of peace and humility. "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt.11: 29).

5. Christ's Courage:

His meekness did not contradict His courage. He was bold as a lion when He knew that His enemies were plotting to kill Him and entered Jerusalem openly in a great procession! Moreover, He entered the Temple and cleansed it driving out all those who bought and sold and overturned the tables of the money-changers." He wants His followers to witness to the truth courageously.

6. Jesus is Just and Victorious:

Jesus is "just and faithful to forgive us" (1 John 1:9). He is the conqueror of sin, death, Satan and hell. "Thanks to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ" (2 Cor 2:14).

7. He Needed a Donkey:

"And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them' " (Matt. 21:3). Isn't it amazing that the Lord God, the Creator of the universe, is in need of a weak donkey?! In the story of Jonah, the Lord needed the sea, the wind, the whale, the tree and even a worm to serve Him, so how much more He will need you and me?

8. The Palm Branches Glorify Him:

The multitudes cut down branches from the palm trees and greeted Jesus. It is written that "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree" (Ps.92:12). The palm tree stands for height, uprightness, joy, purity, fruits, peace and victory. It repays good for evil, when boys throw stones at it, it gives them dates! By this resemblance we can glorify God.

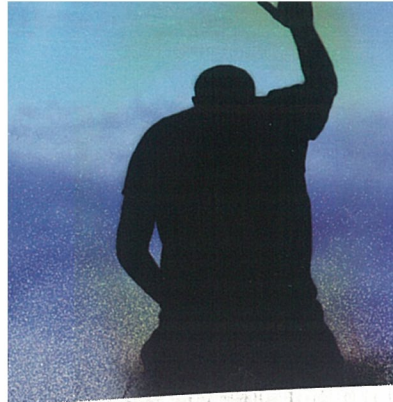
9. The Message of the Garments:

"The multitudes spread their garments on Christ's way". That was the red carpet of the time to receive the kings. We also still can do the same, but in a different way. Giving our garments to the needy and the naked is Christ's commandment. He said, "I was naked and you clothed Me" (Matt. 25:36; see also Luke 3:11).

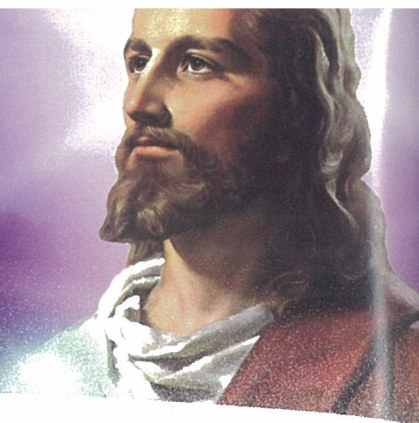
10. The Children's Praises:

"The children cried out saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt.21:15). Those children expressed their joy and faith by singing and praising the Lord, as it is said, "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise" (Matt. 21:16).

Let us not under-estimate our children but teach them how to sing hymns and spiritual songs and memorize psalms and golden verses from the Bible to praise God and glorify His blessed name. That will be much better than the cheep carnal songs which they contract from the radio; TV, cell phone and computer.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE WILL OF GOD



Let me share with you the word of a father who lost his son in an auto accident:

"On an early January night, while driving in a terrible storm, my son Alexander—who to his friends was a real day-brightener, and to his family 'fair as a star when only one is shining in the sky'—my 24-year-old Alexander, who enjoyed beating his old man at every game and in every race, beat his father to the grave....

"When a person dies there are many things that can be said, and there is at least one thing that should never be said. The night after Alex died I was sitting in the living room of my sister's house outside of Boston, when the front door opened and came in a nice-looking middle-aged woman, carrying about 18 quiches. When she saw me she shook her head, then headed for the kitchen, saying sadly over her shoulder, '**I just don't understand the will of God.**'

Instantly I was up and in hot pursuit, swarming all over her. 'I'll say you don't, lady!' I said. (I knew the anger would do me good, and the instruction to her was long overdue.) I continued, 'Do you think it was the will of God that Alex never fixed that lousy windshield wiper of his, that he was probably driving too fast in such a storm, that he probably had had a couple of 'frosties' too many? Do you think it is God's will that there are no streetlights along that stretch of road, and no guardrail separating the road and Boston Harbor?'

"For some reason, nothing so infuriates me as the incapacity of seemingly intelligent people to get it through their heads that God doesn't go around this world with his finger on triggers, his fist around knives, his hands on steering wheels. God is dead set against all unnatural deaths...

"The one thing that should never be said when someone dies is, 'It is the will of God.' Never do we know enough to say that. My own consolation lies in knowing that it was not the will of God that Alex die; that when the waves closed over the sinking car, God's heart was the first of all our hearts to break."

A DISTORTED VIEW OF GOD

What is the will of God? Why is it so often associated with calamities? Why are earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes and floods called "acts of God," while sunshine, spring flowers and the rainbow called works of "Mother Nature"?

Could it be that we have a totally distorted view of God as a stern judge, a divine punisher, who does nothing but send calamities to punish us for our sins? Is not this the view Jesus came to correct by revealing a God who "so loved the world

that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)?

JESUS AND SUFFERING

Did not Jesus spend His life healing the sick? Did He not say once that the sickness of a certain woman was not the will of God but the will of Satan? Did He not weep before the tomb of Lazarus, His friend? Did He not say about the man born blind: "His blindness has nothing to do with his sin or his parents' sins. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him"?

If we are to identify the will of God with anything why not identify it with the words of Jesus, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32)? If we are to identify the will of God with anything, why not identify it with the words of St. Paul, "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4)? Or His words, "He Who did not spare His own son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him" (Romans 8:32)? If we are to identify the will of God with anything, why not identify it with the words of Jesus, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father Who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him." (Matthew 7:11)? God's will is to be identified always with that which is best for us, most loving, most generous, most noble. For God wants all to be saved, to share His divine nature, to spend eternity with Him.

WHAT CAN WE SAY?

In summary, these are some of the things we can say about the will of God and suffering.

First, God came into the world in the person of Jesus not to inflict evil, suffering and death upon us but to overcome them. "In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," said Jesus. Call many things evil, call them inevitable because of sin, but don't call them the will of God.

Secondly, we could understand God's will better if we did not always expect Him to do things our way. "**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts**" (Is. 55:8,9). God does not and will not follow our advice. His is far wiser.

Thirdly, we can say that when we suffer, God shares our sorrow and grief. As a little boy who had been badly burned

said when a woman said of him, "Oh, why does God punish a child like that?" "Don't say that, the child called out. "Don't say anything bad about God! When it hurts, God cries with me! "That boy's theology was absolutely orthodox!"

Fourthly, we can say that Jesus Who overcame death for us has it in His power to make it up to those who are taken away too soon by death. This is not the only life. There is eternity ahead of us. There is more life ahead - infinitely more! The life that is taken away too soon will get its chance to blossom and flourish. God will redress the wrongs of this world. He will balance the books. "If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19).

Let me go back to the father who lost his son in the tragic auto accident. His final words were:

"And finally I know that when Alex beat me to the grave, the finish line was not Boston Harbor in the middle of the night. If a lamp went out, it was because, for him at least, the Dawn had come."

Fifthly, we can say that God is powerful enough to help us use even the evil things that happen to us for our good, just as He took the worst that man could do to Him - suffering and death on the cross - and turned it into the best that ever happened to us - our salvation. "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

I like the words of Robert Browning Hamilton in this respect:

I walked a mile with pleasure,
She chattered all the way;
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow
And ne'er a word said she;
But oh, the tings I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me.

Lastly, we can say that although much sorrow and suffering are traceable to human error and human sin, there still remains much that we simply cannot explain. We simply have to say, "I don't know why this happened, but I do know and believe that no matter what happens God loves me. He will not leave me or forsake me. He will give me the power to bear this cross and even to transform it so that tragedy becomes a crown."

"Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."



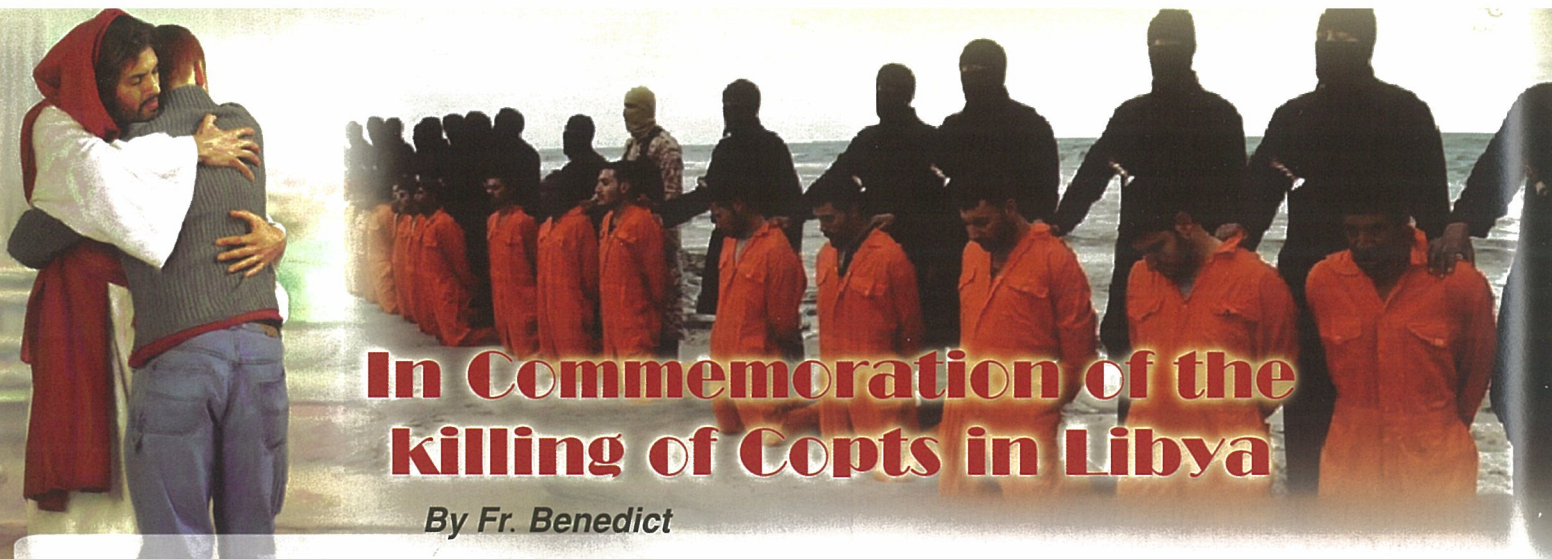
In Loving Memory of **Larry Chen**

Our dear Larry Chen (Liang Tang Chen) went home to be with His beloved Jesus and all the saints on February 16th, 2016. There is a lot to be said about him. Everyone who came to know Larry closely learned a lot from him. Larry (a Taiwanese photographer) joined our church when he hired a Coptic Orthodox assistant by the name of Abir to work for him at his shop in La Puente. He'd always seen her reading the Bible or going to church and he was curious about that relationship she had with a God he didn't know. Little did she know that she was the reason to Larry came to know Jesus Christ.

Larry was adopted by the priests and servants at St. John, and was like a thirsty sponge eager to know and absorb all he can about the loving God he fell in love with. He got baptized, became a deacon and attended Servant Preparation classes, then started serving. Any time anyone visited Larry's store they would find him reading either the Bible or a spiritual book. Our dear Taiwanese brother shone in the house of the Lord with his love, his smiling face, his meekness, his humility and helping hand to everyone. He knew more about our church than most Coptic-born Christians. His passion for Christ and learning about the Lord put us all to shame. We are born with a golden spoon in our mouth {as we say in Arabic}, often taking for granted the grace and blessings that we inherited as Christians by birth.

In 2003 Larry moved back home to Taiwan after his father passed away, to care for his aging mom (as expected from his noble character)!!! He met his high school sweetheart that he loved and got married within their culture, since there was no Coptic Church there. A couple of years later, Larry was diagnosed with vocal cord cancer and as a result lost his voice/speech permanently. Some of us kept in touch with him through social media. After one of his surgeries in 2013, he shared that his ultimate dream is to bring his wife Candy to meet his family (our congregation), baptize her and have an Orthodox wedding, if he survives his latest cancer surgery. Sure enough they made it to California in 2014 and their dream came true. His wife had the same passion to get baptized and to meet his Coptic family. In 2014, Candy was baptized before their Coptic wedding at St. John. She is a precious woman who took

excellent care of him with all respect, joy and love. Larry and Candy travelled the world. Finally while vacationing in Japan last month, Larry caught pneumonia and was hospitalized in Japan. From there he travelled directly to paradise.



In Commemoration of the killing of Copts in Libya

By Fr. Benedict

As the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea lapped onto a clear sandy beach, normally a place for tourists to bathe and relax, exactly one year ago today 20 Coptic Christians and one Ghanaian were martyred at the hands of the brutal followers of Mohammed, known as ISIS or the Islamic State.

The Copts, all Egyptians, were poor laborers. Like so many in the Middle East, they were forced to leave their countries to search for work, in this case, going into the anarchic failed State of Libya, to try to support their families back at home. They were kidnapped by ISIS for one reason: because they were Christians. They were executed by ISIS for one reason: because they were Christians.

Accounts of their initial kidnapping speak of the ISIS demons moving through the facility where the Copts were living demanding to know where the “followers of the cross” were staying.

ISIS, using what the great historian Christopher Dawson called the “black arts of mass propaganda and suggestion,” produced a slick, Hollywood-style video of the execution of the Copts. Dressed in orange jumpsuits, the Copts were made to kneel on the clear sand. Behind each one stood an ISIS executioner, dressed completely in black, because the devil cannot show his face.

One of them, speaking with the guttural accent known as “street” in London, taunted the West, pointing his knife across the ocean, to the coast of Italy just across the sea. Given the latest estimates that up to 16,000 committed jihadists are now in Europe, mingled with the thousands of migrants who have poured over European open borders, those threats seem more real than ever.

As unbearable and unacceptable as it is to actually watch the moment of beheading, this satanic act failed miserably in its purpose. It once again exposed the true face of evil, which a significant number of the followers of the prophet Mohammed accept as legitimate.

It proved that the expression of a seventh century interpretation of the Koran is not, as so many wooly liberals say, “nothing to do with Islam.”

It has everything to do with Islam. But most significantly, and beautifully, it utterly failed as a means of propaganda and fear for ISIS, because it showed the faith of the martyrs.

Twenty of the martyrs were, as we know, Egyptian Coptic Christians. The nationality and faith of the one African murdered with them was not known for some time. His name was Matthew Ayairga, a Ghanaian, although some have said he came from Chad. He was not a Christian, but, at the moment of execution, knowing he would die, he was asked by one his killers if he would reject Jesus.

He turned to his companions and said, “Their God is my God.”

Not since the great persecutions of the early life of the church have we seen such a witness. All the Copts were seen to be saying the name of Jesus: “Jesus is Lord.” They were, and are, “martyrs” – witnesses, to the faith of the church – glorious witnesses.

On this, the first anniversary of the martyrdom of the “Saints of Libya,” we should be affirmed in the strength and faith these men showed at the moment of death.

As our culture sinks ever deeper into triviality and depravity, the example of these poor men, acclaimed by Pope Francis as true martyrs, should inspire all those who claim the name of Christian to greater courage and fortitude.

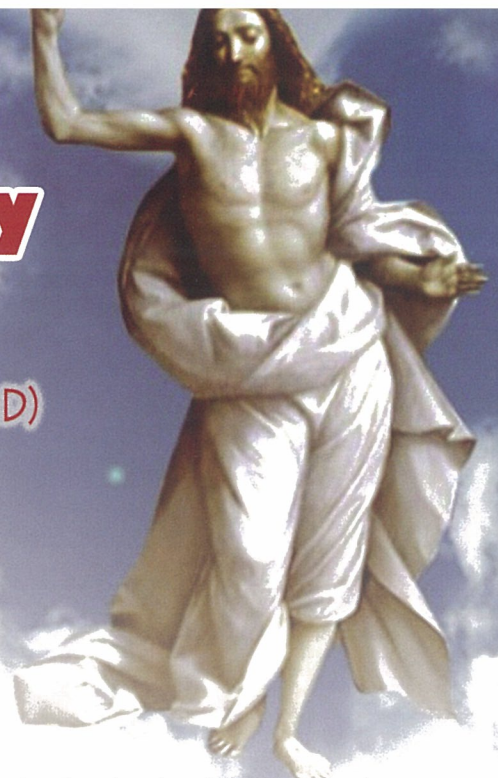
It should also demand ever greater commitment, not only to defeat the forces of evil Islamic darkness, which perpetrates such crimes, but to aid, empower and liberate our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East who are facing a true genocide.

[Father Benedict Kiely is a Catholic priest and founder of Nasarean.org, which is helping the persecuted Christians of the Middle East.]



The Paschal homily of St John Chrysostom

(ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE - 400 AD)



If any be a devout lover of God, let him partake with gladness from this fair and radiant feast.

If any be a faithful servant, let him enter rejoicing into the joy of his Lord.

If any have wearied himself with fasting, let him now enjoy his reward.

If any have labored from the first hour, let him receive today his rightful due.

If any have come after the third, let him celebrate the feast with thankfulness.

If any have come after the sixth, let him not be in doubt, for he will suffer no loss.

If any have delayed until the ninth, let him not hesitate but draw near.

If any have arrived only at the eleventh, let him not be afraid because he comes so late.

For the Master is generous and accepts the last even as the first.

He gives rest to him who comes at the eleventh hour in the same way as him who has labored from the first.

He accepts the deed, and commends the intention.

Enter then, all of you, into the joy of our Lord.

First and last, receive alike your reward.

Rich and poor, dance together.

You who fasted and you who have not fasted, rejoice together. The table is fully laden: let all enjoy it.

The calf is fatted: let none go away hungry.

Let none lament his poverty; for the universal Kingdom is revealed.

Let none bewail his transgressions; for the light of forgiveness has risen from the tomb.

Let none fear death; for death of the Savior has set us free.

He has destroyed death by undergoing death.

He has despoiled hell by descending into hell.

He vexed it even as it tasted of His flesh.

Isaiah foretold this when he cried:

Hell was filled with bitterness when it met Thee face to face below;

filled with bitterness, for it was brought to nothing;

filled with bitterness, for it was mocked;

filled with bitterness, for it was overthrown;

filled with bitterness, for it was put in chains.

Hell received a body, and encountered God. It received earth, and confronted heaven.

O death, where is your sting?

O hell, where is your victory?

Christ is risen! And you, O death, are annihilated!

Christ is risen! And the evil ones are cast down!

Christ is risen! And the angels rejoice!

Christ is risen! And life is liberated!

***Christ is risen! And the tomb is emptied of its dead;
for Christ having risen from the dead,***

has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Him be Glory and Power, now and forever, and from all ages to all ages.

Amen!

Congratulations

Wedding



St. John Church congratulates

Jasmin Salama and David Guerrero

On their marriage; praying the Lord Jesus Christ Who blessed the wedding of Cana of Galilee to bless their life together in harmony, love, joy and peace, growing in the grace and knowledge of God and every good deed.



St. John Church congratulates Dr, Nader and Dina Zak-lama Attia for the baptism of their baby boy

Christian Alexander Attia

May the Lord Jesus bless his life and grant him health, strength and long life filled with the fruits of the Holy Spirit.



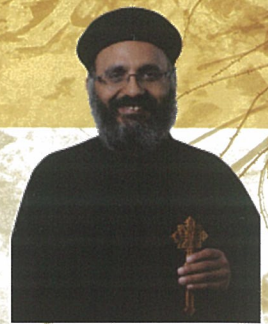
St. John Church congratulates Tamer Wadie and Mariz for the baptism of their baby girl

Heaven

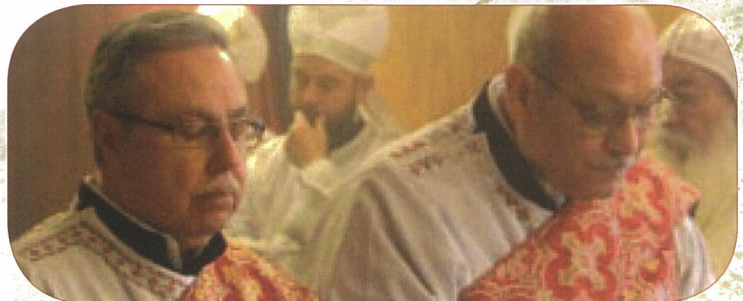
May the Lord Jesus Christ bless her life, health and future.

St. John Church
congratulates

Fr. George Aziz



For the 3rd. Anniversary of his ordination in priesthood, wishing him health, power of the Holy Spirit in his ministry, long life and plenty of fruits.



St. John Church congratulates

Archdeacon Thomas & Archdeacon

Antonius

on their 3rd. Anniversary, praying the Lord to grant them every spiritual and physical blessing, health and long life.



Baptisms

St. John Church congratulates Samer Malak and Maggie for the baptism of their child

George

Wishing him every blessing, health and growth in the grace and stature.

KEROS TECHNOLOGIES

Home & Business
Computer Related
Services & Support

George Isaac
(626) 626-0277
gisaac@kerostech.com

