

**ESSAYS FOR ORTHODOX YOUTH
TOPICS FOR EVERYDAY CHRISTIAN LIVING**



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The Virgin St. Mary and Holy Infant Jesus

**St. Mark the Apostle, Evangelist, Patriarch, and Martyr
(The Beholder of the Divine)**

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III
117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark
(1971-)

Foreword (First Issue)

This book is a collection of articles which came out of real need. As English speaking Christians continue to join our beloved Coptic Orthodox Church in America and other English speaking countries it becomes necessary to explain Orthodoxy to them in their own language. This collection was intended to do that. It appeared in the monthly newsletter: "St. Mary's Message" which is published by: St. Mary & St. Abraam Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Louis, Missouri 63146; USA.

The reader will read about our beloved Egypt, the land blessed by our Lord and his mother the pure Saint, the Virgin Mary. He then reads about The Apparition of the Virgin Mary in Egypt: in Zeitoun, 196; and in Shoubra, 1986.: Prayer, Fasting, and Alms (Giving) are basics he needs to learn how to practice; and are well explained according to our Orthodox faith.

Selected Synxarium (Book of the Martyrs), readings are for learning by the example of our forefathers (The Fathers of the Church). Remembrance of some contemporary saintly men is to learn by example from people who lived among us not long ago. This edition ends with some popular Coptic hymns with English meaning.

This is a preliminary printing. We feel the urge to get it out quickly because we do not know at what time Our Lord will come back: "for in such an hour ye think not the Son of man cometh." (Matt 24:44).

Special thanks to Timothy and Vicki Mayer for invaluable contributions to the original articles, writing and editing for St. Mary's Message. Being American born, they were used to sound off words and phraseology to be able to appeal to the American born reader. The book is written primarily for youth. Adults can benefit from reading it. Each chapter is self-contained.

Glory always be to our Lord Jesus Christ with His Father and the Holy Spirit who guides people to proclaim the Word of God in all lands. We ask the intercession of Mary ('theotokos') the mother of God, St. Abraam the departed bishop of Fayoum, the friend of the poor and all the Saints for the reader and the writer alike! May Christ our Lord use this book to the Glory of his wonderful name. We ask the reader to help us to complete the construction project in St. Louis by sending donations to:

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December 10, 1993 AD.**

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Essays for Orthodox Youth

I. On Egypt

Egypt the land of my ancestors is blessed in the Holy Bible both in the old testament and the new Testament also. Egypt is the land in which Abraham found refuge when he faced famine in the land of Canaan. Egypt also is the land where the Israelites, the sons of Jacob, found their refuge. Two generations henceforth when they faced famine again when Joseph the favorite son of Jacob and Rachel gave his brothers and sisters refuge, in spite of their plotting against him and selling him as a slave to the Ishmaelites (literally finding a scape goat), telling their father that he was killed, and using the blood of a goat to deceive their father. Egypt is where the Israelites had refuge for 400 years until Moses rose and led them.

No greater blessing a land would have than the blessing Egypt received when Mary and Joseph the Carpenter, Mary's fiancé (not spouse), took the babe Jesus and escaped to the land of Egypt, according to the instruction of the angel to Joseph in a dream: "Arise and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt". Egypt was blessed from the Lord when he called it "Blessed my people Egypt". Also, for Egypt it was prophesied by Isaiah the prophet that: " in that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt..." (Isaiah 19:19)

God blessed Egypt with many other things, which are more than can be fit in one article. St. Mark the writer of the Gospel of Mark traveled to Egypt in the year 58 A.D. He started Christianity in my beloved home country. The church of Egypt traces its roots back to that date which makes it one of the three oldest Apostolic Churches; the Church in Jerusalem where Jesus preached and the disciples received the promise of the father; the church at Antioch where the believers were called Christians first, according to the book of Acts; and the church of Egypt where one of the four Evangelist preached, baptized and was martyred in Alexandria in the year 68 A.D.

This was ten years after he lit the torch of Christianity by converting one Ananias, a cobbler (shoe repair man [Kharaaz]). Egypt produced many of the so-called Greek Fathers. They were called Greek because they used the Greek language which was the common language of literary and theological works in the first three centuries of the Christian Church. Among those learned and most revered for their most treasured work in creating a theological base for Christianity which started as a simple religion based on very simple beliefs were: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dedemos the Blind, Cyril the Great, Athanasius the Apostolic-the Bishop of Alexandria, and Dioscores-the brave bishop who was beaten and humiliated because he dared to confess his faith regarding the nature of Christ rather than fall in line with a mistaken majority.

Not many in the west know that the creed of faith was written by St. Athanasius guided by the Holy Spirit. That is why we call this bishop who was born to pagan parents and was converted at a very young age to Christianity, the Apostolic. Not many in the west know that St. Anthony the founder of monasticism was an Egyptian, the son of rich landlords. He literally followed the words of Jesus to the rich young man saying: " If you desire to follow me, go sell all your possession and give it to the poor and come and follow me!"

Did you know my dear friend that Pachomius, the father of communal life was an Egyptian ascetic man who recognizing that the ways of St. Anthony did not fit all the people who desired to leave the world and follow after their own salvation. Because they might be discouraged by being so lonely, he devised the communal system where groups of ascetic people could gather together and live in one place. He wrote laws that governed this form of community which are still used in running the affairs of the monasteries in Egypt and elsewhere. In his days hundreds of thousands lived in hundreds of monasteries which sprang up in the deserts and prairies of Egypt from Alexandria to the land of Nubia (south of Aswan).

We talk about freedom of choice as if it was invented today. In Egypt, in the third century of Christianity, and while Pachomius was organizing communal living (which is the reason we call him the " Father of Communal life"), Shenouda was organizing a different order for those ascetics who chose to be hermits (living alone, isolated

even from people with the same calling), and that is why we call St. Shenouda "The Father of the Hermits". With this proud history, who can forget Egypt the land blessed by God the Almighty.

These blessings did not cease by the tribulation and suffering, they continued over the centuries. In the twentieth century we see the continuation of these blessings in the lives of saintly clerics and even in the lives of some very ordinary people. St. Abraam (the patron saint of the Coptic church of St. Louis, Missouri), the bishop of Fayoum (1857-1917), was a man of a simple faith that raised the dead. St. Abraam also was able to hang his coat on a ray of the sun because he mistook it for a rope and the Lord would not embarrass his saint. One can not talk about the departed St. Abraam without mentioning that the main reason for the great power the Lord blessed him with is by most accounts is attributed to his endless love and compassion toward the poor whom Jesus called 'my Brethren'. He not only gave them food and shelter, but he shared with them, he ate with them, and shared even his clothes with them.

Of our contemporary (20th century) saints, three giants come to mind: Pope Cyril (Kyrillos) VI, Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim, and Fr. Bishoy Kamel. All three are introduced in this book in separate essays. This continuing blessing of Egypt through our Lord and his Saints is the reason why we believe it from all our hearts when we recite the words in the Basilian Liturgy: "As it was, so will it be. From Generation to Generation and forever. Amen "

O'Lord Bless your people Egypt according to your promise. Glory and honor be to you with your mother, the saintly virgin, Mary the mother of God, and with all your saints, martyrs, confessors, and all those departed who asked us to remember them in our prayers. Amen. Amen. Amen.

II. The Apparition of Virgin Mary Part I: In Shoubra, 1986

People in Egypt and around the world are talking about the recent blessed apparition of St. Mary, the Virgin the Mother of God which was first noticed on Tuesday, March 25, 1986 in a small church in the district of Shoubra, a subdivision named Papa Doublo near El-Teraa El Boulakiah Street. The church where this blessed event continues to occur even at the present time. The apparition made them get out and look towards the church where the light was coming. They saw the full figure of the Virgin Mary above the left dome of the church. This apparition lasted only for a few seconds at a time, but it continued to appear many times. This repeated apparition continued for 20 minutes at one time. Each time this occurred, the people shouted joyfully and raised their voices in praises and hymns. The echo of the joyful singing reached the surrounding areas and within hours the church and the streets leading to the church were filled to overflowing with spectators who fixed their eyes on the two domes and the tower of the church. The next day, the same thing happened exactly like on the day before. The number of spectators multiplied which caused the local police to regulate the traffic. Through conversations between visitors it became clear that these apparitions have been taking place for a few months prior to March 25th, 1986. Some thought it to be reflections of light on the outside of the church, but the full figure apparition confirmed that it was not just a light reflection on the building.

Doctors, engineers, lawyers, students are among the many who witnessed the apparitions. Christians and non-Christians testified to what they saw and confirmed that they saw the image of the Virgin in full figure above the church between the two domes. Those eyewitnesses were even more convinced of the true nature of this apparition when it occurred during a power outage during which time the apparition was more vivid and much brighter than at any other time.

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark appointed a fact finding task force charged with investigating the matter and reporting to his holiness. The task force includes:

1. His Grace Anba Bishoy, Bishop of Domiat and the secretary General of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Church.
2. His Grace Anba Moussa the Bishop in Charge of the Youth Episcopate.
3. His Grace Anba Paula, General Bishop.
4. His Grace Anba Sarabion, the Public Services' Bishop.
5. His Reverence Fr. Marcos Ghaly, the Secretary General of the Patriarchate.
6. Mr. Moussad Sadeq, editor of the Newspaper Watani.

His holiness asked for the Lords guidance for the task force. The next Thursday, the task force met at Anba Reuis (The Patriarchate Headquarters in Cairo) and after a meeting which lasted until after midnight studying the evidence presented to the task force from eyewitnesses, four of the six members, namely Anba Bishoy, Anba Moussa, Anba Paula, and Mr Sadeq went to the church of St Demiana and stayed there until dawn. While there, they listened to some of the congregated people in and around the church. They then climbed the roof of the church to observe closely accompanied by Fr. Goargius Amin who was in charge of keeping order. At three-forty in the morning (Friday April 10, 1986) the members of the task force saw with their own eyes the Apparition Clearly and the heavenly lights appeared very bright. This continued until five O'clock in the morning. The task force immediately went back and reported to his holiness the Pope, a summary of their report follows:

“After reviewing many oral and written reports from the Bishops, Priests, monks and many laymen who witnessed the events it became clear to us that supernatural phenomena have taken place. These include:

1. Repeated apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary in many profiles including full figure.
2. Heavenly doves like bright lights accompanied by Incense above the church.
3. Very bright lights appearing from the inside of the two towers that do not open to the inside of the sanctuary and have no source of light in them. This bright light continued even during and after power outages in the area for over an hour on that Friday on which the task force was investigating.

We thank the Lord for his continual blessings on his people Egypt, and his favoring Egypt with these beloved supernatural phenomena frequently. For the sake of accuracy, the task force asks any one who saw any

supernatural phenomena to report it in writing to the Patriarchate. We thank the Lord for his continual blessings on his people Egypt, and his favoring Egypt with these beloved supernatural phenomena frequently. The task force also asks the people to keep the peaceful, orderly solemn atmosphere to receive the blessings of the Virgin Saint Mary and Saint Demiana and all the Saints. God protect our Land and guide us into every thing that leads to the well being of our Nation.”

The Apparition of St. Mary the Mother of our Lord at St. Demiana Coptic Orthodox Church in a suburb of Cairo, Egypt is not without signs, miracles, and wonders : "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the leper is cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them..." (Mathew 11:5).

Many people, regardless of their religion, are healed from chronic sicknesses and diseases. Many of the miracles are being recorded on videotape by a priest charged to record these miraculous happenings. This is not without precedence since we have seen similar wonders and miracles in 1968 and the following years during and after the apparition in Zeitun. Fr. Youssef Aziz, a priest at St. Mark Cathedral in the district of Klot-Beck stated that he used to use glasses for reading which was annoying to him until he went to see the apparition. Later, when he grabbed the hymnal book to sing praises, he discovered that he did not need his glasses any longer.

An even more wonderful healing happened to Teresa Soliman Youssef, age 6. This was verified by her mother and a physician, Dr. Fayez Akhnouk. Teresa lost the vision in her right eye when a needle was stuck in the eye causing a hole in the iris which resulted in complete blindness on 11/17/1984. On 5/18/1986, the family went to St. Demiana Church and received the holy communion, they then went to the second floor of the church. Suddenly, a bright light shines from the right side of the veil of the altar. The mother told that she saw her daughter stretch her hand towards the source of the light and wiped the blind eye and suddenly the child screamed from the top of her lungs, "Mom I can see! Mom I can see!" The physician stated that he examined Teresa and testifies that the right eye is completely healed

Mohammad Fatah, age 48 from Shoubra developed rheumatic fever 20 years back which resulted in congestion of the ventricle valves of his heart. Two month ago he had complications resulting in severe heart attack requiring hospitalization at a university hospital. His attending physician was Dr. Ahmad Nassar, Assistant Professor of Cardiology, Ein Shams University. The physician recommended open-heart surgery, but the patient refused. Instead, he went to St. Demiana Church and was healed completely. At the last examination it was decided that he was completely cured.

Mrs. Badeaa Bischay Abd El-Messeh, age 35 had severe hemorrhage. No medication could stop the hemorrhage. On April 22nd, the hemorrhage increased, she headed to the church around 10:P.M. that day. When she could not get into the church, she went to one of the surrounding residences, headed for the roof and saw the Virgin like a heavenly body surrounded by angels. She lost track of time and until the owners of the house reminded her that it was after midnight and that she had to leave. As she was leaving she saw the Virgin again and immediately after she felt the flow of blood and other fluids. Afterwards she felt a great relief! The pain was completely gone and the blood completely stopped.

From Samaloot, Sohir Ghaly Abd El-Messeh, a diabetic confined to bed because of an extremely high level of blood sugar. She came to the church with her father and was healed from diabetes. She came again to the church to show the priest the lab. reports before and after . On her second visit she was accompanied by her family and their local priest. The wonders and miracles brought about by this visitation are far too numerous to report them all. This must be the topic for a book, such as the ones written about the Zeitun incident. For now, we must pray that Our Lady will continue to make her appearances and manifest healings to the people of Egypt and everywhere.

May such a miracle be visited on us all. Glory always be to Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

III. The Apparition of the Virgin Mary Part II: In Zeitun, Egypt 1968

Editorial: The recent apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

The recent apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Cairo is not without precedent. In 1968 and 1969, Our Lady made many such appearances at Her church in Zeitun, a suburb of Cairo. The visitations became so well known that multitudes of people, Christian and Moslem alike, surrounded the church in an effort to get a glimpse of Her. Finally the government ordered a municipal garage covering the entire block on the south side of the church (where Our Lady made her visitation) torn down to accommodate the crowd. The best account of this event in English is contained in Pearl Zaki's book, "Our Lord's Mother Visits Egypt in 1968 and 1969." "The similarities between this visit and the last one stem from a time of great stress for the Christian Community in Egypt. In 1968 She appeared after the six-day war with Israel. Today She appears in response to the threat of persecution from extremist groups. It is obvious that God has not forgotten the faith of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt.



Apparitions of the Saints and in particular the Virgin St. Mary are numerous. According to tradition, we know about the vision (apparition) in which Thomas saw Mary's body ascending to heaven. He told the other disciples about it after using the doubting routine about her death. They fasted and saw the same apparition, that is why we celebrate the fast of Virgin Mary, 7-22 August every year that ends in the feast of the Ascension of the body of the Virgin Mary..

There are many apparitions documented in the history of the church: They include seeing Jesus our Lord, Angels, the Virgin Mary, and many Martyrs and Saints. One popular apparition was at the city of Atreeb on the Nile Delta North of "Masr" (Cairo) during the Abbasid rule. The Caliph sent soldiers to demolish Christian churches in the empire. When they reached Atreeb, the priest and congregation of this church named for the Virgin prayed for their church to be saved. The Virgin appeared to the priest, comforted him, and assured him that she will bring him a reprieve within twenty-four hours. The priest asked the leader of the soldiers to wait one day. The man laughed because it takes a messenger many days to travel to Baghdad and back. The next day the priest had the answer in a letter dropped by a dove? He took it over to the leader of the soldiers. It was sealed, and the ink was fresh. When the soldier opened it, he had a change of orders from the Caliph. Turn around and go back. Do not continue with the plan! The church of Atreeb is one of the most popular artifacts of the Coptic Church history

Many people in this country (USA) tend to discount miraculous events; and especially when they occur in places not blessed with the dubious benefits of western Culture. Thus, little information was relayed into the United States during the appearances in 1968-69. So far, one small paragraph, which we took the liberty to reprint, has made it into the U.S.A. about the apparition of Our Lady at St. Demiana's Church in Shoubra, a suburb of Cairo. The account of it contained in this publication is the most extensive to be reported yet in English. All we can do is pray that this beautiful event will achieve the recognition it deserves.

The apparition of the Virgin Mary in Zeitun is documented elsewhere. Mrs. Pearl Zaki of New Jersey is one of those who traveled to Egypt and documented it. She continues to receive testimony about miracles and wonders. Please read her book: *The Apparition of The Virgin Mary in Zeitun* "

In Summary, on April 2, 1968 and around 1:00 A.M. a guard at a huge public transportation garage across the street from a small church built in the early 1900 in the suburb of Zeitun (20 miles south of Cairo) saw what appeared like a young female hanging on the ledge below one of the domes of the church across the street. He thought that someone was trying to commit suicide jumping from the roof of the church. He shone his flashlight on the image and shouted from the top of his lungs at that image not to jump. Routinely, he called the police and fire department. Although he is not Christian, he called some of the church officials. They all came. The apparition continued till around 4:00 A.M. They all realized what it was. At first people were skeptical, but the news spread in Cairo and around the Country. Summer was near, and people started to flock to the church of Zeitun. This was a year before the writer left Egypt for the States. I was an instructor at Cairo University, Faculty of Engineering; Electrical Engineering Department. My two sisters and I had the fortune of traveling to Zeitun on Thursday Nights and staying till the early hours of Friday, the official Holiday; and seeing some of the apparitions, Here is some of what many people saw:

Most of the time people including myself saw heavenly bodies that looked like doves floating in the air and moving gracefully in all direction above and around the church. We know that doves do not fly at night, and what we were seeing was lighted more than dense bodies. Then on occasion we would see the Virgin as a bust figure, or a complete figure. The complete figure was leaning forward the hands stretched down and the palms of the hands facing towards the crowd. It was magnificent, the crowds shouted, screamed, prayed, sang, praised God. This continued for over a year. Almost always between 10:00 PM and 4:00 AM.

What did it All Mean? - No body exactly knows other than the fact that God reveals himself to us in all ages. This was one of those revelations which was badly needed:

The Year was 1968, Less than a year after the humiliating defeat in the June 1967 war. People in Egypt, the writer included, were very saddened by the events. Some lost hope in the ability of Egypt to rebound as a nation from such a disastrous defeat. Muslims and Christians alike, believe in God's power to perform wonders. We both believe that Mary gave birth to Jesus ("Issa") and she was Virgin according to the revelation given to her by Gabriel the Angel (messenger of God). We believe in her sanctity and intercessions. So, I believe that she came to reassure all of us that God did not forget or forsake us!

This Magnificent apparition occurred in the days of Pope Cyril (Kyrillos) VI. Pope Kyrillos was known as a man of prayer who himself performed wonders and miracles in the name of Jesus Christ. I believe God honored him by these apparitions.

It is always good for those who experience the miracles, because it can build, even strengthen faith. Please remember the ruler of Cypress who saw Paul not harmed by the serpent. He believed!

Since the events in Zeitun and Shoubra, the Virgin appeared in Yugoslavia. A friend of ours experienced healing in his home in Chicago. He saw St. Menas several times in visions, and had a picture of the Virgin from which Oil started to flow and it increased until it filled the entire frame starting from the bottom, then over flew to cover the entire wall of the living room. This continued for two years. Many people witnessed it. There were similar miracles in a home in Houston where a teenager was healed from Leukemia, and another in our Coptic Church in Cleveland, Ohio.

For those who wish to see and receive, we pray they do. For the others who still have not had the fortune, we remind them of the words of Jesus: "Blessed are those who believed without seeing."

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

IV. LOVE (AGAPE)

It's a beautiful word frequently used but mostly misrepresented. If only one criterion is to be used to distinguish Christianity from all other religions, it must be the way Christ the Lord defined true love (Agape). Agape is not an infatuation or a condition based on mutual benefits. It is a spiritual state that far exceeds our natural man's ability to be. More important we love because we like to be like God, and "God Is Love (I John 4:21)" In the Sermon on the Mount when Christ laid out the foundation of Christian living, he said: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, ..." (Math 5:43-47). He also told the story of the 'Good Samaritan' in Luke 10:25-37 in which he answered the lawyer who tempted him saying "What shall I do to inherit the eternal life?" and Jesus answered him saying: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." When the lawyer did not yet understand who his neighbor was, Jesus told the story of the "Good Samaritan" who was called "Good" because he loved even his enemies (the Samaritans and the Jews were bitter enemies). So we have to do likewise to be called the same.

Love is not only a nice quality to possess, "Love is fulfilling of the law." (Romans 13:10). It is the commandment of our Lord: "to Love one another as I Loved you." The greatest love of all is the love of God for us all: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.." (John 3:16). There is no greater love than this for one to die for those whom he Loved and as a result: "He that believeth on him is not condemned.." (John 3:18). With this great promise we should not fear any thing if we truly love him because "there is no fear in love..." (I John 4:18).

His (Christ's) love has to be manifested in every thing we do. It is not just empty words we recite, we have to show love to all: the good, the bad, and the indifferent. We have to walk the second mile, we have to turn the other cheek because if we don't then we did not really accept the teachings of our Lord and we do not deserve to be treated according to his mercy. It is told that John the Evangelist (who is called the Beloved and the one that Jesus entrusted with his Mother, the Virgin Mary) spent the latter part of his life preaching one thing and one thing only: LOVE. Two of his three epistles are a manifestation of that truth. His first epistle also showed that love should not be just some empty words: "My little children, let us not neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (I John 3:18) he writes: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love..." (I John 4:7-21). The second epistle starts with a salutation to those "whom I love in the truth.." (II John 1:1-3).

The stories told about Christian Love (Agape) are numerous; let's contemplate a few:

St. Bishoy the righteous man, the Savior's beloved, was called that name because he loved more. One day, he told his disciples that if they came to church the next Sunday they would see Christ. On their way to church a disabled poor man was on the road asking every one of the brothers to: "please assist me to get to Church because I want to see Christ also". None of the brothers even considered helping the man because they were in a hurry to get to Church, except Anba Bishoy. He loved so much more that he carried the disabled man on his back to church. On the way, the man became heavier and heavier. Anba Bishoy did not mind the suffering and pain even though he was an old man. Then the load became lighter and lighter until it suddenly disappeared. An angel of the Lord told Anba Bishoy that he was the only one who loved enough to become worthy not only to see Christ but also to carry him!

We must have read in this magazine or elsewhere about the departed St. Abraam the bishop of Fayoum. He not only gave to the poor out of Love, but he shared his food and clothes with them. And through this powerful gift of Charity (Agape) or true Love he was able to perform wonders and miracles, he healed the sick, and even raised the dead.

Paul the apostle understood the commandments of our Lord very well when he showed the Corinthians a better way than becoming teachers, apostles, or even workers of miracles. He said: "Though I speak with tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (love), I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have a gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind; Love

envieth not; Love vaunteth not itself, it is not puffed up. Love doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (I Corinth 13:1-13).

Dear reader whoever you are, wherever you are: JESUS LOVES YOU, so do I.

V. FAITH

Now that we talked about Love 'Agape', it is only natural to talk about Faith which is a great companion of love and hope, "And Now abideth faith, hope, and charity..."(I Corinth 13:13). Many times we hope but never receive. But, if we combine hope with a measure of faith we certainly will receive, "According to your faith be it unto you." (Mat 9:29).

What is faith? Faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb 11:1). Abraham, the father of the fathers believed (had faith) in many things unseen and many that were hoped for. "By faith, Abraham, when he was called to move into a place which he should receive for an inheritance, obeyed. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise. Through faith Sarah received strength to conceive seed and was delivered of a child when she was past age (Sarah was over 90 years of age when the angel of the Lord announced to her that she would conceive). By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: "...and he that received the promises offered up his only begotten son accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead" ..etc. (Heb 11:-).

We also read about other men of God who by faith were able to see and receive promises which were more than what they thought or hoped for: "By faith Abel's sacrifice was more acceptable than Cain's. By faith Enoch was translated (went to heaven) that he should not see death. By faith Noah built an ark for the saving of his house." (Heb 11:-).

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God. But without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. "The Gospel (good news) of God is preached unto us as well as unto them (who do not believe): But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith ." (Heb 4:2). Faith is the means to receive spiritual gifts from God given freely to those who seek them. Paul the apostle called the Galatians "FOOLISH" because, "This only I would learn of you, received you the Spirit by the works of the law, or by Hearing of faith? " (Ga 3:1,2). He then reminded them that: "...no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith" (Ga 3:11).

How much faith should one have to walk in the way of salvation? Jesus gave us the perfect answer, when the apostles asked him to increase their faith, he said: "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamore tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you." (Luke 17:5,6). He also said to the disciples when they wondered why they could not cast out devils: "Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove.." (Math 17:20). Can we simply summarize by saying that it takes very little faith to even move mountains!

JESUS showed us by many examples the power of faith: The woman with the issue of blood twelve years came behind him, and touched him because she believed that if she touched him, she would be whole. He said to her: "Daughter be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole." (Mat 9:22). To the two blind men who followed him crying ;" Thou son of David have mercy on us"; he said: According to your faith be it unto you.' (Mat 9:29).

To the leper he said: "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole." (Luke 18:19). And to the blind Jesus said: "Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee." (Luke 18:42). The daughter of Jarius was raised from the dead on her father's faith. The servant of the Centurion because of his master's faith was healed (Mat 8:8). And the sick of the palsy was healed not only because of his faith, but also because of the faith of his four friends who removed the roof and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus, because when Jesus "saw their faith, he said unto him, man, thy sins are forgiven thee." (Luke 5:20).

Does that mean that one can believe for another? The answer is Yes. One also has to believe (have faith) for his own condition. The woman with the issue of blood had faith, the friends of the man with palsy believed (had faith) for their friend.

In the history of our church, we all heard the story of moving the mountain of Mukatam (east of Cairo) in the days of the Pope St. Abraam known as Ibn Zaraa (62nd Pope and Patriarch) during the rule of Al-Mouez Al-Fattimy. The Pope, through a vision, after three days of prayers and fasting (he was challenged to move the mountain as the bible said or else) was led to a man of simple faith. Samaan 'Al-Kharaaz' (the shoe cobbler) led the faithful in moving the mountain. His prayer was so simple but his faith was so powerful! As the congregation followed him in reciting the simple words: "Lord have mercy", the mountain rose up and moved in front of all that were congregated (the challenger had to ask them to stop because it was so frightening to see a mountain move!).

It is marvelous to have faith and always rely on simple faith in all the affairs of our life, but we have to remind our brothers and sisters who are reading this and any other article on faith not to forget an important truth that goes together with faith: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead." (James 2:26)

So, regardless of our spiritual condition, let us believe that God gave each and every one of us a measure of faith because all it takes is as small an amount as the grain of a mustard seed which is pretty small. Let us combine our faith with good works as the Lord commanded us and see if we can not move any obstacle in our way even mountains. We then will find ourselves glorifying the wonderful name of the most faithful of all, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ to whom Glory be forever. Amen.

VI. Prayer

There are three pillars for Christian life: Prayer, Fasting, and (Alms) Giving. This article can only touch the surface of the subject of prayer. We will talk about the other two subjects in future articles. What is Prayer? While fasting is a relationship between man and himself and giving is a relationship between man and his fellow men, Prayer is: a relationship between man and his creator. Prayer is the communication link with the Almighty. If the link is open and clear, it opens the door of heaven to benefits its user greatly.

In the old, the people came to Moses and said: "...Pray unto the Lord, that he take a way the serpent from us, and Moses prayed for the people.." (Num 21:7) and they were saved from the serpents. On another occasion Moses prayed for the people: "I prayed for you unto the Lord, and said, O' Lord God, destroy not thy people.." (Deut 10:26) which tells us that we can ask our spiritual leaders to pray for us, but we should know that they pray for us without being asked. The church guided by the holy Spirit did put that into every day practice by including in the Liturgy prayers the priest makes for his flock that covers all things and every thing.

When should we pray? The Apostle Paul answered this question by saying: "Pray always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.." (Eph 6:18). And to his disciple Philemon he said: "Thanking my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers" (Ph 1:4). To the Thessalonians he said: "Pray without ceasing" (I Thes 5:17).

The church, following the Old Testament teaching "Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgment" (Ps 119:164), arranged seven prayers for the hours of the day:

1. Early morning (6 A.M.),
2. Terce (9 A.M.),
3. Sext (12 Noon),
4. None (3 P.M.),
5. Vesper (5 P.M.),
6. Compline (6 P.M.),
7. Midnight (Midnight)

These seven prayers are written in the book of 'Agpeya' and are an arrangement of 12 Psalms, a gospel reading, intercession prayers, absolutions, and other prayers to fit the particular hour. If we start practicing these prayers, we will surely have the power of prayer in us. The Early morning prayer has 19 psalms and a reading from the epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians concerning the belief in the Holy Trinity, One Baptism, and One Church.

We also are commanded to attend the public prayers the church arranges for us which include and not limited to:

1. Liturgy, at least once a week. Some Churches celebrate liturgy Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. His Holiness Pope Kyrillos VI celebrated liturgy everyday, except during Paschal Week. So, does His Grace Anba Domadius, the Metropolitan of Guiza who also was a spiritual secretary of Anba Kyrillos.
2. Raising of Incense (Vespers), the night before Liturgy,
3. The celebrations of saints and martyrs,
4. The Paschal Week prayers,
5. All the other prayers as specified by the canons of the church.

The prayer of the congregation is what gives strength to the individual through the group and without it, the individual prayer loses its effect: "These all continued with one accord in prayer, with the women, and they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread. Praising God with all the people." (Acts 1:14, 2:46).

Who Prays?

1) Spiritual leaders pray for their flock always: "Praying always for you" (Col 1:3). The effectiveness of a church is not in how many teachers or how many books but in how much prayer is offered for the people. Some of us remember the life of our departed Father Pope Cyril VI which can be described as: a life of effective prayer.

2) The congregation has to pray for its leaders also as Paul requested: "Pray for us" (II Thes 3:1). Prayer certainly is the best act one can do for another. It certainly will be heard if it is from the heart and without selfish motives.

Where to Pray?

For congregational prayers it is better to pray at church because the sanctity of the church, the house of the saints, certainly helps raise our hearts towards heaven.

We should also pray every chance we get, everywhere we happen to be. In the car, at work, at camp, on the beach. Prayer does give us the power to resist temptation. It is good to pray with friends in gatherings, on social occasions like anniversaries and birthdays and also let us not forget to pray at the table. Families should get into the habit of praying together and remember the saying: "The family that prays together, stays together."

The best place for true personal prayer is in a private place as Jesus taught us: "But when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door then pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." (Math 6:6). The Bible gave many examples of being apart to pray: "He (Jesus) went up into a mountain, apart to pray" (Math 14:23), "Peter was at the house top (alone) praying when the angel also spoke to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter." (Acts 10:7,-) thus was the door opened for the gentiles (us) to receive salvation.

What to Pray for?

This is probably the most difficult question to answer: "We know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the spirit itself makes intercessions for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom 8:26). For example, we should pray for others before we pray for ourselves. We should pray for spiritual needs before we pray for material needs: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Math 6:33).

We ought to pray for our spiritual leaders following the teachings of the church Fathers in the Liturgy, we pray for our Pope, our Bishops, Our Priests, our deacons and sub-deacons, and for every one that the Lord May have mercy upon us all.

Let's not forget also to pray for our rulers and those above us in all the affairs of our lives: "I exhort that prayer be made for all men. For kings and for all that are in authority, that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life .." (I Tim 2:1,2). If you are a US citizen, you should pray for President Bush and the government of the US. If you are a Canadian, you should pray for the PM and the government of Canada. In Egypt, we ought to pray for President Mubarak and the government of Egypt, etc.

What is the power of prayer? The answer is simple, the power of prayer is unlimited. It opens doors: Paul requested from the believers to be: "Praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.." (Col 4:3).

To Cornelius: "The angel appeared while he was praying and said: Cornelius, thy prayer is heard.. " (Acts 10:31) thus prayer opened the door for this gentile and all of us to receive salvation. "When Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God.. and suddenly there was an earthquake, so that the foundation of the prison were shaken and immediately all the doors were opened.." (Acts 16:25).

King Manasseh when he was taken to Babylon as a slave prayed: "and (the Lord) heard his supplication ... Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." (II Chron 33:11-13).

Ezra prayed unto God "and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, ... the people wept very sore" (Ezra 10:1) and this was the means by which his people were united and rebuilt Jerusalem during the reign of Cyrus the king of Persia.

Nehemiah during another time of captivity: "sat down and wept and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven." (Neh 1:4) and he was granted permission to return to Jerusalem and said his famous words: "Come, let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach" (Neh 2:17) and it was for him according to his prayer.

When Daniel prayed, the angel Gabriel informed him of the seventy weeks which are determined upon his people and their holy city. He also was shown a glorious vision of what will befall the human race in the latter days (Dan 10,11)

Elijah prayed and it caused rain to stop for 3 ½ years. And he prayed again and it rained abundantly (I Kings 18)

St. Shenoute (Shenouda) the archimandrite (Head of Solitude) used to speak with angels, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and even the Lord Jesus Christ as he prayed. Read what his disciple Anba Wesa said describing a conversation between apa Shenoute and a monk named Joseph in "The Life of Shenoute by Wesa" : "Joseph, Shenoute does not speak with men in the desert; it is the angels I speak with ..." What gave him this power? Apa Wesa said: "He adorned his life gloriously with the perfection of monastic labours, great asceticism, and a multitude of practices, for he would pray twelve times a day. At night he would not sleep at all until day-break."

What hinders Prayer?

Being not from the heart: "This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Math 15:8).

Not according to the will of God: "for we know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom 8:26).

Not the right time: In an acceptable time have I heard them, and in a day of salvation have I helped them" (Is 49:8).

The Devil our arch-enemy might be is hindering our prayers, again it could be because we are not resisting him enough: "Then said he (the Angel Gabriel) unto me, fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that thou didst (pray)... thy words were heard and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of... (the devil) withstood me one and twenty days; but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princess (the arch-angel), came to help me" (Dan 10:12-14).

The Best prayer? Is a prayer of thanks giving that is why the church's Fathers taught us to start all congregation prayers with the prayer of thanksgiving. We recite it in the raising of incense, during Liturgy, in Weddings, Ordinations, Baptisms. We even say it in sad times such as funerals.

The Perfect prayer is: Our Lord's prayer which he taught us in the sermon on the mount when he said: "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name..." (Math 6:9-13).

What we liken prayer to? ".. Golden vials full of odours which are the prayer of saints .." (Rev 5:8), and "was given unto him (the angel) much incense that he shall offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.. " (Rev 8:3,4).

Prayer raised the dead "And he cried (Elijah prayed) ... And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, (I Kings 17:17-23). And heals the sick: " The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." (James 5:15).

Our dear reader, if you experienced the power of prayer in you life, spread it around. If you did not, you will be happily surprised when you experience this mighty weapon. Start today. Say your prayer before going to bed, early in the morning, at the table, in the car. Anywhere and everywhere. Ask for God's wisdom in choosing

what you pray for and you will certainly see things in a new light. We pray for you that the Lord may cause the spark to happen in your life soon. Very soon. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

VII. FASTING

We already talked about Prayer, the first pillar of Christian living. Fasting is the second pillar of Christian living; it is a good companion of prayer: "This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting" according to our Lord and Savior (Mat 17:21). It is difficult to give a comprehensive treatment to such important subject in one article, we can only touch the surface of this most important practice. Prayer and fasting go together as the Lord said and repeated in the book of Mark: "And he said unto them, this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting" (MK 9:29).

Why Fasting? - A question that was asked in past times and raised more often in these times in which materialism blinded us all. Drive anywhere and you will be bombarded with signs: "All you can eat" as if it is good for one to eat all he can eat! The bible says "Meats (food) for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them" (I COR 6:13). It is not good to always eat all you can eat. More often than not, it is good to say NO, to have control.

Fasting gives us the ability to have that control "But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in affliction, in necessities, in distress, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumult, in labours, in watching, in fasting ..." (II COR 6:4,5). Paul also said about himself, about controlling his desires: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to the others, I myself should be a castaway" (I COR 9:27). And to cast any doubt about the Apostle Paul's fasting and practice of self control and abstaining, because his name is used a lot in what is called "New Testament Churches" (which are sometimes so ignorant of the teachings of the New Testament) let us examine what the book of Acts says about him:

"Paul besought them all to take meat (food), saying, this day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing .." (Acts 27:33). Also, we ought to know that big decisions are done better when they are taken after prayer and fasting: "As they ministered (prayed), and fasted the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for the work whereunto I have called them." (Acts 13:2).

I remember when I was a youth, we used to pray and fast before big exams. Many of us would go to Church and leave our names with the father the priest. Some did even go to the house of the patriarchate and asked the blessings of the Holy Father the Patriarch. It was a mighty power.

How to Fast? - Following the teachings of our Lord, "When you fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say to you they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy father, which is in heaven and thy father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." (MAT 6:16,17).

We have to appear as normal as we can be! We know about those that go around telling the world. This is not the Christian way. Pay attention to the words of Christ.

It is evident from the writings of the prophets and Apostles that it is not enough to abstain from food, we have to stay away from desired things, from rich foods such as meat and dairy products: "My knees are weak through fasting" (Ps 109:24-27) are the words of David the prophet and the king."

We also know that the Lord Jesus Christ fasted for us 40 days and 40 nights to teach us the importance of this practice (MAT 4: 2-4). This he did before he started his ministry to teach us to do likewise before any major decision in our lives.

The Synxarium (History of the Saints) and The Book of the Paradise of Monks are full of examples of how to fast. Most are way above our abilities or will power, but we all know that a mile long journey starts by taking a first step. St. Bishop whom we call the beloved of our Righteous Savior ate very little. St. Paul the first Anchorite and Soul Traveler ('Paula awal Al-Swaah') lived on half a loaf of bread a day brought to him by a crow. We all know the beautiful story of the visit by St. Anthony the father of monastic life: The crow brought a whole loaf of bread that day. St. Paul the Anchorite through fasting and prayers and many like him became soul travelers (not limited by time or space). St. Shenoute (shenouda) the archimandrite lived a life of prayer and fasting to the point

that his skin stuck to his bones. How is that for will power! He was blessed by seeing and speaking with: Angels, Isaiah, Ezekiel, David, the Apostles, and even Christ the Lord.

The Synxarium reading for the 7th of Hator talks about St. Ibrahim the hermit. He lived as a hermit 33 years eating dried beans ('fool') wetted and salted. It did mention that his daily ration was about a cup of beans!

What Is the Power of Fasting? - The book of Acts (New Testament Church) talks about the conversion of Cornelius, the first gentile to receive salvation: "Cornelius said, four days ago I was fasting until this hour, and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man (angel) stood before me in bright clothing." (Acts 10:30). This opened the door for all gentiles to receive the Good News.

"As they ministered (prayed) ... and fasted the Holy Ghost said, ..." (Acts 13:2).

It is also necessary to break fast. "Paul besought them all to take meat (food), saying this day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting" (Acts 27:33). "When much time was spent, and when sailing now dangerous, because the fast was already past" (Acts 27:9)

The Law of Fasting? - The early Church guided by the Holy Spirit has instituted Canons to govern fasting (See the Canons of the Apostles (Descoliah)). Our Coptic Church is one of the very few Apostolic Churches that abides by the Canons of the Holy Fathers of the Early Church. The practice goes even back to old testament times: "Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement unto you, It shall be an holy convocation unto you , and you shall afflict your souls (fast), and offer .. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted (not fasting) in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people" (Lev 23:27-29). The following is general rules to be verified and approved by your spiritual advisor (the local priest in most cases):

Observe fast every week on Wednesdays and Fridays with the exception of the Pentecost season (the 50 days following Easter) because we ought not fast while the bridegroom (Jesus) is with his bride (the Church). "Jesus said unto them, can the children of the bride chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? .. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in these days" (MK 2:19,20).

The day following the day of Pentecost is the beginning of a holy fast named after the Apostles. Some Copts do not observe this holy fast, which they ought to. This fast ends on July 12 which is the celebration of the Apostles and the martyrdom of Peter and Paul who represent the evangelical works among both Jews and Gentiles.

From August 7 to August 21, we have a most loved fast called in honor of the Virgin Mary. Hardly any one skips this most refreshing spiritual event. Some non-Christians in our home land observe this fast also.

The Advent season. It is the forty-three days preceding Christmas. It starts on Nov. 25th and ends on January 6th.

In February, we celebrate a 3 days fast remembering the act of the people of Nineveh and how merciful the Lord God was to them all. "So the people of Nineveh believed and proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them" (Jon 3:5). As we all know the Lord had mercy on them not because of the prophet Jonah, but because they humbled themselves, and cried unto the Lord of heaven, who heard them and put away the wrath which was to beset them.

The Holy forty days precedes the Paschal week and is preceded by 7 days of fasting in preparation to fasting following the example of Christ our Savior who fasted on us forty days and forty nights he who is righteous and had no need to fast. This is called lent in all Apostolic Churches and is a good time for repentance and full forgiveness follows, to grow in the grace through the mercy of our Lord who saved us while we were undeserving sinners.

It is also commanded that the day preceding any of the feasts of our Lord to be 'Paramoon' (preparation) and nothing is more effective in preparing to receive the blessings of the feasts of our Lord than to fast.

Rules of Fasting: When we fast, we have to:

1. Abstain for a period. Not eat or drink. The spiritual advisor works with the individual the number of hours.
2. When we eat, we eat light and limit the diet to vegetables, beans, and fruits. eating fish is not always allowed. Exceptions are made in case of illness and because of age, but these should not be a blank check. You have to review your situation with your spiritual advisor.

3. On Saturdays, we do eat fasting foods during fast, but we do not have to abstain.
4. Any time you had communion, you do not abstain for the rest of the day, because you broke fast by receiving Christ.

Does It Work? - "But for me when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned unto my bosom (was heard)" (Ps 35:13). No one had as much glory as David had.

"And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven" (Neh 1:4) How many people had the honor of rebuilding the temple of the Lord and the wall of the great city Jerusalem, the city of the great king.

"Then I proclaimed a fast then, at the river of Ahava that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance" (Ezra 8:21) And it was the prophet Ezra according to his faith. Did not he get permission from Cyrus the king of Persia to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

Again we mention the incident of moving the Moukatam mountain east of Cairo (~970 A.D.) in the tenth century A.D. It was after three days of fasting and praying that the Lord directed the Pope of Alexandria as to what to do and who is the one to lead that great effort of performing the wonder of moving a mountain

Dear friend, we wish you will practice fasting this lent season (Starts March 2, 2003), if so talk to your spiritual advisor about even greater measure of self control, shall we use the biblical term self-affliction. If you have not started yet, please do so soon. it is a good act of self renewal. It is like we said a relationship between one and himself. It is primarily to your benefit, but, it also have blessed results which manifests themselves in our relations with. Give it a try. Consider it a new diet unto the Lord!

Lent is particularly important for our spiritual growth and we can combine an extra measure of self control with sincere heart filled prayers; continuously; to not fall in temptation. Lent commemorates the Lord's fasting. He fasted for us forty days and forty nights; and when the devil came to tempt him, the devil was defeated. The devil ran away from the power of fasting! One departed father used to say: Lent is the time for gathering spiritual benefits that lasts a whole year.

May our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ; grant all of us the power needed to act in ways pleasing to Him. Glory always be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God. Amen.

VIII. Alms (Giving)

The third Pillar of Christian living is alms (giving). As with Prayer and Fasting we can only touch the surface of this most important principle in one article. Alms (giving) - is a relationship between man and his fellowmen in one sense and a relationship between man and his creator in a bigger sense.

"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Mat 25:40). Please read the whole chapter. Our Lord commanded us to give and to do so in complete secrecy, which can not be overemphasized. "The left should not know what the right is doing! "

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what the right hand doeth" (Mat 6:1-3). Also read Matthew 6:19-21.

We also should recognize that the same goes for praying and fasting thus we build a complete foundation of a most strong relation with God and since he is a "Lord on the hearts of men" then we do not have to sound off like other people do!

Tithing (1/10th) - The principle of giving 1/10th or tithing is as old as humanity "And Mel-chiz-ed-ek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine and he was the priest of the most high God. ... (Abram) gave him tith of all" (Gen 14:210) This explained, "all" means everything: He gave him 1/10th of all his possessions and even his hair, his finger nails and toe nails which the priest clipped, and Abram gave 1/10th of that and everything else: "ALL".

In Leviticus: "And all the tith of the land whether of the seed of the land , or of the fruit of the tree is the Lord's: it is unto the Lord" (Lev 27:30).

The prophet Malachi reminds the Israelites about tithing saying: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it .." (Mal 3:10).

Wouldn't it be nice if we literally do that and save our poor from having to go to others for help and in the process get fed teachings alien to our Christian way of living?

Should we tit? - The new testament church is commanded to do better: "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mat 5:20) and we know how the Scribes and Pharisees boasted about their following the Law of Moses and the Prophets. We all heard the story of the little poor widow whom Jesus praised: "And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites (1/7 of one piece; the brass coin which was the common denomination; it is like a penny today!), which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance: but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living " (MK 12:42-44).

If we give from our want like she did, we would never hear about a church in need or a poor among our people. Let's remember the act of the poor widow and do likewise to receive the praise she received and remember that this was not a parable Jesus told, but it was a real act indeed!

The history of our Church is full of stories of people who did just that and were rewarded on earth and in heaven. St. Anthony the Great, the Fr. of Monastic life is a good example and many did like him. He literally followed the words of Jesus: "Jesus said unto him, if thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me... And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt 10:17-31) Also read (LK 18:18-30). This is the ultimate in giving.

There is a story in the Book, "The Paradise of the Monks" about a monk who gave every time he was asked until he had nothing to give. A man came to him asking for a donation, he looked around and when he had nothing to give him, he gave him the bible that he was reading from. The Brothers asked the Abbot: How can he do that? How shall he be able to read the bible again for his own daily worship? The Abbot answered: "Brothers, he became a bible unto himself!"

How to Give? - Secretly: As we mentioned above. It is very important to give in secret. When I was growing up, in Egypt in the 50's, folks slaughtered lambs, sheep, or calves on particular occasions like the remembrance of the arch-angel Michael (Nov 22) or the martyr of St. George. They divided the meat into 3 equal portions: 1/3 was sent to the church, 1/3 was distributed with other substance to the poor, and 1/3 was consumed by family and friends. Children were made to participate: They were sent out with the food baskets. Were told to knock on the door and hand the food without identifying themselves. They learned to give in secret. These customs might not be practical today, but the principle is still valid. It would be nice if Sunday School teachers use a collection plate or box to teach the little ones the principle of giving. It is not the amount in this case, but the practice which is most valuable.

Without Worry - Also we all are familiar with the words of Job "Naked came I out of my mother's womb The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away" (JOB 1:20) which is usually quoted otherwise, but do you not see that we brought nothing to the world? So if we own less why worry? ..."It is (then) more blessed to give than to receive" (Act 20:35) and when we give we really are not giving because we do not even own, we are on borrowed time in this world until we meet "The King of Glory shall come in" (PS 24:9).

With Simplicity - We have to add also the word simplicity: "He that give let him do it with simplicity." (Romans 12:8). It is bothersome to see all the schemes being invented to drag money out of people, like Bingo night at churches, or lotteries, or whatever. In this you fault the organizer first! But like one priest said: "If the people of God are following his commandments, there would be no need to do any of that. The Church does not have to invent fancy schemes to get people attentions!"

With Gladness. Besides secrecy, it is important to give cheerfully, with great affection and delight: "God loveth a cheerful giver" (II COR 9:7) because we do not own in the first place: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps 24:1) Please read the rest of this beautiful Psalm, you will realize that we do not own, we are on a borrowed time in this world until we meet "The King of Glory": He that give let him give with gladness.

Fruits of giving? - About Cornelius the bible says: "Cornelius gave much" (Acts 10:2), and he is remembered as the first Gentile to receive salvation.

Tabitha was remembered by all and they all interceded for her and she was raised from the dead on the hands of Peter because "she was full of good works and almsdeeds (acts of giving)" (Acts 9:36).

Solomon's words in the book of Ecclesiastes will reverberate to eternity: "Cast thy bread upon the waters for thou shalt find it after many days" I wish we remembered it always. It means that you do not do good only unto those you think they are deserving. Do it regardless and God will show you the fruits of giving even if it takes a long time for the fruits of your 'Almsdeeds' to come back to you. You will see it!

I once thought, what about those who gave up marriage or material possessions: What did they receive? It was foolish and quickly realized that they became Fathers of many. Do you see? Anthony became Father of all monastic life. Packomios became Father of commune life, Shenouda became Father of all hermits (Archimandrite) ... etc. "Sell that you have and alms: provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth." (Luke 12:33).

Remember that Jesus promised 100 folds in this world and everlasting life with him.

St. Abraam the departed Bishop of Fayoum is a good example for our generation here and now: He gave even when there was not much left. As we heard from those who saw it, he would ask a person in need to go in and take what satisfied his need. Far cry from the monthly welfare checks of modern times! When he was an Abbot at

the monastery he gave to the point of being accused of being fiscally irresponsible! The same happened when he was the deputy of the bishop of Menia, and again when he was the bishop of Fayoum. His response was complete silence towards his accusers. A level much higher than any of us can attain today. The Lord rewarded him the 100 folds promised in this generation. He was able to hang his coat on a ray of the Sun. How many of us can come close! He even was honored, by giving, after his departure: When a man came to the Azab Monastery in Fayoum asking for him (not knowing that he departed), the man was told to go in. When he went in, he saw him sitting in his chair. He asked and was given what he asked for!

How about Receiving? - Some of us are on the receiving end from time to time. We ought to be thankful and not ashamed because Christian giving is from God not man: "he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things And hath made of one blood all nations ... For in him we live ..." (Acts 17:24-28). Remember also the words of Jesus: "Ask and it shall be given unto you" (Mt 7:7) to which we say: Amen.

Beautiful Gifts? - The beggar, at the gate of the temple (called beautiful), asked Peter and John for alms, he received a better gift: "Then Peter said, silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. ... And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." (Acts 3:2-8). How we all hope for that kind of gift!

Finally - We like to say that giving should not be limited only to material things. God is more interested in our hearts and in our time. Are we willing to give him what is his: "Remember the sabbath (seventh) day, to keep it holy. ... But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God" (EX 20:8-11). Do we give him the seventh day which is his? It is our feeling that there is a greater need for giving of our time and our efforts than of material possessions. This can only be satisfied if we really get involved as we should every one according to his ability: "every man give as he is able to, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee" (Deut 16:17). And we all know the verse: "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." (Mt 9:42).

May God the Almighty who opens his hands and fills every one from his goodness make these words bring fruits. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

IX. Do Demons Still Exist?¹

In a society that has dulled our belief in the spiritual and which has led us to stupid, drunken beliefs in the "here and now" evil spiritual beings have no need to reveal themselves in order to do their work. Our spiritual demise and the triumph of evil has already come to fruition in our social views, morals, and personal philosophies. In fact, were evil to manifest itself in an obvious, , it would bring unbelievers into belief; for, as an old maxim has it, the living reality of the devil presupposes the living reality of God .

Have you ever seen the envy of an evil man directed against the innocence of an upright man, that envy finding its force in the evil man's inability to tolerate the goodness of the innocent? Have you ever seen individuals intensely hate others because of the color of their skin, their beliefs, or their physical form? Have you ever observed the vicious jealous

If you have seen any of these, and few of us have not, then you have seen not human fault, but demons: face to face! And if in yourself you have found envy, pride, hate, or anger, then you have been possessed in some form by that which seeks to combat and expunge the goodness, purity, love, sacrifice, and image of God that bespeak the true nature of man. If we see and know these things, evil cannot prevail. It fears knowledge and discovery. When we have the humility to see those things which are wrong in us, evil must flee. It cannot possess us. Its greatest weapon is our ignorance of its existence and our deluded misapprehension of its nature.

As sure as God exists within the heart, giving us tears of contrition and divine love, demons exist all around us, at times possessing us and leading us into fits of hate, jealousy, and pride. Let none of us doubt or forget this. And always remember that: "This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matt 17:21)

¹ From the article "Demons" by Bishop Chrysostomos of Oreoi, published by the Center for Traditional Orthodox Studies

X. Special Display of Coptic Art at the Newark Museum

A special exhibit of Coptic art was put on display at the Newark Museum in Newark, New Jersey in November, 1986. The exhibit featured many different types of craftwork manufactured by the people of Egypt from the third to seventh Centuries (A .D.). Over a hundred different objects comprise the show.

Most of the exhibit is from the Nadler collection, named for Morris Nadler an industrialist who worked in Alexandria in the early years of the 20th Century (A.D.). When the Nadler family came to New York City in the 1950's, a large collection of Coptic artifacts came with them. These were the result of Morris Nadler's collection activities. The display at the Newark Museum represents only a small part of the Nadler collection.

Of particular interest is a painting of St. George from the 6th or 7th Century (A.D.) that is remarkably well preserved. Many fine examples of textile pattern weaving in brilliant colors may also be viewed. Several water flasks from St. Mina's Monastery (4th Century A.D.) and various silver hand crosses round-out the exhibit as well.

It is encouraging to see a show devoted to Coptic Art on display in this country. For those of us not fortunate to visit the Coptic Museum in Cairo, Egypt, the Newark Museum's exhibit will suffice.

**XI. Book Review:
The Life of Shenoute
by 'Besa' (St. Wesa his disciple)
Dr. David N. Bell**

This book published by cistercian Publications, Inc. of Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008 is a necessary reading material for every Coptic family that does have members who are not able to read the same history which exists in Arabic (translated from the Boharic text). The author of this book, Professor Donald N. Bell, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, did an excellent job in translating the Boharic text edited by I. Leipoldt and W.E. Crum (paris 1906) into English.

As a Copt, I appreciate the effort of Dr. Bell and I would like to give the unfamiliar reader a flavor of the beauty of the life of our Great saint Shenoute the Archimandrite. One of the shining stars of Christianity who is completely ignored by western theologian because he was too much of a Copt (Our father Shenoute new Greek very well, but he preferred to do all his writing in Coptic the language of his ancestors. For that reason, Western theologians do not count him with the so called 'Greek Fathers' who were mostly Fathers of Alexandria called 'Greek' because they used that language in their writings since it was the most common language for literary work in their times]. Here are some quotes from that translation:

(The shepherd would [often] testify and say: "I saw the young boy's ten fingers like ten flaming lamps ..." Ten days after these things had occurred, his father took him to the holy apa Pjol to receive his blessings ... The holy apa Pjol said to the men sitting by him: 'Arise let us go out to the archimandrite. He took apa Shenoute's hand and placed it on his head saying: 'Bless me, my father and archimandrite!').

In the introduction Dr. Bell fully explained why St. Shenoute is not as well known in the West as his contemporary the Great St. Cyril of Alexandria although he does not deny that St. Shenoute accompanied the father the patriarch St. Cyril to the Council of Ephesus. The reason is as we said before: "he preferred to write in Coptic." He was too much of a Copt for the Western world to take

I wish Dr. Bell did not write an introduction for this beautiful translation of a most beautiful life story. Unfortunately, accusations of cruelty are completely out of place. It is true that people did use physical punishments to curb lying and stealing. Not long ago, in the 50's and 60's, to be exact, when I was growing up, I got licked by my father and at least one of my school teachers for something wrong I did. I am most grateful to both of them. Please Dr. Bell do not judge our archimandrite with your values. There are people who have a higher regard for his values than yours.

However, I recommend this book to the readers of the message and any body else who is looking for a good life story of a Great Saint of Great social and moral impact. I thank Dr. Bell from the bottom of my heart for presenting in English: the Life of (the archimandrite) St. Shenoute as written by his disciple St. 'Besa' Wesa. The blessings of both be with us all.

XII. A History of the Church in America: St. Mary and St. Abraam Coptic Orthodox Church of Saint Louis

A group of immigrants from Egypt felt the need to attend the liturgy . They invited Fr. Raphael Younaan, then of Montreal, Canada to visit St. Louis and celebrate the liturgy. Fr. Raphael came to St. Louis in late 1970 and the Coptic Mass was celebrated for the first time ever in St. Louis in an apartment near Deaconess Hospital on Oakland Ave. Approximately 20 people attended. Fr. Raphael agreed to visit St. Louis regularly bi-monthly.

From the second visit on, the celebration of liturgy was held at the Deaconess Hospital Chapel. in 1974, Fr. Hanna Tadros of St. Mary Church, Queens, NY became the visiting Priest instead since he it was easier for him to visit. Fr. Hanna held most services in a small Baptist Church on Jefferson Ave. Among other priests visiting St. Louis: the late Fr. Antonius Baky, Fr. Ibrahim Aziz, Fr. Gabriel Abd-Elsayed, Fr. Zakaria, Fr. Marcos Daowd, and Fr. Mankarios Awadalla. The latter celebrated Palm Sunday which was the first time in St. Louis a feast was celebrated in the presence of a priest.

Delegations visited the Patriarchate in Cairo who met with his Holiness Pope Shenouda III who promised to send a priest to serve the Coptic community in St. Louis and surrounding area. Shortly before Christmas 1979, Fr. Wiessa Besada was chosen by the Pope to serve as the priest of St. Mary and St. Abraam Coptic Church in St. Louis. Fr. Bessada was contacted by members of the church council. Arrangements were made for his arrival in St. Louis. Fr. Weisaa and his wife arrived in St. Louis shortly before Christmas 1979. He celebrated the first Christmas at St. Mary and St. Abraam on January 7, 1980.

About a year earlier, a house was bought and modified to be used as the priest's residence. Initially, the adjoining garage was linked to another garage to be used as the Church . Most of the members (25 families) enthusiastically labored to get the church and the residence ready for the priest's arrival. The work was a labor of love which was done in great cooperative spirit. Fr Weissa also helped in the construction work. A library room and a community hall (St. Mark's Hall) were later added. Bishop Weissa, the Bishop of Balianna visited the church and blessed the congregation during the time Fr. Weissa was the Priest. Fr. Weissa moved to Staten Island, NY in August 1980.

During the period from August 1980 to March 1981 several priests celebrated the liturgy including Fr. Salib Ava Mina of St. Mina Monastery. In a visit by Fr. Shenouda of St. Mark Church in Chicago, the congregation learned the news that Fr. Ekladius Hanna was selected to become the priest of the church. Fr. Ekladius arrived to St. Louis in April, 1981 and he has been the priest of the church ever since. Fr. Ekladius has been active in spreading the good news not only in St. Louis, but he has been serving wherever there is need. He has traveled to Indianapolis, IN; Kansas City, KS; Denver, CO; Houston, TX; Dallas, TX; Minneapolis, MN; New Orleans, LA; Ames, IA; Orlando, FL; Daytona, FL,...etc.

Fr. Ekladius was transferred to central Florida in November, 1987. He worked with the local congregation in Orlando and surrounding area to find a permanent location for St. Mary and Arc-Angel Michael Church which was using the building another non-orthodox church fitting their service time to their service schedule. they moved to the new church in 1991.

His Holiness sent a monk to St. Louis, Fr. Reuis Anba Paula served in St. Louis for a year. He paid special attention to Children, youth, and Adult Bible Studies. He increased number of Sunday School teachers to give children more quality learning. He took every opportunity to ordain youth as sub-deacons, and he hel bible studies in the homes on a rotating basis to have no excuse.

In November, 1988, His Holiness appointed Fr. Bassellious Sedrak as the priest of St. Mary & St. Abraam Coptic Church. He also gave him the responsibility to serve at St. Mark & St. Bishoy in Chicago until a permanent priest is appointed on that Church. Fr. Bassellious continued the efforts of the previous pastors, and added more effort in the areas of Youth service by giving an english language sermon every Sunday, he teaches Coptic Language, and we have a weekly in-depth Bible Study at the Church after the raising of incense on Saturdays.

The New Church Building construction project is starting to take off. We completed all engineering drawings and have all the required municipal permits on hand. We pray that it will be completed soon and the Lord will add more people to his church in St. Louis, and keep those already in the fold in his faith.(This is the first of a series about the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church in America. We welcome information about the church in your area.)

XIII. A History of the Church in America

2. St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Denver, Colorado

In 1967, an Egyptian Lawyer migrated to Colorado and resided in Colorado Springs. Six month later another Lawyer followed to the same city. By 1969 a congregation of half a dozen families was assembled in Colorado Springs. They invited the late blessed Reverend Father Bishoy Kamell, the pastor of St. Mark Coptic Church in Los Angeles, California, to celebrate mass in one of the residences. They used a small table as a mobile alter. This was followed by several bimonthly visits and when the group grew they moved the mass to a borrowed church building in Colorado Springs. As the number of immigrants increased, some of the new immigrants resided in Denver and surrounding area. By 1971 it was decided that Denver was a more central location for the Coptic community in Colorado and the service was moved to the Greek Orthodox Church on Pennsylvania Ave. in downtown Denver. Fr. Tadros Malaty then the priest who took the place of Fr. Bishoy came for the service regularly until about 1973.

When Fr. Tadros returned to Egypt, Fr. Roufail S. Mikhail took his place and continued the monthly service in the Greek Church. In 1974, Fr. Moussa Wahba was sent by his holiness Pope Shenouda to serve as the priest in Houston and was put in charge of St. Mark Coptic Church in Colorado. He continued the service at the Greek Church. At that time, the congregation considered buying the Greek church building, which was for sale since its congregation had moved to the suburbs, but decided against the idea because the place lacked a parking lot and it was difficult to find parking in this area which is blocks away from the Capitol.

The visit of his Holiness the Pope to America in the summer of 1977 rekindled that desire to obtain a Church building and it was not long after that visit that a Contract was signed for a building to become the home of the Coptic Church in Colorado. In March 1978, the church building at 351 W 80th Ave. in Thornton became St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Colorado. By that time Fr. Moussa Wahba was back in Egypt and Fr. Roufail Mikhail was back in America serving the congregation in the Detroit Mich. area. Fr. Roufail returned to serve the congregation he knew well in Colorado. Fr. Roufail and the congregation converted the inside of the building to look like a Coptic church, adding an alter room and an alter veil.

In 1980, Fr. Wissa Bessada was sent by his Holiness the Pope to serve in St. Louis, MO and was instructed by Pope Shenouda to care for the church in Colorado. Fr. Wissa increased the number of services from once a month to once every two weeks. This continued for about a year. Following Fr. Wissa's move to Staten Island many priests served in Colorado including Fr. Ibrahim Aziz, Fr. Ekladius Hanna, and Fr. Roufail Mikhail. his location was held on the the day of the feast of Pentecost, 1970. The Reverend Fathers who have served there since 1970 are: The Most Revered Late Father Bishoy Kamel(1) (Nov 6, 1969 to August 1970), Fr. Tadros Yacoub (August 1970 to June 1972), Fr. Arsanios Aziz and Fr. Kyrillos Daoud (June 1972 to May 1974), Fr. Antonious Heunen (Jan 1974 to Sept. 1974), Fr. Roufail S. Mikhail (May 1974 to Nov. 1975), Fr. Phlemon Mahrous (Nov. 1975 to Nov 1977), Fr. Lukas Sedarous (Nov 1977 to July 1979), and Fr. Bi

In 1983, Fr. Moussa El-Syriani (a monk from St. Mary's Monastery known as El-Syrian) was sent by his Holiness to serve in Colorado. Shortly after he arrived, he and the congregation decided and was able to find a much larger church building in Englewood. The new location of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church since April, 1984. The numbers have increased a great deal since half a dozen families congregated in a house in Colorado Springs. Unfortunately Fr. Moussa El-Syriani was called to serve in San Francisco.

For a while Fr. Angelos Boghdadi served in Denver for sometime, but he is now back in Egypt. The Church in Colorado needs every ones prayers for the Lord to arrange for a pastor for his little flock in beautiful Colorado.

XIV. History of the Church in America

3. St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Los Angeles, CA (and the seeds of other churches in California before 1986)

St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Los Angeles, California is located on the corner of Robertson Blvd and Pickford in the Hollywood area of L.A. The Church is on a 1/2 acre property. The sanctuary is 95' x 35.5'. The building was acquired in 1970. The first liturgy service at

The Coptic Church in California was organized starting in L.A. in 1968. The services started on an irregular basis with priests visiting from Cairo, Egypt. They used the building of the Syrian Orthodox Church for Liturgy service.

The service became regular with the* arrival of the late beloved Fr. Bishoy Kamel, may his righteous soul rest in peace. It was a very vigorous start with about 200 families. They agreed to purchase a Lutheran church building in mid Feb. 1970. Fr. Bishoy Kamel celebrated liturgy there in 1970 and he resided in the church building complex. Many more families were attracted to the church. Tasonry (sister) Angel, Fr. Bishoy's wife dedicated a great deal of time and effort to teaching church hymnals (Alhaan). Fr. Tadros (presently in Ottawa, Canada) arrived during the virgin Mary's feast (August 1970) and Fr. Bishoy returned back to Egypt, after establishing a strong foundation for the service. The small plant that Fr. Bishoy Kamel planted, grew to become a big tree.

Fr. Tadros did a great job building over the foundation. He especially worked on coordinating the Sunday School services, attracting the youth to church through spiritual meetings arranged specially for them. He issued a monthly news letter and wrote many books in English and Arabic explaining the Orthodox faith.

Fr. Ibrahim Aziz visited L.A. in the summer of 1971. This was by divine providence because Fr. Tadros got sick during this period, and the presence of Fr. Ibrahim Aziz prevented any interruption of church service in L.A. during that time. The congregation proposed that every one pray in their home nightly starting exactly at 9 P.M. for the healing of Fr. Tadros. The Lord answered the prayers of his flock and Fr. Tadros was healed. During his two years of service, Fr. Tadros served the congregations in: San Francisco, CA; Denver, CO; Portland, OR; Seattle, WA; and Houston, TX.

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III sent two priests to relieve Fr. Tadros: Fr. Arsanios Aziz, and Fr. Kyrillos Daoud arrived to L.A. on June 2, 1972. They served with honesty, sincerity, sacrifice, and modesty. The brotherly love they had for one another is something which is still remembered. They also supported the idea of purchasing land for a monastery which became a reality in 1973 when 40 acres of land was obtained and open air liturgy was celebrated in Oct. 1973 at the monastery. The sign of the cross appeared in heaven during the liturgy celebration.

During the Virgin Mary's feast in 1973, His grace bishop Maximus visited L.A. and consecrated the church by instructions from His Holiness Pope Shenouda III on Tuesday, August 21, 1973 (the night of the feast of the Ascension of the body of the Virgin Mary to Heaven).

The number of families increased to about 900, so on Oct. 15, 1973 His Holiness pope Shenouda III ordained Mr. Nabil Latif Heunen of Los Angeles priest and re-named him Fr. Antonious Heunen. Fr. Antonious arrived to L.A. accompanied by the Late Fr. Bishoy Kamel and served at St. Mark (Fr. Antonious is still serving in L.A. now at St. Mary & St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church). Fr. Arsanios returned to Egypt in 1974, but his companion Fr. Kyrillos was asked by the pope to move to Houston to start regular church service there. At that time, the idea of finding a church building in San Francisco was proposed. Fr. Kyrillos returned to Egypt in mid May 1974 at which time, Fr. Roufail S. Mikhail ved to L.A. from Cairo. He served with Fr. Antonious and while the late Fr. Bishoy Kamell was in L.A. a church building in Pasadena was purchased to serve East LA. The late Fr. Bishoy Kamel returned to Egypt after the purchase at the end of June 1974. The first service at the newly purchased church building took place on the day of the feast of Nerooz (Coptic New Year) which was Sept. 12, 1974. Fr. Roufail continued at St. Mark's and Fr. Antonious moved on to become the first priest of the newly acquired place which became St. Mary & St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church. During this time a two story apt. building next to St. Mark was obtained. The lower level was used for Sunday School services, and the upper level for the priest's residence. The house was paid for shortly after it was obtained.

In 1975, Fr. Roufail and Fr. Antonious both were back in Egypt. Fr. Phlemon Mahrous came to serve at St. Mark's and Fr. Ibrahim Aziz came to serve at St. Mary & St. Bishop. In March 1976, Fr. Antonious came back to L.A. and Fr. Ibrahim was back in Egypt.

On May 13, 1977, His Holiness pope Shenouda arrived to L.A. on his historic visit of North America. Of the 40 days tour, he spent about a week in L.A. This visit had a great effect on the people in America: Egyptian and non-Egyptian alike. During this his toric visit Mr. Atef Ishak (now His Grace bishop Descorous, an Engineer who was an Instructor at Cairo University; School of Engineering and a graduate of California Institute of Technology) was ordained priest and the first monk on the monastery of St. Anthony and the first to be ordained Coptic monk and priest in America. This was on Sunday May 15, 1974. He was given the name monk Bishop Al-Anthony (the Anthonian).

The ordination of monk Bishop was performed by His Holiness the pope assisted by the bishops who accompanied him on the North America visit. The pope and his companions visited the monastery and said the thanksgiving prayer, sprinkled holy water, and blessed the place with their honored visit to the California desert. Monk Bishop Al-Anthony did a great deal of effort working by his own hands on digging the ground and laying the foundation for the monastery building. He lived in a trailer while the construction work was taking place. He was assisted by Coptic youth and adults who loved Christ and his servant St. Anthony the father of monastic life. The building, now completed, consists of 2 residences (Qallali), a reception room which is also used as a sanctuary, a kitchen, and bathrooms. There is a big water pump and electricity has been connected. Many trees were planted in the area also.

Fr. Phlemon returned to Egypt in Nov. 1977 to serve at St. Mary church in Madenat Nasr (Victory city). His great efforts in L.A. included spiritual meetings for the youth on Sunday evenings thus keeping them in the fold of their church instead of being somewhere else (Fr. Phlemon returned back to L.A. this year serving the newly formed St. Athanasios Coptic Church in San Fernando Valley).

Fr. Luka (Luke) Sedarous took the place of Fr. Phlemon at St. Mark's. He arrived few weeks before Fr. Phlemon left for Egypt. Fr. Luka worked not only with Egyptians but also with non-Egyptians. He baptized more than 30 Americans, including a former atheist named Peter Brownfield. Peter is now a deacon in the church and is married to a Coptic Christian Lady. Fr. Luka also led a joint Sunday School Teachers class which alternated between St. Mark's and St. Mary's thus increasing the bonds between the Sunday School teachers at both churches.

On Feb. 18, 1979, His Holiness pope Shenouda III ordained a deacon named Shoukry Nageeb Ghobrial, a resident of L.A., priest. At St. Mark Great Cathedral in Alexandria. His Holiness named the new priest "Bishoy", the name of the late Fr. who was the first priest at St. Mark Church in L.A. The ordination took place at St. George (Mar-girgis) Church in Sporting, Alexandria in the presence of the late Fr. Bishop Kamel. This was at the request of the late blessed Fr. who was seriously ill then and would not have been able to attend if the ordination would have taken place (as would have been expected in L.A.). In the evening of that day and during the monthly sermon in Alexandria. His Holiness announced the good news of ordaining this priest who became the 101st ordained on the hands of His Holiness.

Fr. Bishop Ghobrial arrived in L.A. on April 13, 1979 which was the night of the last Friday of lent. Fr. Luka continued at St. Mark until sometime in July 1979.

On July 8, 1980 in a meeting of the board, one of the deacons proposed the demolition of a three-room extension which was built by the deacon Atef Ishak (now His Grace bishop Descorous). The next day, a fire destroyed the three rooms. Fortunately, the fire did not extend to the church which was very close and, since a fire station is just across the street, the losses were limited. Using the Insurance money (\$32,000) and donations from the congregation, the church was able to pay for a much bigger project to enlarge the church building by adding: a big hall (which can be made part of the sanctuary by opening a sliding door), a tower 70 feet high with a lighted cross on top, 10 rooms for Sunday School classes, a modern kitchen, a bakery for making the service bread (Qorban), and five restrooms. The project ran close to \$400,000.

About 1976, the idea of obtaining a church building in Orange County was on the minds of many. The service there started by a regular weekly Sunday class. Then in 1979, the congregation rented a church building in the area for Liturgy service on Saturdays. This continued until one day a member of the congregation informed Fr. Bishoy Ghobrial about a church building for sale in the Bellflower area. Fr. Ghobrial went to see the place and met the minister of the church who was asking for \$200,000 for the building. A down payment of \$500 was paid so the church will be ours if it was God's will. In April, 1980, \$80,000 was paid and the rest was to be paid in monthly installments. His Holiness the pope sent Fr. Ibrahim Aziz back to L.A. that year. Bishop Descorus also came to Bellflower to assist in starting the work of the Lord and was able to help gather a good size congregation to start what became St. George Coptic Orthodox Church; Bellflower, CA.

In the Summer of 1983, Sunday School at St. Mark organized a summer camp at Lake Arrowhead (1 1/2 hours driving from L.A.) The church charged \$110.00 per individual for 3 days at the camp. The money was used as the nucleus for a fund to obtain a permanent place near Port Huneme (50 Miles South of L.A., 2 miles from the Pacific). The place is on 3/4 acres and is used for camps and retreats year around.

In August 1984, Fr. Ashaiah (Isiah) Michael who had been serving in San Francisco since 1980, returned to Egypt. Fr. Bishoy traveled to San Francisco every week for Liturgy on Saturdays until a priest (Fr. Mikhael Melika) arrived there 8 months later.

This story of one of the largest Coptic congregations in the U.S.A. was sent to us (in Arabic) by the Reverend Fr. Bishoy Ghobrial the pastor of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of L.A. It is a story of continuing love and sacrifice by many of our Frs. who served in L.A. during the most crucial time of building a church of believers in Christ according to the Orthodox teachings. We wish those who are mentioned and those that have been inadvertently forgotten many more years of fruitful efforts and we are certain that many good lessons will be learned when the complete story of the Coptic Church in America is told.

The story clearly shows the relentless efforts of our beloved Fr. Bishoy Kamel who was sacrificed on the altar of love to Christ the Lord and his Saints. He started the work in LA among other places and always came back to assist in making important moves forward on the way. His prayers and intercessions be with us all. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

[Fr. Bishoy Kamel departed in peace in Alexanrdia, Egypt on March 21, 1979. Fr. Bishoy Ghabrial (April 1977 to Present) is the Hegoment at St. Mark in LA. The Church owns and operates: St. Anthony Monastery which is on a 40 acres property 150 miles East of Los Angeles, and a campground 50 miles from Los Angeles, and a duplex next to the church building. These notes were written in 1986. Since that time the monastery gre and had a bishop ordained and no longer belongs to any one Church]

XV. Synxarium Reading: Tut 7

A. Saint Dioscorus

On this day in 456 A.D. departed the Reverend Father, the Champion of Orthodoxy, the great patriarch, Saint Dioscorus, the twenty-fifth pope of Alexandria. His departure was at the island of Ghanghra after he fought the good fight for the Orthodox Faith.

When he was called to the Chalcedonian Council (as the Emperor Marcianus ordered), he saw a great multitude of bishops (about 630). "Who is not faithful so that this multitude had to be gathered together?" He demanded. St. Dioscorus was told that the council had been summoned on the order of the emperor and he replied, "If this council is by the order of Christ the Lord, I will attend and will speak that which the Lord puts into my mouth. But if it is a gathering by the orders of the emperor, let the emperor take care of his gathering as he pleases."

When St. Dioscorus heard that Leo, the bishop of Rome, taught that Christ had two natures and two wills after the Incarnation, he disapproved the "new" belief, saying, "Christ is One. He is the One that was invited to the wedding as a man, he is the One that turned the water into wine as God, and he was the same in all his deeds." He referred to the words of St. Cyril the Great:

"The union of the Word of God with the body is like the union of the soul and the body of flesh, and is like the union of the fire with iron; and although they were from differing natures, they become ONE with the union. Likewise, Christ the Lord, One Christ, One Lord, One nature, One will."

No one dared to argue with him at the council. However, some of the bishops attending had been at the Council of Ephesus (which was gathered against Nestorius) and since they followed Nestorius, they went and told the emperor Marcianus: "No one disobeyed your orders concerning the faith except Dioscorus, the patriarch of Alexandria."

The emperor brought St. Dioscorus in to a meeting with a select group of bishops who argued with him the entire day. St. Dioscorus did not depart from his beliefs, which was hard for the emperor and empress to accept. The empress ordered St. Dioscorus to be struck in the mouth and to have the hair of his beard pulled out. Afterward, the hair and teeth were sent to Alexandria with the message, "These are the Fruits of Faith."

When the other bishops saw what had happened to St. Dioscorus, they became afraid of suffering the same fate. Thus, they signed the council's resolution which decreed a belief that Christ had two separate natures and wills. When St. Dioscorus learned that such resolution had been signed, he asked to see the resolution, pretending that he would sign it too. But when he read it, he wrote a condemnation underneath the resolution against everyone who had signed it and deviated from the true Orthodox Faith. Outraged, the emperor banished St. Dioscorus to the island of Ghanghra. Also expelled were St. Mark, the bishop of Edlo; and two others.

When St. Dioscorus was taken to the island of Ghanghra; its bishop, a Nestorian, met him with a great deal of disrespect. However, the Lord worked many miracles through the hands of St. Dioscorus which caused the people of the island to respect and obey him. Since the Lord glorifies his chosen everywhere, he was exceedingly honored. St. Dioscorus told his companion, St. Mark, that there was a crown of martyrdom waiting for him in Alexandria. He sent him there with a merchant (who was a believer) to Alexandria, where St. Mark received the crown of martyrdom.

St. Dioscorus completed his good fight and departed from this life of falsehood. He received the crown of eternal life on the island of Ghanghra where his body was buried. His prayers and blessings be with us all. Amen.

XVI. Synxarium Reading: Hatur 28 The Martyrdom Of Saints Kozman and Demian

On this day Saints Kozman , Demian, their brothers Anthimos, Aaundios, Irabios; and their mother were martyred. They were from a city in Arabia. Their mother was a good Christian woman full of the fear of God; kind to strangers; and merciful. She became a widow when her children were very young. She raised them and taught them virtue and the fear of God. Kozman and Demian learned medicine and they treated the poor free of charge. Their brothers became monks.

When the emperor Diocletian departed from the faith and ordered the worship of idols, he was informed that Kozman and Demian were preaching Christ the Lord and were influencing people not to worship idols. He ordered them to be brought before the governor (of their region). The governor had them tortured using fire and clubs. He then asked the whereabouts of their mother and brothers. When he found them, he brought all of them before him and ordered them to worship and burn incense to the idols, but they refused.

He ordered the five brothers crushed in a vice and when they were not harmed he ordered them tossed in a fire for three days and nights. Next, they placed them on red-hot iron beds. The Lord saved them from all this to show his glory in them. When the governor gave up, he sent them to the emperor who tortured them also.

During these ordeals, their mother was comforting and encouraging them. The Emperor forbade her to do this, so she scolded him for his cruelty and idol worship. He ordered her beheaded and she received the crown of eternal life. Her body was left hanging, but no one dared to bury her. Her son, Kozman, shouted at the people of the city saying: "Citizens, is there any among you who has the mercy to bury this old widow?" At that point, Boctor Romanson advanced, took her body, wrapped it, and buried it. When the emperor learned of what Boctor Romanson did, he exiled him to Egypt where he received the crown of life eternal. The next day, the Emperor ordered Kozman, Demian, and their brothers beheaded. They all received the crown of eternal life.

Their intercessions be with us. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

**VXII. Synexarium Reading: Misra 19th
THE RETURN OF THE BODY OF
SAINT MARKARIUS TO HIS MONASTERY IN SHIHEAT**

On this day, the church celebrates the return of the body of Saint Markarius to his Monastery in Shiheat. Soon after his departure some people from his home village of 'shan-shown' went to the monastery, stole his body, took it to their village, and built a big church around it. His body was kept in this church for a period; then was moved to another village until the time of pope Mikhail (the 71st pope), about four hundred and forty years later.

When pope Mikhail went to the monastery in shiheat for lent, he exclaimed: "How much I wish that the Lord would help us, so the body of our Father Saint Markorius could be among us. "And after a few days the Archpriest Mikhail, the head of the monastery, went out with some of the elders to take care of a few things. The thought of bringing the body of the Saint back to his monastery occurred to them, so they went to where the body was kept. The residents of the village with their ruler congregated against the elderly monks. Armed with sticks and swords, the villagers prevented the monks from taking the body. The elderly monks spent the night in grief. That night, the rulers saw a vision of Saint Markarius saying to him: "Let my children take my body and don't prevent them."

Greatly troubled, the ruler called the elderly monks and turned the body over to them. They accepted it with great joy and many believers followed them to pay the body farewell. When the ship reached Marriott, they spent the night there. In the morning, they celebrated the Eucharist and had communion. They then carried the body on a camel's back to the prairie of shiheat. When they were halfway there, the elderly monks wanted to rest but the head of the monastery said: "The Lord lives forever, we do not rest until the Lord shows us the place where the angel of the Lord held the hand of our Father." So, they continued to walk until the Camel knelt and refused to stand. The camel started to move its head and lick the body; finally, bowing its head. Thus, the elderly monks knew this was the place they were seeking and praised God. When they reached the monastery, the monks came out carrying candles and singing spiritual songs. They then carried the body on their shoulders and brought it inside the church with great celebration. On this day the Lord performed many miracles.

His blessings be with us, Glory be to God fore ver. Amen.

XVIII. Synxarium Reading: 25th of Toba The Departure of St. Botros (Peter) The Worshiper

On this day departed St. Botros (Peter) the Worshiper. He started as a tax collector, very cruel, without mercy, to the point that he was called the merciless. The Lord Jesus had mercy on him, loved him, and wanted to get him away from his bad deeds. One day, he sent him a poor man asking for a little donation. It happened that his servant was bringing him his meal. The tax collector picked up a loaf of bread from the tray and hit the poor man with it in a way to get rid of him and such that he will not come back.

That night, he saw a vision in his sleep, as if it was the Judgment day, and the balance was set. A group of people were dressed in black cloths and they looked terribly bad. They advanced and placed his sins and injustices in the left scale of the balance. Then a group of angels of light approached, beautiful in appearance and dressed in white cloths. They stood beside the right scale of the balance perplexed because they could not find a thing to place there. However, one of them advanced and placed the loaf of bread he hit the poor man on his head with in the right scale of the balance saying this man has nothing but this loaf of bread. At this moment, Botros woke up afraid and extremely disturbed. He started to mourn his bad fortune, and blame himself for what he had done.

From that moment on, he started to be kind and merciful, and increased in mercy to the point that he gave away every thing even his robe. And when he had nothing to give, he sold himself out as a slave and gave the price to the poor. When his reputation spread, he escaped to the Prairie of St. Makarios. He became a monk, and lived an acceptable monastic life which made him worthy of knowing the date of his departure. He called in the elders of the monks and bid them farewell and departed in peace.

His prayers be with us. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

XIX. Synexarium Reading: APIP 8 ST BISHOY'S DEPARTURE

On this day departed the most reverend shining star of the prairie, Anba Bishoy, the saint. He was born in a town called Shasna, near Cairo. He had six brothers. "The Lord wants one of your sons to serve him," an angel told his mother in a vision. "Lord, take whoever you want," she told him and the angel held Bishoy's hand. He was delicate and slim bodied. "But take a strong one to serve the lord!" she exclaimed. "This is the one the Lord has chosen," the angel replied. Soon after, Saint Bishoy went to the prairie of Sheheet and became a monk under the supervision of Saint Bemoeh (the one who ordained Saint John the Short).

He exhausted himself because of his excessive hermetic life and continuous worship, until he became worthy and saw Christ the Lord. Emperor Constantine the Great appeared to him in a vision and said: "if I knew how greatly honored monks were, I would have left my position as emperor and became a monk." "Didn't Christ give you something," Anba Bishoy replied. "You, the one that uprooted paganism and elevated Christianity to its place of honor?" "He gave me plenty, but not the honor of the monks."

In his days, there was an elder who lived in the mountains of Ansana. He was perfect and surrounded himself with a great multitude of followers. He forgot who he was, the Devil deceived him, and he started teaching that the Holy Spirit did not exist. Many were deceived by his teachings. When Anba Bishoy heard about it, he went to the elder carrying baskets. Each basket had three handles. When Anba Bishoy was asked about the baskets having three handles, he replied: "I have a trinity, and everything I do in the likeness of my trinity." "This means that there is something called the Trinity," they said. He then verified to them from the Old and New testaments, showing them that the Holy Spirit was one of the parts of the Trinity until they were convinced. When they returned to the knowledge of truth, he returned to the prairie of Sheheet.

When the Barbarians attacked the prairie of Sheheet, he moved out and lived in the Ansana mountains where he departed. When the persecution ended, the monks took his body, and the body of Saint Paul from Tamooch, and brought them to the prairie of Sheheet. His prayers be with us. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

St. Bishoy Monastery, Western Desert, Egypt

XX. Synxarium Readings: Babah 24 The Departure of St. Elarion

On this day in 427 A.D., departed the righteous Father who was a hermit monk, St. Elarion the Contender. He was from Gaza, which is in the northeast of Sinai. His parents were Pagan and they taught him the Greek knowledge. When he showed ability in the Greek sciences and wanted to excel, he was sent to Alexandria and joined the School of Alexandria, where he gained a great deal of knowledge. He was moved by the zeal of the Lord to learn the Christian sciences (Christianity was taught as a science at the School of Alexandria after it was brought to Egypt by St. Mark the Evangelist). He studied and researched it and received help from Father Alexander, the Pope, who explained to him what he did not understand. Shortly thereafter he believed in Christ the Lord and the Pope baptized him. He stayed with the Pope for a while and then departed, heading for Saint Anthony the Great. When he saw him, he was overwhelmed by his graciousness and his beautiful shining appearance which was brightened by the blessings of the Holy Spirit. St. Elarion's heart was filled with reverence and he desired to become a monk, so he took off the worldly dress, put on the monastic habit, and practiced monasticism with great zeal following the example of St. Anthony his teacher. After a short while, he received the news of his parents' death, so he returned to his home city and took everything they

left him and gave it to the poor and needy. He then entered one of the monasteries of the Shaam region (present day Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan). There he practiced all aspects of monasticism. He used to fast by the week and eat only beans and green leaves. His mind was enlightened and the Lord gave him the power of doing miracles and prophecy. Later on, the man who would become Saint Abiphanos joined the monastery. Abiphanos was given to Saint Elarion so he could be trained. St. Elarion taught him the monastic life and perfected him in church science. He also prophesied that Abiphanos would become bishop of Cypress. St. Elarion lived to be eighty years old. He spent ten years in his parents' house, seven years in Alexandria, and sixty-three years in worship. He departed old in days and pleasing to God. St. John Chrystomos praised him in some of his epistles, and he was also mentioned by St. Basil in some of his monastic writings. His prayers be with us and glory be to God forever. Amen.

XXI. Synxarium readings: Kiak 6 The Departure of St. Abraam (Ibn Zaraa) and Moving Moukatam Mountain (Condensed)

On this day departed in 970 A.D. our Father the Saint Abraam, the 62nd pope of Alexandria. He was a Christian from East Nazarene originally. He was known as 'Ibn Zaraa Al-Syriani' (Zaraa-son the Syrian). He was a wealthy merchant who visited Egypt frequently before deciding to settle there. He was blessed with many virtues, including mercy on the needy. His reputation became well known. When the chair of the patriarchate became vacant, the bishops, elders, and learned agreed among themselves to choose him for the position. And when he sat on the chair of St. Mark, he gave all his positions to the poor and needy. In his days, the Coptic Wazeer (Coptic minister) Ibn-Mena (Mena-son) was appointed governor of Syria. Ibn-Mena left with the pope 100,000 Dinaris until he returned. If he should not return, the pope was to give the money to the poor, the needy, the churches, and the monasteries. When the patriarch heard that Hafktin had invaded Syria and Palestine, he thought that Ibn-Mena was dead, so he distributed the money according to the will. But it happened that Ibn-Mena escaped death and returned back to Egypt. The Father the pope told him what he did which did not upset Ibn-Mena, but, instead, made him very happy. In his father days, a minister who had been envious of the pope, said to Al-Mouez, the ruler (Caliph) of Egypt: "Your royal highness knows that the Christians are not on a sound basis. Their bible says: 'If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'remove from here to another place', and it shall remove'" You should not be deceived that these sayings are false claims. And in order that this should be proven, the patriarch should be called in to prove the claims of their Christ." The Caliph thought to himself and said: "If the saying of Christ is true, we can benefit a great deal. The Mukatam mountain is close to Cairo and if it can be moved away some, that will make the center of Cairo even greater than what it is now. And if it is not true that will give us an excuse for persecuting them." Al-Mouez called in the patriarch and told him what he wanted. The patriarch asked him for three days to give an answer, and this was granted. When he left, he gathered the monks and bishops which are near by, and they all stayed in Al-Mualaquia (the hanging) church in old Cairo (it exists even today) for three days praying and fasting. At dawn on the third day St. Mary Theotokos appeared to the patriarch and told him about a cobbler (Kharaaz) named Samaan (Simon), a Saint through whom God would perform the miracle. The Father patriarch brought this man to the church and took him and a group of priests, monks, and laity to see Al-Mouez. Who, accompanied by ministers and community leaders, went to a place close to the Mukatam mountain. The Father patriarch and his companions stood on one side, Al-Mouez and his companions stood on the other side. The Father patriarch then prayed and he and his companions (led by Samaan Al-Karaaz) knelt three times and every time they knelt, the y said: "Kyrie Elison (lord have mercy)" and it was that whenever the patriarch and the congregation lifted their heads, the mountain was lifted up. And when they knelt down, the mountain was lowered down. When they walked the mountain moved in front of them. This put great fear in the heart of the Caliph and his companions and many of them fell down on the ground. The Caliph advanced on his horse towards the patriarch and said: "Imam (great teacher), I now know that you are a patron of God. Ask anything you desire and I will give it to you." The patriarch refused to ask for a thing. But when the Caliph persisted, the patriarch asked to be allowed to renovate the Churches; in particular the church of Saint Markorios (the double-sworded) which was in Masr-Al-Kadeema (old Cairo). The Caliph wrote him a decree permitting the renovation of the churches and gave him a large sum of money from the treasury of the state. The patriarch thanked him and wished him well, but refused to accept the money which made Al-Mouez admire him even more. When the renovation of the church of Saint Markorios started, some people tried to stop the work, but the Caliph went to the place and had the demonstrators restrained. He stayed until the foundation was laid.

This Father renovated many churches in the see of St. Mark. When he completed his effort, he departed in peace after serving three years and six days on the chair. His prayers be with us. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

XXII. St. Mena El-Mariotty (From Mariott), the Performer of Wonders and Miracles

On this day St. Mina, who is called the blessed faithful, was martyred. His father, Eudoxius, was a native of the city of Nakiyos (Nikiu) and was its Governor. His brother was envious of him and he brought charges against him before the Emperor. The Emperor transferred him to Afrikia and appointed him Governor over it. The people were pleased with him because he was merciful and God-fearing. His mother Euphemia had no children. One day she went to church on the feast of our Lady, the Virgin, the Mother of God, at Attribes. She saw the children in the church wearing their beautiful clothes with their parents. She heaved a sigh and wept before the icon of Our Lady [St. Mary](#), entreating her to intercede for her before her beloved Son, in order that He would give her a son. A voice came from the icon saying, "Amen". She rejoiced in what she had heard and realized that the Lord had heard her prayers. When she returned to her home and told her husband about it, he replied, May God's Will be done. The Lord gave them this saint and they called him Mina, according to the voice that his mother heard. When he grew, his parents taught him reading and writing and they reared him in a Christian manner. When he was eleven years old, his father departed at a good old age. Then his mother departed three years later. St. Mina devoted his life to fasting, praying and to living a Christian life. Because of everyone's love towards him and his father, they placed him in his father's position. In spite of that, he did not forsake his worshipping. When Diocletian had reneged Christianity and issued his orders to worship idols, many were martyred for the Name of the Lord Christ. St. Mina left his position and went to the desert, where he stayed many days worshipping God with all his heart.

One day he saw the heavens open and the martyrs crowned with beautiful crowns. He heard a voice saying, He who toils for the Name of the Lord Christ shall receive these crowns. He returned to the city over which he was Governor and confessed the Name of the Lord Christ. Knowing that he belonged to a noble family, they tried to dissuade him from his faith and promised him honors and precious gifts. When he did not change his mind, they threatened him and the Governor ordered him to be tortured. When the Governor failed to turn him away from his faith in the Lord Christ, he sent him to his brother so that he might influence him but he failed also. Finally, he ordered his head to be cut off with the sword, his body to be cast in the fire and his ashes to be scattered in the wind. The body remained in the fire for three days and three nights, but it was not harmed.

His sister came and gave the soldiers a lot of money and they let her take the body. She put it in a sack made of fronds and decided to go to Alexandria, as her brother had previously advised her. She embarked with her brother's body on one of the ships to Alexandria. During their trip, sea beasts came out of the water and attacked the passengers aboard the ship. They were frightened and screamed with fear. The Saint's sister prayed to the Lord and asked for the intercession of her brother. While the passengers were in fear, fire went forth from her brother's body and burned the faces of the beasts. They dived immediately into the water and as they reappeared, the fire burned them again. They finally dived and did not reappear. When the ship arrived at the city of Alexandria, most of the people went out with the father, the Patriarch. They carried the holy body with reverence and honor and entered the city with a venerable celebration and placed it in the church, after they shrouded it in expensive shrouds. When the time of persecution ended, the angel of the Lord appeared to the honorable Patriarch, Anba Athanasius, the Apostolic.

The angel informed him of the Lord's command which was to place the body of St. Mina on a camel and to take it out of the city without letting anyone lead it, but to follow it from a distance until it stopped at a place that the Lord had designated. They walked behind the camel until they arrived at a place called Lake Bayaad, in the district of Mariott. There they heard a voice saying, This is the place where the Lord wishes the body of his beloved Mina to be placed. They lowered the body and placed it in a coffin, then they situated it in a beautiful garden and many miracles happened through the body.

Later on, the people of Pentapolis (the five cities) rose against the cities around Alexandria. The people were getting ready to face the Berbers, and the Governor decided to take the body of St. Mina with him to be his deliverer and his strong protector. He took the body secretly and through the blessings of this saint, he overcame the Berbers and returned victorious. The Governor decided not to return the body of the Saint to its original place and wanted to take it to Alexandria. On the way back, they passed by Lake Bayad, St. Mina's original place. The camel carrying the body knelt down and would not move in spite of frequent beatings. They moved the body over another camel, but again this second camel did not move from its place. The Governor finally realized that this was the

Lord's command. He made a coffin from decay-resistant wood and placed the silver coffin in it. He then returned it to its place and invoked St.Mina's blessings, then returned to his city.

When the Lord wanted to disclose the location of St. Mina's holy body, He did it in this manner. There was a shepherd in the desert. One day a sheep with mange slipped down into the water of a well near the place of the saint's body. The sheep then came out of the water and rolled over in the sand of that place, and instantly the sheep was healed. When the shepherd saw this miracle, he was amazed. He took some of the sand and mixed it with water and smeared it over every sheep with mange, as well as on those with other infirmities, and immediately they were healed. The news of these miracles spread in all the countries until the Emperor of Constantinople heard of them. He had an only daughter and she was leprous. Her father sent her to the place where the saint's body was and she inquired from the shepherd how these miracles were happening. She took some of the sand, moistened it with water, smeared it on her body and slept the night in that place. In her sleep she saw St. Mina saying to her, Arise early and dig in this place, and you will find my body. When she woke up, she found herself cured. She began digging as she was told and she found the holy body. She sent word to her father, informing him of the news.

The Emperor rejoiced exceedingly, thanked the Lord and glorified His Name. He then sent men and money and built a church in that place and it was consecrated on the fifteenth day of the Month of Baounah. When Arcadius and Honorius reigned, they ordered a city to be built there. Multitudes of people came to that church asking for the intercession of the blessed St. Mina. The Lord had honored him with many signs and wonders that appeared from his pure body. When the [Arabs](#) came to Egypt, some of them attacked the city and the church was destroyed, only ruins remained. When His Grace, the late [Pope Abba Kyrillos the Sixth](#) was ordained Patriarch over the See of [St.Mark](#), he took interest in building a large monastery in this area (Mariott) in the name of St. Mina. He spent a great deal of money in establishing it. There are now many churches in the monastery, visited by many Orthodox worshippers who go there to receive blessings and to pray. He also bought one hundred acres of land and built a fence around it. He ordained a number of monks who had a high degree of scientific and religious education.

May The intercession of Mari-Mina be with us and Glory be to our God forever. Amen

XXIII. Contemporary Saints

1. Pope Kyrillos (Cyril) VI

The 116th Successor to St. Mark the Evangelist (1902-1971)

On March 9 (Amshir 30), the remembrance of the departure of the Great Pope (Papa Ava) Kyrillos (Cyril) VI, the 116th successor of St. Mark the Evangelist. He was pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark before our present pope, Papa Ava Shenouda III. Anba (His Holiness) Kyrillos was a holy man who through full dedication to the life of prayer and fasting possessed many higher gifts which included performing wonders and miracles, the gift of knowledge, and an unusual ability to lead by example. which was missing for generations before his ascending to the throne of St. Mark. He sat on the chair of St. Mark for twelve years (1959-1971). He had the honor and showed the wisdom needed to guide the Coptic Church through the difficult times of the 1960's when the government of then Gamal Abdul-Nasser was nationalizing business, real estate, and land including those willed to the churches and monasteries. He was highly regarded by the people of Egypt from all walks of life Christian and non-Christian alike.

Pope Kyrillos VI was born August 2, 1902 as Azer Ata, the son of a church deacon from a middle class family. After completing high school, Azer went to work for a shipping company in Alexandria. Much against his family's wishes, he resigned his job with the intention of becoming a monk and entered the monastery of Baramous (named after Sts. Maximus and Domadius) in the Western Desert of Egypt in an area called bariaat Sheheet (the prairie of the heart's scale). On the 25th of February, 1928, he was consecrated monk. He was given the monastic name "Mena" after St. Menas his patron saint. Three years later he was ordained a priest, July 18, 1931.

Fr. Mena attended the Helwan Theological College and was rated one of the top students. Later, he retired to a cave two miles away from the monastery to live a life of solitude. That is how he came to be known as "Abouna Mena Al-mota-Wahed" (Fr. Mena the Solitaire). Afterwards, he was appointed abott of the Monastery of St. Samuel in the eastern desert, south of Suez near the Red Sea. He devoted a great deal of effort toward the restoration of this historic landmark.

When the monastery of St. Samuel was restored, he left that area and moved to a deserted windmill south of Cairo (the windmill belonged to the Army, and long after, it was revealed that he paid a nominal rent for it when he found out that it belonged to the Army). This is near the historic region of "Masr Al-Kadema" (ancient Cairo). He restored the place and built a small residence and a church on the name of St. Mena his patron saint. He found himself surrounded with college students, many of them are from outside Cairo, so, he started a dormitory for students who needed this service. This informal program produced the first church affiliated dorm in modern times in Egypt, and produced countless church leaders, some of whom are our present bishops, priests, and Laity leaders. The likes of His Holiness Pope Shenouda (his successor), the late bishop Samuel, .. etc.

After the abduction of his predecessor, the late pope Youssab (Joseph) II by militant Copts, the church was in great turmoil which did not last long, because it was the will of God the pope Youssab departed shortly thereafter.

In April, 1959, Fr. Mena Al-Mota-Wahed was elected pope and patriarch through the unique process used in the Coptic Church to elect a pope. Candidates for the honorable position are nominated, three or four of the nominees are elected by the Holy Synod as most qualified. The final selection is left to the will of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, by placing the names on the altar during the appointed day of final selection. A young deacon is then asked to draw a name which is then the one chosen by God from among the qualified candidates for this high calling.

In May, 1959, Fr. Mena became pope and patriarch by the laying of the hands of all the bishops of the Coptic Church at the time, he was called pope Kyrillos VI (That means that five popes before him were called Kyrillos. The first pope kyrillos is Cyril of Alexandria the pillar of faith).

During his tenure as patriarch, many were attracted to monastic life and to the priesthood by his good example and sincere life style. As a teen-ager growing in Egypt at the time I used to attend Vespers regularly at the

Graet St. Mark Cathedral (Al-darb Al-wasse) in Cairo where his holiness lead the prayers and many of us had the blessing of seeing him, talking to him, and getting his blessings. He always paid attention to the people and spent many hours blessing and chatting with young and old. He always encouraged us during exams seasons, and prayed for our success. No wonder many joined the priesthood from the ranks of college grauates in all fields which was previously not considered the thing to do! Many books have been written about his life, wonders and miracles. The author recommends the publications of Pope Kyrillos the VI Society which are published originally in Arabic and translated to many live languages (Englis, French, German, .. etc.). We are going to mention just a few, some have not published elsewher and was related to the author by relatives and friends:

His Holiness had the gift of knowledge, so one day, he was visited by two men, one was well known to his holiness. When the gentleman introduced his friend to his holiness, Pope Kyrillos looked at the man and said: "Why don't you like us?" I love you and like to see you here always. The man was very ashamed because he thought evil of our beloved pope and had argued with his friend about the use of meeting a 'simple' man. This man became a great admirer of anba Kyrillos and his son was healed from terrible illness through the prayers of Anba Kyrillos.

Miracles of heeling and casting out of devils from a non-Christian young lady was related to me by a very dear relative. She was the daughter of his boss in a textile factory near Alexandria. She was one of 22 children, possessed by demons and was withering away. Her father loved her very much. He spent a fortune on real doctors and witch doctors as well, with no results. On day, he called my relative to his office and said, you have "Sheik Kebeer" (Great Elder)? can you introduce me to him? My relative promised to arrange a meeting, he travelled to Cairo and arranged with the pope's secretary a meeting for the afternoon of a specified date. He was supposed to meet them at the door and introduce them to the staff to take them to the hous of the patriarchate. The people were very anxious, they arrived early. His Holiness recognized them although he was not told (ordinarily, people were brought in, and they told him their needs). Anba Kyrillos called the young lady by her first name. Put his cross on her forehead, she fell down sobbing. From that moment on, she was completely whole.

In his last days, he was gravely ill with phlebitis (blood clot in the leg). They hooked a speaker from the great Cathedral to his bedroom at his request because he could not bear not being able to perform liturgy (which he performed almost daily during his life of priesthood). One day the head mother of one of the convents (monasteries for nuns) wanted to speak to him on the phone, but the staff wouldn't give out his private number. Anba Kyrillos appeared to her in a vision, gave her the number and comforted her. She did not call, but later on she was blessed by seeing him and was rendered speechless when Anba Kyrillos asked her the reason she did not call on his private line. Our Father Papa Ava (the Great Pope) Kyrillos departed on March 9, 1971. Shortly before his departure, he told one of the monks, you look like Tobia, the one mentioned in the book of Tobeet. Take care of my burial. Initially, they burried him under the Altar in the Graet Cathedral in Cairo. But when his successor, the Great Patriarch, Pope Shnouda III read his will, he had to follow his wishes and move his holy body to the desert south west of Alexandria, to the Monastery of St. Mena which was renovated and immensely expanded by Pope Kyrillos to honor his good friend, patron saint, St. Mena of Marriot. That is wher his place of rest. It is the custom of Apostolic Churches to wait 50 yaers after departure, before declaring a person a saint. And although many in our generation feel deeply about the worthiness of Anba Kyrillos, we anxiously are waiting until this day comes.

His prayers and the prayers and intercessions of his patron, Saint Mena of Marriott be with us. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

XXIV. Contemporary Saints:

2. The Archpriest 'Abouna'

Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim

1899-1975

A unique man, words can not describe him. His saintly dedication to Christ is unparalleled (The writer knew him very close and personal from 1963 to 1969). Others spent a life time enjoying the blessings of this saint. One who knew him well is pope Shenouda III, the present patriarch and a great teacher of our generation. He was so moved by the departure of Abouna Mikhail on March 26, 1975, his holiness wept and gave a eulogy to be remembered for generations to come.

Many saw Abouna Mikhail assigning responsibilities in the Church of God: To St. Mary the Virgin he would say before leaving the church: "'Aadraa Mariam' (Virgin Mary) you take care of so and so. 'Maar Morcos' (St. Mark) you take care of so and so. 'Maar Girgis' (St. George) you take care of this and that.. etc.". He goes home believing that all is taken care of. He would ask his parishioners to ;pray for him! and when you brought a problem to his attention he immediately responded with: "Let us pray". He seldom gave advice because he believed strongly in the power of prayer. He would say let us pray and God will bring the answer.

The following is a story witnessed by my own eyes: as I was waiting for him in the office of St. Mark Coptic Church, Haddaiq Shoubra where he was priest for 20 years, a man came to the office to request his presence at his wedding which was to take place in a few weeks. Abouna Mikhail referred him to the elder priest, the late Fr. Marcos Daoud, claiming he is not worthy to perform the ceremony. Fr. Marcos referred the man to then Junior priest Fr. Stephanos who was ordained less than a year at that time in the mid 1960s. Fr. Stephanos did what was expected of a man in training with two wise and elderly Frs. He referred the man back to Abouna Mikhail. The man threw his arms in the air saying: "It seems that I will not get married, you gave me the runaround!" Abouna Mikhail replied: "Brother: one of us will be there for sure. May be the three of us will have time to bless this wedding". The man went home with a big smile on his face (He still did not know for sure who was going to perform the ceremony).

One of the female members of our congregation told this story: "I went to Abouna Mikhail for my confessional. I told him about things that were heavy and troubling and ended in saying: Abouna I do not feel that I can receive the sacrament, I am not worthy." He replied: "Who is. Don't delay for one day. Promise me, tomorrow you will go to church and receive communion." He left a great impression on that person. She felt that God cares and shows his care and compassion through good men of God the likes of Abouna Mikhail.

He used to call everyone with respect adding a title to the name: Mr. so and so, Doctor so and so. I heard him calling the custodian 'Aam fullan' (Uncle so and so) and never referred to himself with more than his first name. He would introduce himself as Mikhail or 'Al-aabd' (the servant) Mikhail.

Abouna Mikhail was born, Mikhail Ibrahim Youssef, in Kaafr Abdou, Quisna on the 20th of April, 1899. His father Ibrahim Afandi Youssef and his mother Hanounah had five sons. They raised them in the bosom of the church, teaching them the life of prayer, 'mattaniaat' (kneeling) and humility. The priest of the church in Kaafr Abdou, Fr. Girgis, had a big influence on young Mikhail and his brothers. They attended the church school where they learned reading and writing. They learned church hymnals from 'Mualim' (Psalmist) at the church.

In 1908, Mikhail started School at the Coptic School in Quisna and completed his secondary education at the Greater Coptic School in Cairo. After High School he was hired by the ministry of Interior as a police clerk serving in Fohh, Sherbeen, Kaafr-Al-Sheikh, Belbees, Hehia, and Guiza which was his last tour of government service before he was ordained priest in 1951. He was honest and hard working civil servant. He also served God and man wherever he went. He helped form religious societies wherever he went. In Belbees, he also led the effort to build a church in that city. An argument arose between the chief of police and an inspector from the ministry who accused Mikhail of poor performance because he used to go to work on Sundays at 10.00 AM. This was an unfair accusation because the government of Egypt extends this privilege to all Christians with no exception. Mr. Mikhail preferred to be transferred than cause the chief of police any harm. He was transferred to Hehia where he spent 10 years (1938-1948) working with dedication and serving God as much as he could. His last tour of civil

service was in Guiza (1948-1951) where he resided in Old Cairo near the monastery and church of St. Mena. This time in Old Cairo put him closer to saintly people the likes of Abouna Mena Al-Motawahid (The departed Pope Kyrillos VI) and others who became leaders in the church. He was known among the group as the humble man who knew God in his heart. He was seen kneeling and praising God making the sign of the cross as he approached the outer doors of a church like one who saw the gates of heaven. This habit continued all the days of his life.

He was called to the priesthood when the priest of Kaafr Abdou departed, and the people of Kaafr Abdou remembered their native son Mr. Mikhail. They nominated him, and the Bishop of Guiza at that time, the departed Anba Youannis, was delighted to ordain a man who was known for his dedication and selfless life. He was 52 years of age when he became priest. He dedicated himself to the service of God and stopped many bad habits like collection plates and payments for services rendered by the church. One year later, he was elevated to the position of 'Qumoss' Archpriest. He saw the need for help, so he nominated and was able to arrange for a younger man to be ordained to assist him. The younger man turned the congregation against Fr. Mikhail accusing him of being wasteful, instead of thanking him for his generosity with all. He did not defend himself, instead he left Kaafr Abdou in 1955 for Old Cairo.

The Call to serve one of the larger congregations in Cairo, came shortly thereafter when the priest of St. Mark Coptic Church of Hadaaiq Shoubra (The departed Fr. Marcos Daoud) needed a priest to fill in for a monk who was sick. When he met Abouna Mikhail, he realized immediately that he is the kind of partner he needed to help him take care of a large congregation and a large ministry including among other things the headquarters of the Bible Friends Society of Egypt. They served together for 20 years. Fr. Marcos Daoud had in Abouna Mikhail Ibrahim the sincere and dedicated brother he needed and they complemented each other. Fr. Marcos was a prolific writer and translator of many great works. Abouna Mikhail was a man of prayer and was trusted by a multitude of people to hear their confessions and help complete the sacrament of penance (repentance).

Abouna Mikhail was a man of sorrows, he lost two sons, Philemon and Paul as infants. He also lost his eldest son Ibrahim when Ibrahim was a promising young Doctor. This was followed shortly by the departure of his dear wife, Mary. To the people who came to comfort him, he gave the words of comfort: "I thank God because I have three sons and their mother praying for me." Only a great man can utter such words in the face of adversity. It was not easy for him to be a widower with all his responsibilities spending his days in the church and his evenings which usually extended to the early hours of the next morning hearing confessionals which mostly took place in his house which was less than a hundred yards away.

Abouna Mikhail was once ordered off a public bus by an ignorant man because he was a priest. The bus broke down. The driver was very angry at the man, asked him to apologize to that old Coptic priest. A few of them went down and asked Abouna if he please get on the bus again. Abouna got on the bus, the driver turned the ignition key and the bus moved smoothly. When Abouna was asked why he got off, he answered saying: "I did what I was told to do" when he was asked why he rode again, he said: "they told me to come back, and I did what they told me to do!" This selfless humble example is not easy to copy.

Abouna Mikhail preferred to pray for situations, people, and problems. In his heart he believed that God hears prayers and answers them in due time. But when he gave advice, it was prophetic words from heaven. He would ask people young and old to pray for him calling himself: "The poor servant Mikhail". One of his Final words was recorded in his own hand writing in Arabic which translated means: "Christ will bless the poor me, and will bless all those who ask for his blessings. Amen. 7/28/1974." This was 9 months before his departure.

He departed on the 26th of March, 1975 at the age of 76 after a full life of service to God crowned with 24 blessed years in the priesthood. He served God with dedication and full sacrificial life. When the news of his departure became known, the whole Coptic community headed by the present patriarch, his holiness pope Shenouda III was weeping the departure of a great man of God. They wanted to bury him near the church where he served, others suggested the village of his birth, or a 100 other places. The pope of Alexandria had another plan, he requested that Abouna Ibrahim be buried under the Altar of St. Mark Great Cathedral because as his holiness said: "we all needed his prayers for our generation and the generations to come". Our dear father Abouna Mikhail Ibrahim pray for us as we remember your good example. We know that your spirit is rejoicing and not wanting a single word of praise, but we praise your good example anyway.

Glory be to God forever. Amen

XXV. Contemporary Saints:

3. The Arch-priest 'Abouna'

Fr. Bishop Kamel (1931-1979)

He was born Samy Kamel in Sirrs-Alliaan, Menoufia, Egypt, in 1931. Raised in Damenhour, Egypt where he received his early education. He attended the school of Sciences, Alexandria University, and graduated with B.Sc. degree in 1951. While working as a Science teacher in public schools, he continued at Alexandria University and received a degree in literature in 1954 and was appointed an instructor at the Education College, Alexandria University. He was ordained priest in December 1959.

Not many people talk about his early life as a teacher, Sunday School Servant, and the free tutoring he offered to kids who needed help, because he was known as the priest who was a buzzing bee collecting concentrated essences and producing the pure honey that sweetened the lives of all who knew him, or even knew about him. Some of us can not forget the messages that went back and forth between this young budding priest in the district of Sporting, Alexandria, and an Elderly Priest, in Shoubra, Cairo (the late Father Mikhail Ibrahim whose remembrance is above mentioned). The elder would send the greeting to the younger asking his prayers. Now that they are together in paradise, they are seeing the not-seen and hearing the not-heard and glorifying the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, whom they both truly loved, indeed.

He summarized his love for the little flock in these words: "They are your children Lord: Some are good, others are evil, other are wasting themselves ... they all have one thing in common: They are your children. I am the servant of your children .. I am a servant and have no right to insult or despise any of them, because if I do, I would be insulting you or despising you ... I only can serve them, love them, and assure them of your certain promise that you loved them all because it is you who carries the sins of the whole world" (translated, shortened, and paraphrased from Arabic).

When he felt the urge to dedicate his life to serving Christ, he told one of his fellow Sunday School teachers: "Would it be possible for some of you to pay my wages which I am receiving now so I can leave that job and become a full time servant of the Lord?" When he became priest, he kept that promise of full time service to the last breath. He so despised material things, that material things were thrown under his feet. An eye witness saw him one night at the Church puzzled because a young woman came asking for financial help. She was followed by a student asking for money to pay college registration fees. This little worry did not last long. Our late Fr. Bishop asked them both to wait. While waiting, a little girl walked in and handed him an envelope stuffed with money. When he asked her name, She just answered saying: "My mother Mary sends this to you." All the needs were met that night. In Egypt we celebrate feasts (Christmas, Epiphany, Easter) at night. The late Fr. Bishop Kamel always went to distribute food and gifts to some of the needy in his congregation after the service. Because he always felt the importance of sharing the meaning of the Lord's feasts. His wife got used to it.

He started St. George Coptic Orthodox Church in Sporting, Alexandria (where he is buried). Some advised him not to accept having associate priests, but he was not the one to fear competition. The number of priests at the Church reached 5 and all had more work than they could do. By the standards of his time, he was but a young man running a big Cathedral and very good at it!

He was instrumental not only in increasing the number of priests in his church, but also in starting new churches. The following are some of the churches he helped found: St. George in Sporting; St. George , in Hadra; Arch-Angel Michael, in the district of Mostafa Kamel; St. Takla Hemanout, in Ibrahemia; St. Mary and St. Cyril, in Cleopatra; St. Peter; in Seedy Bishr; St. Mark in Los Angeles, California. He indirectly helped found the Church in Denver, where I served; and the Church in Houston among others. Not including his efforts in Europe and Australia.

The purchase of a church for the early Egyptian Immigrant to the USA in Los Angeles is a wonderful story of faith and trusting the Lord: The congregation was just starting in the late 60's when Fr. Bishop Kamel was sent to Los Angeles in 1969. They initially used a Syrian Orthodox Church building. Then came the opportunity to purchase a \$100,000 existing church building which was previously used by a Russian Orthodox Congregation on Robertson Blvd., Near Hollywood. The congregation had \$500 in the treasury. Some of the prominent people warned Abouna (Fr.) Bishop: "Don't get us in debt!" In a short order he raised \$23,000. Some of this money was small loans from

new immigrants who had very little to give. He took a cab and went to the bank to pay the down payment, and sign the papers for a mortgage loan. In his excitement, he left the unmarked envelope full of cash (\$23,000) on the seat and when he realized it the taxi was gone. He went in, told the loan officer that he misplaced the money, and needed sometime to find it or replace it. He went home sad feeling he had failed everybody, and on top of it all some will think Abouna is a thief?

Abouna had an unpleasant day, the envelope was not marked. He could not think of a way to prove he had money! After midnight, there was knock on the door. Fr. Bishoy asked Tassony (Sister) Angel his wife to open the door. Was surprised to see the cab driver. The man confessed. After you left, I looked back so that envelope. Picked up and found it full of cash. Not marked. I thought about keeping it. Drove around and around. Then I said this man must be a minister or a priest or something. But, even if I want to give him the money back how could I find him. I then thought if I describe the way you are dressed and the way you looked, somebody might be able to lead me to you. That is how I found out that you must be Coptic (Egyptian) and the way to your apartment which was then church address. The man refused to accept the customary 10% reward and even paid a donation!

Fr. Bishoy loved the cross dearly, no wonder his departure was on the third day of the feast of the Cross. He gave the titles: "Under the feet of the Cross", and "With Christ Crucified" to two books he wrote. His most favorite possession was a picture of Christ crucified and Mary Magdeline kneeling under his feet. This picture he hanged on the wall above his bed.

Fr. Bishoy Kamel was always concerned about his own salvation. He rarely talked about his personal life. He and his wife Angel lived as virgins. He always hid himself behind the cross. His ministry was that of a true loving and caring Father, Brother, and Friend. Not just a priest performing the duties of his office. On the nights of church feasts, and as soon as he completed the church service, he ran out to visit those in need. Accompanied by his wife or going separate ways, they did as much as they could, and brought back some of the people from out of town to their home the night of the feast.

He did not allow people to speak evil about others in his presence and always had something nice to say about others, especially, those who differed with him following the words of the Apostle: "Love suffereth long, and is kind, Love vauneth not itself, ... thinketh not evil .." (1 COR 13:1-13).

His preaching was deep in spiritual meaning, and seasoned with the word of God presented in practical terms. It was supported by examples from: the Bible, Church history, tradition, and the life of the Saints. His voice in the Liturgy was low (you can even say weak) but very comforting to the listeners. This brought great multitudes to church not only for the liturgy but for the evening prayers as well. He was so humble, many a time he wondered why people praised him. He always felt he was not deserving, as he always felt he did not do enough. His example is clearly felt in those who new him and also in those who just heard about him. His departure was certainly early, but it was the will of God that he be in paradise to intercede for us.

Glory be to God in all His Saints. Amen.

XXVI. Eulogy: The Departed Great Educator Anba Poemen, The Bishop of Malawi

The Editor with a feeling of great sorrow and personal loss announces to the readers the departure to the heavenly Jerusalem of our great teacher the blessed honored Bishop Poemen who lived in the tradition of the great masters and teachers of Christianity. Like Paul the Apostle and Habeeb Girgis the founder of Sunday School education in the Coptic Church, Bishop Poemen completed his effort and kept the faith and at the end he was ready to receive the crown of righteousness.

He was born Kamal Habeeb, lived on Rafaat street, Terra Boulakia, Cairo, Egypt. As a young man he served as a Sunday school teacher at St. Mina Coptic Church, Terra Boulakiah, Cairo Egypt. He served tirelessly in the 1950's and 1960's which made him extremely well known and liked by all. He was elected the Head of the Higher Committee of Sunday School of the Coptic Church. We used to joke with him about that, we called him the Chief of Staff ('Raees Al-Arkan'). Kamal Habeeb was a teacher by profession, he graduated from the University with a degree in social sciences which was followed by a Master's degree in Education and Psychology. He also did Doctoral studies at Princeton University in the early 1970's. He worked as a high school teacher for many years and one day in 1964, he surprised all of us by resigning his job to dedicate his life to Christ. He left his parents home on Rafaat Street and went to live at a house, for men who dedicated their life to Christ, in Helwaan (Beet El-Takrees). He also was a founder and director of a printing house and a library called "Marcos".

I used to attend his weekly lecture to Sunday school teachers at St. Mina Church and later on at St. George Church in Gazerat Badraan, Shoubra. He spoke softly, but like one who has authority. We listened with great concentration and were always filled with joy. After the lecture, he would shake hands with every one in attendance greeting them with his popular words: "Peace to your spirit brother so and so ('Al-Sallam li-Rohaak Ya -Akh Foulan..'). When he moved to Beet El-Takrees, we followed him there. He held group meetings and also counseled us in one on one sessions and always reminded us to go to confessional since he was not even an ordained deacon at this point in his life.

His deep knowledge of the word of God and his extensive training in human sciences were effectively used to the Glory of God. Although we heard that he had a temper when he was younger, this was displaced by a meekness that surprised those who new him earlier in life. Yes, he took a stand that were not popular in 1965, but he also obeyed when he was told not to teach his youth leaders class at St. Mina Church. He just moved to St. George Church and it was a blessing to both congregations because we all benefited.

His generation is that of great men and true believers, many are now Bishops and Priests of great stature in the Orthodox way of Christian living. When I left Egypt in 1969, he was still living at Beet El-Takrees in Helwaan. Shortly After Pope Shenouda ascended to the throne of St. Mark in 1971, the Pope who was Kamal Habeeb's Spiritual Adviser and the great teacher of this generation asked Kamal to become a monk which was followed shortly thereafter by ordaining him a Bishop.

Bishop Poemen was to many of us the great teacher "Ustaaz" Kamal Habeeb. He travelled to Europe and North America on many occasions to do the work of the Lord. In September 1981, he was among the clergy who were imprisoned and was counted among those who became worthy to suffer for His Name. He did obey God more than men.

The people of Malawi were fortunate to have him as Bishop of their episcopate. He did what you expect a great educator would do, His Grace Bishop Poemen started a Theology College which was badly needed in that region of Southern Egypt.

Bishop Poemen wrote over 21 books, 20 Booklets, many Pamphlets, and he wrote a regular column in the official Coptic Church Weekly Magazine, the Evangelism (El-Keraazah). His books covered: Christian Education, Celibacy, Love, Worship, Rural Evangelism, Teenage, The Body a53nd Sex, Christian Vision of Evangelical work, Liturgy, Christian Family, Contemplation, Spiritual Fasting, and Official Books for High School Christian Education. His last work is a Search Guide to the Holy Bible. His Booklets were on such topics as: Lent, Confession, Spiritual Guidance, Resurrection, How to Start?, Pure Love, Grace and the Law, Glory Peace and Joy,

Second Birth, Social Life, Family Life, Christianity and Personality BUILDING, Holy Zealous, We Want to See Jesus, Second heaven, Signs of64 a Church, and the Life of Sharing.

To Describe Bishop Poemen Life, the writer can not find better words than the words of Paul the Apostle: "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14). This the departed Bishop Pemen did as an Apostle would have done today. We wanted you our beloved teacher to stay with us a while longer but who are we to refuse the will of the Almighty who saw it fit that you be with him in heaven. Like Paul the Apostle you were ready to be offered, and the time of departure came and although none of us wanted to hear it you had to say: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but all them also that love his appearing." (Timothy 2:7,8)

St. Mary and St. Abraam Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Louis, Missouri sends condolences to all who knew our departed Bishop Poemen. Pray for our spirits our beloved Bishop Poemen. Send your peace greeting to our spirits our great teacher "Ustaaz Kamal Habeeb."

Glory be to Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ with his mother the Blessed Virgin Mary and all his Saints who pleased him in their deeds. Amen.

**XXVII. On the Occasion of the 15th Anniversary of
His Ascending to the throne of St. Mark the Evangelist
His Holiness: 'Papa Ava' (Pope) Shenouda III,
the 117th Patriarch of the Great city of Alexandria and
the See of St. Mark**

His Holiness Pope Shenouda (HHPS) was born Nazeer Gayed in a village near Assiut (in Upper Egypt) in 1923. He attended Cairo University and graduated with a B.A. degree in 1947. He worked as a teacher and, at the same time, attended evening classes at the Coptic Theological Seminary in Cairo. He was appointed to its faculty in 1949. He also served as an army reserve officer for 2 years. In 1954 he experienced a deep urge to retire to monastic life, and entered the St. Mary's Monastery known as Al-Syriaan Monastery in the Western Desert. From 1956 to 1962 he led the life of a monastic hermit at 'Al-Syriaan.' He was later ordained priest with the name Father Antonius Al-Syriaany.

In 1962, the late Father Pope Cyril (Kyrillos) VI consecrated him bishop and assigned to him the position of bishop of theological education. The number of students at the Coptic Theological Seminary increased three-fold thanks to his relentless efforts. After he became bishop, he started weekly lectures open to the public: In Cairo on Fridays, and in Alexandria on Sundays. Thousand of these very valuable lectures are recorded on tape and represent a very important source of biblical teaching, Church tradition, and orthodox doctrine information that will benefit the faithful for years to come.

After the departure of the Holy Father Pope Kyrillos VI, bishop Shenouda was one of three bishops nominated to succeed the departed patriarch to the throne of St. Mark. Following the Coptic Church tradition of asking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making the final choice in selecting a pope, a child was asked to draw a name in front of the congregation in attendance at the Great Cathedral of St. Mark. Bishop Shenouda was chosen by the will of God to be Patriarch on the 5th of Hatur 1688 A.M. (November 14, 1971).

One of his first efforts was to hold meetings with representatives of other denominations. It began with a series of informal meetings with Roman Catholic theologians which led to the signing of a joint statement with Pope Paul VI on the need for Christian unity. Visits have been exchanged with other orthodox patriarchs including Chalcedonians as well.

Under his leadership, the number of Coptic Churches increased in Egypt and abroad. His firm belief in spreading the word made him increase the number of episcopates. To that end he increased the numbers from 33 to 55 consecrating that many bishops to serve the new episcopates. He has devoted a great deal of effort to the reconstruction of old monasteries. He has personally ordained more than 22 bishops and more than 500 priests.

HHPS is a prolific writer and a great poet in his own right. Among his writing are: "An Introduction to the New Testament", "A Commentary on the Book of Revelations", "A Commentary on the Book of Psalms", "The Book of the Song of Songs", "Meditations on the Ten Commandments", "Salvation: An Orthodox Perspective", "The Law of Monogamy", "St. Mark, Apostle and Martyr", "Repentance", "Silence and Solitude, according to St. Isaac the Syrian", "The Upsurge of the Soul-a poem", "The Life of Prayer", "The Life of Thanksgiving" Many of his books have been translated into English and French.

Since his return to the seat of Coptic Orthodox Administration on January 6, 1984 (the Egyptian Government under Anwar Sadat, had banished him to the monastery of St. Pishoy in Oct. 1981), Pope Shenouda has been working hard to re-establish the daily management of the Church. His 40 month isolation resulted in more than 4 books. Over a million copies of these new books are in the hands of the faithful who never doubted for a minute that he was the true Holy Patriarch chosen by the Holy Spirit to lead the people whom the Lord on the tongue of Isaiah the prophet called: "Blessed my people Egypt"

Many of his books have been translated into many languages including: English, French, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, etc. since his return to the seat of Coptic Orthodox Administration on January 6, 1984

We at St. Mary's Message joined with the congregation of St. Mary and St. Abraam Coptic Orthodox Church, St. Louis, Missouri do pray that God will grant his Holiness our Father Pope Shenouda III the wisdom and abilities needed to guide the Coptic Orthodox Church through the difficult times it is now experiencing and lead her to the shores of safety. May God grant his Holiness Pope Shenouda III long life and richful ministry. We ask it in the name of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. Through the intercessions of St. Mary the Mother of God, St. Mena the wonder maker, St. George the Great Martyr, and his namesake St. Shenoudaa the Archmendrite, and all the Saints, Martyrs, Arch-angels, angels, all the worshipers, and all the sufferers and bearers of the cross. Amen. Amen.

XXXVIII. Book Review "The Miracle Child: A Story From Ethiopia" by Elizabeth Laird and Abba Aregawi Wolde Gabriel (Holt, Reinhart, Winston)

If Orthodox Christian books for adults can be hard to find, Orthodox Books for children are almost impossible to locate. Elizabeth Laird and Abba Gabriel have corrected this situation by producing this beautiful book about the life of St. Takla Haymanot, one of the great founders of monastic life in Ethiopia. The book is excellently printed in full color.

The story of St. Takla Haymanot is easily explained in terms a young reader can understand. His birth, education, and ministry are all touched upon. A brief selection of his miracles is also included. Best of all, the book is illustrated with Ethiopian icons from the life of this man of God. Each icon has a brief sentence describing the significance of the scenes portrayed. "The Miracle Child" is a superb Orthodox Christian book for children. Let us pray for many more books like this one.

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Let us pray for many more books like this one.

**XXIX. TO YOU IS GLORY AND POWER:
THOK TE-TIGOM
(A Hymnal used in the Paschal Week)**

Coptic In English Letters:

- ❖ Thok te-tigom nem-pi-o-ou nem-pi-smou nem-pi-amahi-Sha-eneh. Amin.Emanoel pen-nouti pen-auro.
- ❖ Thok te-tigom nem-pi-o-ou nem-pi-smou nem-pi-amahi-Sha-eneh. Amin.Ba-Shoice Isus Pi-khristos Pa-Sotir en-aghathos.(Tagom nem-pi-esmou pi-epshois ev-shobi-neiah enso-teria efouab)
- ❖ Thok te-tigom nem-pi-o-ou nem-pi-smou nem-pi-amahi-Sha-enehRP. Amin.

Arabic in English Letters:

- ❖ Laka al-quoah wal-magd wal-barakah wal-ezzah eilla al-abad. Amin.Emanoel elahna wa-malekna.
- ❖ Laka al-quoah wal-magd wal-barakah wal-ezzah eilla al-abad. Amin.Ya-rabi Yassou al-masseih moukhalesi al-saleh.(Kouati wa-tasbehti houa al-raab wqad saar lee khalasaan mukadasan)
- ❖ Laka al-quoah wal-magd wal-barakah wal-ezzah eilla al-abad. Amin.

English Translation:

- ❖ To you is the power, the glory, the blessings, the majesty for ever. Amen. Emanuel our Lord and king.
- ❖ To you is the power, the glory, the blessings, the majesty for ever. Amen. My Lord Jesus Christ, my blessed savior.(My strength and hymnal is the Lord and he became my holy salvation)
- ❖ To you is the power, the glory, the blessings, the majesty for ever. Amen.

Refrain: (Kirie Eleyson) 3 times then 3 times

**XXX. O' KING OF PEACE:
(Epouro)**

- ❖ ep-ouro ente-ti hirini moy nan entek hirini semni nan entek hirini kanen novi nan evol.
- ❖ Gor evol eni gagii ente ti ekklisia arisovt eros enneskim sha-eneh.
- ❖ Emmanoel pennouti khi ten miti tinou khi epoo ente peefiot nem-pi-epnevma ethouab.
- ❖ Entef esmou eron tirien entef touvo ennehit entef talcho enni-shoni ente nen-epsichi nem nen soma.
- ❖ Ten-au-osht emok opi-khristos nem pi-kiot en-aghathos nem-pi-epnevma ethouab je avask (je akei) ak-soti emmon.

MEANING:

- ❖ O'King of Peace give us your peace, decree for us your peace and forgive us our sins.
- ❖ Disburse all the enemies of the church and fortify it so it will never falter
- ❖ Emanuel is now in our midst with the glory of his father and the holy spirit.
- ❖ He will bless us all, cleanse us all, and heal the sicknesses of our spirits and bodies.
- ❖ We worship you, O Christ, with your Holy Father, and the Holy Spirit. for you have come and saved us.

XXXI. The Birth of Christ is the Gospel Translated (condensed) from a articles by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Christmas, 1986

"Rejoice in the Lord always" is a commandment from God. Christ came to spread happiness among all people. His coming was surrounded by the rejoicing of angels. We want a year in which there are less wars; even none. We want a year in which famines will vanish. We want a year in which abundance, blessings, love, and peace will spread among people. In which all will live in safety, and without fear; yes even in brotherly love. The birth of Christ was the good news for all. It was the first step in this salvation which was completed by redemption. In his birth the angel brought a message of great happiness to the shepherds: "Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, which is Christ the Lord." (Lk 2:10,11).

The message of Christianity can be summarized in this sentence which the angel pronounced: "good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Christianity is good news which brings to people the good news of their salvation. Christ came to: "Save that which was lost" (Mt. 18:11), and he says in joy bringing words: "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world" (Jn. 12:47) and to the woman taken in adultery: "Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more." (Jn. 8:11).

Christ came to look for the lost sheep to carry him on his shoulders happily (Lk. 15:5). He came to say to the chief among the publicans: "This day is salvation come to this house, for so much as he also is a son of Abraham." (Lk. 19:9). He came to say to the crucified thief: "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." (Lk. 23:43). And to the strangers from all nations of the earth: "And they shall come from the east, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." (Lk. 13:29).

Christ came to bring forth a religion full of delight to all. Listen to an Apostle saying: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice." (Phi. 4:4). In the midst of this Apostle's tribulations he says: "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." (II Cor. 6:10). And the Lord Christ says: "But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." (Jn. 16:22).

Joy in the coming of Christ- the bible explained to us the joy that spread all over the world at the coming of Christ. The joy was manifest in the song of the angels: "Good tidings towards all men" which means joy... People rejoiced because Christ proclaimed liberty to the captives, and saved them from their bitter enslavement to Satan. Thus the Lord said: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." (Lk. 18:10). Hence the authority of Satan as the prince of this world was relinquished. And the Lord said about him: "The prince of this world is judged." (Jn. 16:11) and the people rejoiced because they are enslaved to him no more: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." (Jn. 8:36). Earth became the Lord's and his Messiah. The Lord ruled...

So let us have this optimistic look on the new year. And let us rejoice like Simeon for in the birth of Christ we have salvation. Let us say with Isaiah: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace." (Is. 52:7). Spread joy and hope among people. Because he who is pessimistic, who always sees dark, he is like the owl who cries and always warns about forthcoming destruction, but does not hear in him the voice of God. But the Sons of God, always speak comforting words, with encouragement, filled with hope. They offer a key for every locked door, and plant hope in the hearts of people. They teach people that there is no giving up as long as God works.

- 1) Joy in Hope: Christ came offering hope to every soul. Even to the bruised reed and smoking flax (Mt. 12:20). The woman with the issue of blood who spent all her wealth on doctors and benefitted nothing, he gave her hope through complete healing freely just by touching him... The sick man from Bethsaida who spent 38 years in sickness and had no one to help him (to the pool), he made him carry his bed and walk... Lazarus who stunk after being dead and buried for 4 days, he raised him from the dead, completely whole. And so said he to (all) people: "With God nothing is impossible." (Mk. 10:27). He said even more: "Everything is possible to those that believe." (Mk. 9:23). Hence, people rejoiced through hope, and

hopelessness became nothing but an attack from Satan with which the evil one attempts to make people fall. One of his ploys is to make them live in worry and disturbance, and some times in fear and trouble. But the good news says: "Lift up the hands which hang sown, and the feeble knees." (Heb. 12:12).

- 2) **The Joy of Sinners:** And Christ came to bring joy to the sinners. Joy that God shall grant them forgiveness and shall accept them. The bible says: "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (I Tim. 2:34). That is why Christ promised to send his Holy Spirit, to be in us, and stay with us forever (Jn. 2:16) and to send his grace to work in us all. That is why I wonder about those who are controlled by sadness, even in religious circles. Those are the ones who do not put forth any virtue, except the one of tears, and when they aren't crying they force themselves to do so. They see nothing in religion but tears for fallings and sadness for sin. They neglect every verse in the bible from Genesis to Revelation except: "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." (Ecc. 7:2). Or maybe "blessed are those who weep", forgetting the rest of the verse is: "because they receive comfort (Mt. 5:4). They also forget the words: "but your sadness shall be turned into joy." (Jn. 16:20).
- 3) **Rejoicing in God's Protection:** Rejoice because your God is loving and caring. He loved us even when we were sinners, and that is why he came and saved us. It was said about him: "Having loved his own which was in the world, he loved them unto the end." (Jn. 13:1). In his love he cared for us, and called us his children and called the church his bride... He offered us a book in the bible, The Song of Songs, in which he explained his love for us. This love which reached giving his own for us; to save us with his blood. God is the giver, the provider, the shepherd, the satisfier who fills every one from his goodness. Even the insect which crawls on the ground or under a rock, he provides for it and cares for it. How much more is mankind his liking and image. Does not all this lead to joy? His disciples were troubled in the ship because of the high waves thinking that he would not care; Christ the Lord scolded them saying: "Why did you doubt, you of little faith?" Hence rejoice in the Lord and do not lose your joy no matter what troubles you, and no matter how difficult life in the world gets.
- 4) **Rejoice in Difficulty:** If you are in difficulty, rejoice and be exceedingly glad. Be assured that behind difficulty blessing the Lord will grant you. Behind difficulty a crown the Lord will place on your head. Learn also that in difficulty, spiritual experience you will gain, and love to God you will obtain. Be assured that difficulty will provide you with virtues you could not obtain otherwise. That is why you should rejoice continually in comfortable and difficult times. Be assured that God does not permit difficulty unless it is to your benefit. He also does not permit more than you can bear. And that begins the way out. Here we see the peace of the children of God and their precious substance. They did not get upset in difficulty, they did not lose their peace, but they rejoiced. The birth of Christ brought difficulties, which Christ bore, the Virgin St. MARY bore. But these difficulties did not obstruct the divine joy with The Birth. There was no place for them in the Inn, and they slept in a manger. It was winter and cold for them. They were on a journey by necessity not desire for the census. There was a plot on the part of Herod the Great to kill Christ which led to the martyrdom of all the children in Judea under two years. This led to their escape to the country of Egypt. Through this last difficulty our land was blessed with the visit of the holy family. Christ and his mother came to Egypt and by their coming many places were blessed and many miracles were performed.

That is why we say that the children of God live in a continual peace regardless of the circumstances, and we should notice that "Rejoice" is a command. It is not an advice or recommendation. It is a heavenly commandment from our good Lord who desires joy for us here on earth, and joy in heaven. Joy now and at all times and forever more

XXXII. The Virgin Mary (theotokos)

Over the years, thousands of books and articles have been written about the Virgin, the Pure, the Full of Grace, the Mother of Mercy, the Spring of Life, the Rising Morning Star, the Mother of the Savior, Saint Mary, the Mother of God (Theotokos) in truth. We can only write a few humble words of appreciation asking for her intercession and prayers for the writer and readers alike. According to the teachings of the Fathers of the Church few have the privilege of intercession: Mary is first and foremost, followed by the archangels, and John the Baptist. The others, whom we adore, such as the Apostles, St. Mena, St. George, St. Philopateer Marcurius, St. Demiana, ..etc. pray for us.

In prophecy, she was mentioned many times. Moses saw her as the burning bush near the mountain of Sinai where he received the Commandments.

Isaiah prophesied a thousand years before the Virgin birth saying: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear son and shall call his name Emmanuel (God among Us)" (Isaiah 7:14). David the prophet and king said about her: "She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needle-work: the Virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee" (Psalms 45:14) Thus David honored her and those who follow her example, they become the Brides of the King of Kings. Ezekiel in his vision was brought to the east gate of the temple and the Lord said unto him: "This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it: Because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut." (Ezekiel 44:2) and we know that God does not live in houses made by hands. So what is Ezekiel talking about, he is talking about Mary the Mother of God who was chosen from among all women, a pure Virgin and she remained pure. Solomon said about her: "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (Song 4:12) same meaning. Solomon about her also said: "My beloved, and my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (Song 5:16) which we repeat in the morning praises every day.

She was born to Joachim (Yo -wakeem) and Anna from the tribe of Juda from the seed of David the King. This was to prove to one and all that Jesus is King who came to save sinners since David the King comes from the seed of Rahaab the Harlot (sinner). Her mother Anna was barren (unable to conceive a child). Anna and Joachim prayed exceedingly (many times) asking for a child since it was a shameful thing in their days not to bear a child. They promised to dedicate their offspring (child) to the service of the Lord according to St. Isaac Avraam the Syrian: "I promise to place in your hands the offspring you give me. I will bring my offspring to the temple as soon as it is able to walk on its feet." They did just that when Mary was only three years of age. The Lord heard and accepted this prayer like the prayer of Abrahaam and Sarah to whom He gave Isaac. It took a long time for the prayer of Abrahaam and Sarah to be fulfilled, the same for Joachim and Anna. In the meantime, both couples suffered from vicious talk and mockings. A lesson in patience and faith: "The substance of things unseen".

At the appointed time (God's time), On God's schedule, Anna conceived and gave birth to the one who became worthy to be called the Mother of God in Truth (Theotokos). Mary was in her parents home until she was 3 years of age. Her parents brought her to the temple, a child, at this young age to fulfill their promise. Her father Joachim departed when she was 6 years of age. Her mother Anna continued to visit her until Anna departed. this was when Mary was only 8 years of age. Mary continued in the temple until age 12. She was known to serve the elders and read the Holy Books continuously. According to the traditions concerning females who were dedicated to the Lord, she had to leave the temple at age 12. According to Coptic tradition, the priests and elders of the Jews including Zakariah, later on, the father of John the Baptist, brought up the subject of marriage to her in front of all the people. According to tradition, "they took the staffs of many of the elders and young and tagged them. And they decided that staff that will show a sign by budding like a flower, was to be an indication as to whom God chosen for her." The staff which belonged to Joseph the Carpenter, one of the respected elders, a cousin of Mary from the tribe of Juda, and the seed of David the King budded which was the sign they were looking for. Joseph the Carpenter was chosen as her 'spouse'. Mistaken are those who say that Joseph took Mary as wife. She was only betrothed (engaged) to him. Joseph was an elder and when he took her to his

home, she spent her time in his house in prayers and worship, continued to read the Holy Books, and serve the widows, needy, and old, as she did when she lived within the walls of the temple. Although the Bible did not detail her life, it clearly states: "... the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and this virgin's name was Mary". (Luke 1:29). So any talk about her marrying Joseph and having other children is utter nonsense. the angel said: "Hail, thou that are highly favored (full of grace in other translations), the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." (Luke 1:29).

Mary showed great humility in her reply: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation ..He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. ..." (Luke 1:46-55). A long and most humbling address which deserves to be recited often, because it teaches humility especially when it comes from the Theotokos.

Her visit to Elizabeth was so overwhelming, the baby moved in her womb in awe and worship, Elizabeth prophesied saying: " Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me." (Luke 1: 42-43). It was a great encounter between the mother of the Savior, and the mother of the forerunner "the messenger who goes in front of him to prepare his way"

Many of the things that are recorded in the Bible (New Testament) concerning Jesus were relayed to the disciples and Apostles by Mary Theotokos: "All these things, kept she in her heart." (Luke 2:51). Without her diligence, we would not have learned about his childhood; the visit to Egypt; the visit to the temple; the encounter with Simeon the elder; and Anna the daughter of Phanuel; His teaching in the temple and staying behind at age 12 telling Mary and Joseph that He must teach in his Father's House (the temple), .. etc. Mary told these incidents to the disciples and apostles. That is how they came to be mentioned in the Gospels, especially in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The book of John was written later about the divinity, assuming, the existence of the other three Gospels. The first miracle that Jesus performed was at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. It was at the urging of his mother who being the dedicated servant of God was concerned about all the needs of the people, even as small as running out of wine (refreshment) at a wedding. Thus the first miracle of Jesus, turning water into wine. She was one of the women honored in the bible because they followed Jesus and served (attended to his needs) from their own money. She was also at the cross under his feet when he was crucified for the sins of the world.

Mary was entrusted to John the beloved (Apostle, Disciple, writer of the Gospel according to St. John, Revelation, and three epistles). John was one of the four fishermen Jesus called first to be his disciples, they are Peter and his older brother Andrew and John and his older brother James. John rested his head on the Lord's chest and John's mother is the one who asked Jesus if her sons can sit one on his right and the other on his left in his kingdom. John the son of Zebedee was very close to Jesus and was the one chosen by Christ to care for his mother: "when Jesus therefore, saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." (John 19:26). These words are very deep in meaning and symbol. First, Jesus cared for his mother, he arranged for her to be taken care of by the best. Do we care for our elders, do we try to arrange the best for them. Extended families are much better than nursing homes if they can be arranged and made work.

Second, this verse tells us that she lived in the house of John, which we believe was the situation to the end of her blessed life. The talk about her marrying and having other children is utter nonsense, because if she had natural children they would have been required to care for her instead of John. The brothers the Gospels speak about are the children of her sister Mary the wife of Cleophas: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene." (John 19:25) (She had a sister born after her and given the same name since by dedicating her, Anna and Joachim considered her not theirs anymore). Also, who would care for these small things after giving birth to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The virgin Mary was with the disciples when Jesus entered while the doors were locked. This occurred several times in the period between his resurrection and his ascension 40 days later. She also was in the upper room when the Holy Spirit descended on them like tongues of fire as they received the promise of the Father on the day of Pentecost.

According to our Church tradition, when Her Son's will was for her to depart our world (the world of falsehood), and to be with him in his paradise, which was fifteen years after his ascension, he sent an angel to tell her the news of her departure, which she received with great delight. She asked that the disciples and apostles be gathered from around the world (it was a busy time in evangelism history). When she saw most of them together, she was filled with happiness, encouraged them, and informed them that the time of her departure arrived. She then advised and blessed them and surrendered her pure soul in the hands of her Lord and Savior, her son Jesus Christ.

They buried her in Gassemani. But Thomas, the disciple, the doubter, was not with the others. He was preaching in the Lands of India and Persia. But, as he was on his way back, by heavenly knowledge, he saw her body carried by angels and ascending to heaven. When he arrived in Judea, he asked the whereabouts of the blessed virgin. When they told him about her departure, he again raised his doubts as was expected. They took him to Gassemani, and when they opened the tomb where they buried her, they realized that the body was not there. Thomas then told them about what he saw on his way back from India. They all prayed and fasted and it was revealed to them that her body was carried by the angels to heaven to be waiting in paradise (the place of rest) until the day in which Jesus will come to Judge everyone according to his deeds. On this day the queen (the church) will be sitting on the right-hand of the King (Christ) in his Glory. Also, on this day a queen (Mary) will be sitting on the right hand of a King (her son Jesus) and they will all say: "This is the daughter (Mary) that freed her mother (the church).

Our Church celebrates the ascension of the virgin Mary on the 16th of Misra which occurs on the 22nd of August every year. The celebration is preceded by a popular fast which starts on August 7th. In my beloved Egypt, we all fasted those two weeks with joy and uplifted spirits. Some of my non-Christian friends even fasted with us, asking the prayers and intercession of the mother of mercy. Many churches are named in her honor world wide. In our beloved Egypt, and elsewhere, many apparitions of Mary accompanied by miracles and wonders, continue to take place. The apparition at St. Mary's in Zeitoun in 1968 and at St. Demiana in Shoubra in 1986 are very popular, for the apparitions continued for over a year in each of these places. The prayers and intercession of the Virgin Mary Theotokos be with us all. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

(C) Revised 1997; Dr. William A. Hanna; St. Mary & St. Abraam Coptic Orthodox Church; St. Louis, Missouri 63146; USA. (C) 1994; Dr. William A. Hanna; Essays for Orthodox Youth.

XXXIII. The Holy Spirit (The Lord Giver of Life)

Fifty days following Easter, we celebrate the feast of Pentecost. The season leading to the feast is called in Arabic 'Khamaseen' which means fifty (50) or Pentecost. The feast of Pentecost or the poring of the Holy Spirit, is a great feast and an occasion preferred over any other time in Church calendar for new ordinations of Bishops and Priests in the Coptic Church. The word 'Pentecost' is a Greek word which means fifty, its equivalent in Coptic is 'Ansara', in Hebrew is the word 'Bitevi' and in Arabic 'Khamaseen' or 50th day. We also use the Greek word 'Parakleet' which has more than one translation, meaning,

The Holy Spirit of God is referred to as the 'Parakleet' meaning: language, tongue, comforter, advocate, defender, intercessor, .. etc. These are some of the works of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the Church. Before his passion, Jesus promised his disciples saying: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even, the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me .." (John 15:26).

Before man was created: "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2). Men received the Holy Spirit, also in a small measure for special purposes. Before the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured on very few people of God for special purposes, as examples:

1. Jeremiah: The Holy Spirit came upon him even when he was in his mother's womb and continued with him, so he prophesied great prophesies which gave us a treasure of knowledge about things to come, even to this day: "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed you in the belly I knew thee; and before thou comest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee and ordained thee a prophet .." (Jer 1:4).

2. Joshua the son of Num: "was full of the Spirit of Wisdom; for Moses has laid his hands upon him." (Deut 34:9).

3. Bazaleel the son of Uri: "The Lord said unto Moses. I have called by name Bazaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, .. and I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom and understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. To advise cunning works, to work in gold and in silver and in brass .." (Exodus 31:1-5).

4. The seventy elders of Israel: "The Lord said to Moses: gather 70 of the elders of Israel and I will take of the Spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them." (Numb 11:16-29).

5. Joseph was filled with the Spirit of God which made him wiser than all the wise men of Egypt: "Pharaoh said: can we find such one as this is, a man in whom the spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discrete and wise as thou art .." (Gen 41:36-).

6. Saul the son of Kees: was annointed with oil and the spirit of God was on him when the Israelites asked Samuel the prophet to appoint him king on Israel, previously they were ruled by judges: Samuel the prophet spoke to Saul after anointing him with oil saying: and the spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophecy .." (I Samuel 10:6). Later on the Spirit of the Lord left him and a bad spirit possessed him because he displeased God.

7. David the Prophet and King: Was by the will of God chosen on the hands of the great prophet Samuel to succeed Saul while Saul was still alive and David was filled with the Holy Spirit of God: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him .. and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." (I Samuel 16:13-).

In that same category are: Isiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, and Elisha among other men of God. It is interesting to learn that the Spirit of God strifed with all men always, but after the flood the situation

changed because man's sin became like a big wall that separated man from his creator: "God said: My Spirit shall not always strive with man .. Because they sinned." (Gen 6:3). From the time of the flood a measure of the Spirit of God was on a few chosen people like the above mentioned.

How did God Prepare for the Coming of His Son?

A special dispensation of the Holy Spirit preceded the Coming of Christ (his birth):

1. Zakariah the Priest and His Wife Elizabeth - were given a special dispensation of the Holy Spirit. They gave birth to the messenger, John the Baptist, to prepare his way. Both Zakariah and Elizabeth prophesied about the message of their son and the coming of the savior Jesus Christ. List to Elizabeth saying to Mary: "And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ..." (Luke 1:43,44).
2. John the Baptist - "was filled by the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb." (Luke 1:15) because he was "his messenger to prepare the way of the Lord" which shows the mercy and grace of our Lord in the fullness of time. It is important to understand that God by his Holy Spirit works in us and for us at the right time as determined by God's pre-knowledge and infinite (unlimited) wisdom.
3. Mary Theotokos (Mother of God in truth) - was filled by the Holy Spirit to become worthy of carrying Emmanuel (God with Us): "The angel said unto her: Fear not Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in the womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. .. And the angel and said unto her: The Holy Ghost (Spirit) shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highers shall overshadow thee." (Luke 1:26-).
4. Jesus our Lord - to prepare himself (to give us an example of how to prepare for the service of the Lord) fasted 40 days and 40 nights and was then baptized and: "Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him." (Matt 3:16). This was mentioned for our edification, since Jesus is God Incarnate, one of the trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We learn the importance of fasting and receiving baptism which is renewed always through repentance (penance), confession, and the Eucharist (holy communion).

XXXV. The Holy Spirit in the Church (After Ascension)

Before ascension, the works of the Holy Spirit was not fully manifested, because Jesus was with his followers in the flesh. After ascension, the Holy Spirit was sent according to the promise: "And behold, I send you the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry (wait) ye in the city of Jerusalem, until you be endued with power from on high. . . And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen." (Luke 24:49-). These words are the last words in the Gospel according to St. Luke. They are very clear instructions from Jesus to his Disciples, to wait in a specific place, Jerusalem, to receive a specific endowment (inheritance) which is the Holy Spirit of Power. This was the weapon they needed to go out and complete the works of evangelizing the whole world.

This is a great truth which is essential for the church to live with. The church of God which was begun by Jesus himself, the corner stone, was entrusted to the Disciples and those that followed their teaching, endowed with power because it received the promise of the Father after Jesus was glorified (died, buried, risen, and ascended). The prophet Joel prophesied about that great outpouring of the Holy Spirit centuries before it actually took place: "And I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophecy, you old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit." (Joel 2:28-). Here we see no particular groups being chosen to receive the Holy Spirit, instead he says all flesh. He also stresses old and young, sons and daughters, rich and poor.

The Works of the Holy Spirit:

1. Witness for Christ: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." (John 15:25).
2. Stays with the believers: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." (John 14:16).
3. Teaches the believers all things: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send you in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26).
4. Leads the Believers to the Truth: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...and he will show you things to come." (John 16:13).
5. Reproves (reprimands or rebukes) the World: "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin because they believe me (Christ) not. Of righteousness because I (Christ) go to my Father (which makes us right with the Father)... Of judgment, because the prince of this world (Satan) is judged." (John 16:8-11). These are the words of Christ our Lord concerning the works of the Holy Spirit.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Paul the Apostle explained these things to help our understanding, especially in his words in his first epistle to the Corinthians. The Corinthians were part of the Greek culture, they admired miracles and wonders, and he explained to them how the Holy Spirit of God can give us the ability to perform wonders and miracles which is a gift of the Spirit. No one can have any of these gifts if the Spirit is not in him.

. St. Paul made it clear to the Corinthians that different people receive different gifts because they are different members of the body of Christ, but the different gifts complement each other to make the Christian community whole (complete): "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the

same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is give to every man to profit withal (to benefit everyone).. (I Cor 12:1-7).

In the book of acts, acts 19, it talks about seven men the sons of skala, a Jewish head priest who tried to cast out an unclean spirit calling on the name of Jesus whom Paul preached. The evil spirit responded: Jesus I know and Paul I am familiar with, but you, who are you, and the man with the evil spirit jumped on them and they ran out naked

We can summarize the gifts of the Holy Spirit: the word of wisdom, Faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, diverse kinds of tongues, and interpreting of tongues (See I Cor. 12:8-10). It is essential to note though that God divided as he wills: "But all these works that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." (I Cor. 12:11). This is because we all are members of the same body with Christ the head. If so we do not need to be one and the same: "For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many are one body: so also is Christ." (I Cor. 12:12).

We do not need to expound on many of the gifts because they are obvious: nothing is better than saying a word of wisdom in a difficult situation. It can diffuse anger and turn a losing situation into a winning one.

Healing is a power that we have to believe in more so we can receive a greater measure of this most needed gift of God to the works of his hand. Who can not use a miracle even a minor one from time to time.

Prophecy can help a church, a community, a family, or an individual in times of uncertainty. Prophecy does not have to be spoken also, it can come in the form of a vision, a holy feeling, or a dream.

Tongues are the subject of great controversy today because some are misusing and sometimes plain abusing the gift. Our church teaches that it was essential to have that gift in the early days of Christianity because the teachers of the word were very few and most were simple and uneducated. Today, education and knowledge makes it less important. Even during the time of Paul the Apostle, the gift was abused which caused him to write in the same epistle: "Follow after charity, love, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather you may prophecy (the most important gift). For he that speaks in an unknown tongue speaks not unto men, but unto God: for no man understands him; howbeit in the spirit he speaks mysteries... for greater is he that prophecies than he that speaks with tongues..." (I Cor. 13:1-6).

The Fruits of the Spirit:

If you have a gift, that gift must bear some fruits otherwise it is a useless gift. Paul the Apostle also summarized the most important fruits of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering (Patience), Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance, and added the beautiful words: "against such there is no law" (Ga 5:22-). Now if you have the Holy Spirit active in you, the Holy Spirit will work in you. As a result some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit will become evident in your life. And consequently the works of the Spirit will bear fruits. It is marvelous to have all the fruits at once, but if we can not, let us hope for some. Which are your favorite qualities: Is it Love? How about having Christ's Joy, his peace, long-suffering? How about asking for gentleness? Goodness?

Faith is a great quality. It protects us from the doubts Satan sends our way every turn of the way. Do you have faith that you will reach the top of the mountain, knowing that the road is long and the door is narrow? There is no law against these beautiful qualities. Let us pray to the Father in the name of Christ our Lord through the Holy Spirit, the Lord Giver of life to assist us in claiming that life full of gifts and fruits in Christ Jesus our Lord to whom is Glory with his Father and the Holy Spirit; One God. Amen.

XXXV. The Holy Spirit (The Lord Giver of Life) Part II

We already talked about the works of the Holy Spirit in general listing the dispensations of the Holy Spirit of God from creation to Pentecost. This article, addresses specifically the works of the Holy Spirit in the new testament church through the sacraments which were initiated by Christ and his disciples and are accepted as a whole by all Apostolic churches and in part by many other churches.

There are seven sacraments recognized by the believers since the days of the Apostles:

- 1) Baptism,
- 2) Myroon (Confirmation),
- 3) Penance (repentance & confession),
- 4) Holy Eucharist,
- 5) Anointing of the Sick,
- 6) Matrimony, and
- 7) Priesthood.

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even, the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me .." (John 15:26). This is the Holy Spirit which descended on Jesus when he was baptized in the Jordan River as a sign to the believers those who were present heard a voice saying this is my son, with whom I am pleased, to whom ye listen. We will talk in details about our own baptism, confirmation, penance, and Holy Eucharist as gifts which are required by all believers. Matrimony and anointed of the sick are if desired or needed. Priesthood is a special gift for those who desire to serve God starting from the ranks of subdeacon, deacon, archdeacon, priest, archpriest, bishop, archbishop, and patriarch, respectively. The holy Eucharist (communion) is listed first in most church books, but if you think about the steps in the life of a believer, you have to follow the order above mentioned.

1. Baptism: The Holy Spirit is given to us in baptism, we also receive the confirmation after water baptism by the laying of hands and anointing with oil (the oil of confirmation or Myroon), to be baptized with water and Spirit. This order was reversed on some occasions as mentioned in the book of acts about the conversion of Cornelius and his house, for example. In normal circumstances, it is better to follow the normal order of Baptism as the first sacrament, followed by confirmation or Myroon. In baptism, we are cleansed from the sins we inherited being the descendants of Adam and those who followed him, Adam's sin. In confirmation, we are receive the Holy Spirit of God, so God will dwell in us from thereon. This is following the instructions of Jesus to Nicodemus: "Verily, Verily I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5). An adult has to have complete faith and full understanding to receive the Holy Spirit in the sacraments (Baptism and Confirmation): "Phillip said (to the Ethiopian Eunuch, the minister of Kinga the Queen of Ethiopia), If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest (be baptized). And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God. And they commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water ... and he baptized him." (Acts 8:35-38). In our church in America many adults are being baptized, they have to receive instructions in the faith before they can truly receive these precious gifts.

The traditional churches do baptize children, rightfully so. The children of believers are to be baptized as soon as possible, on their parents faith. Giving the parent or guardian (Eshbeen) full responsibility to raise that child in the orthodox faith observing all commandments. Boy should be baptized soon after they are 40 days old, girls when they are 80 days old or soon after. This is not to favor boys over girls, but in obedience of the law concerning purification of women: "But if she bears a maid (female) child, then she shall be unclean two weeks .. and shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days (66 + 14 days or 80 days). (Lev 12:4-6). Remember that Christ came not to tear down but to complete the law. The church recognizes also that some newborns might not be healthy in which case they can be baptized immediately, but someone other than the mother has to bring the child forward, the mother is fully

participating by attendance, and celebration. She only can not bring it forward (carry the child). The tradition of infant baptism goes back to early Christianity. It was mentioned in the writings of St. Arianos, Origen, St. Gregory Theologos, and St. Augustine among others.

The church warns against repeating baptism. Families have to keep records and not commit the grave foolishness of repeating baptism: "For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." (Heb 10:14). In our church, we had to baptize a 20 years old young lady, and her 19 years old brother because their parents neglected to baptize them when they were young. Our priest had to remind the parents to think very carefully and try to remember if they were baptized, since they were not, they received baptism as adults. so, so he took the cup, Through immersion in the water is how baptism is performed in the orthodox way, by immersion you are buried with Christ, and by coming out you are resurrected with him. Baptism cleanses us from all our previous and inherited sins by the works of the Holy Spirit (you die with Christ, are buried with him, and rise with him" That is the mystery of Baptism.

2. Confirmation (Myroon): Myroon or confirmation is the sacrament by which those who are born anew (again) in baptism receive the Seal of the Spirit, the gift of the Father. By Baptism we receive the new birth, the forgiveness of our sins, and by Myroon we are affixed into this birth, and are sealed: "In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of Promise." (Eph 1:13). Myroon is the anointing with oil according to Apostolic teachings. This is the act of laying of hands which is an important part of the sacrament, going back to the time of the Apostles: .. they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost (Spirit) Came on them .. " (Acts 19:1-8). The oil used in the Coptic Orthodox Church for the imparting of the Holy Spirit is a mixture of 30 different precious oils including: myrrh, aloes, cassis, spikenard, saffron, calomel, cinnamon, and frankincense crushed to fine powder and mixed with pure olive oil and boiled on a slow fire made from special woods. This is the same as the oil used to anoint kings in the old testament tradition. This oil is prepared only when needed with much prayers and veneration by the pope accompanied by many bishops and priests. Pope Cyril (Kyrillos) VI prepared the Myroon once in his reign. Pope Shenouda III (our present pope) prepared the Myroon, so far, four times. The last time it was prepared, was during paschal week, 1995. The veneration of the making of Myroon is because it is used for the sacrament of confirmation. the gift received in this sacrament is the Holy Spirit of God, nothing less.

3. Penance: Penance is the sacrament of forgiveness of sin, reconciliation, through repentance, confession, and absolution. It is the sacrament by which we receive God's healing forgiveness for sins committed, voluntarily, and involuntarily, after baptism. This sacrament is also called reconciliation because it reconciles us not only with God, but with the Church (body of believers) and ourselves. All the aspects of reconciliation are important for a healthy mind, soul, and spirit. As members of Christ's body, everything we do affects the whole body. Sin wounds and weakens the body of Christ; the healing we receive in penance restores health and strength to the church as well as ourselves: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

Penance requires getting together with the priest and confessing all your sins talking directly (face to face, not through a partition) to the man who is entrusted with the responsibility to hear confession and keep all your secrets in the strictest of confidence. That is part of his ministry (service). The priest will also give you advice as a spiritual father and in some cases will recommend spiritual exercises to help you get over persistent bad habits. The priest receives a special measure of the Holy Spirit to be able to hear confession and give impartial advice, and keep your secrets. The priest also, will follow up with you in matters of importance. When you finish the confession, the priest will pray with you and for you. He then gives you absolution by the authority in him as a priest of God: ".. He (Christ) breathed on them and said receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John 21:22:23).

4. The Holy Eucharist: The Holy Eucharist or sacrament of sacraments is the most sacred mystery in the Christian faith. It is usually mentioned first, because it is the gift of renewal. People of other denominations talk about renewal and being born again. We talk less, but in reality we act more on this principal. We are renewed (born again) every time we partake of the Holy Eucharist. the Holy Eucharist is a gift of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit completes the transformation as we will explain later.

This sacrament was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ himself as St. Paul taught us what he has received from the Lord himself: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks he broke it and said: Take this, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manne when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: This do ye, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (I Cor 11:23-26). Because as St. Paul stated: At the Last Supper, on the night when he was betrayed, our saviour instituted the Eucharist sacrifice of his body and his blood. He did this in order to teach us to partake of him.

When Jesus instituted the sacrament, it was through his divine power. When the church practices the sacrament, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit in the celebrant (Patriarch, bishop, or priest) that the transformation takes place. Also, it is through the faith of those who partake that they receive the body and blood of Christ and not bread and wine as some think. It is also important for the reader to understand that the cross of Jesus "Him Crucified" is a Godly act perpetuated (repeated) in the life of the church until Jesus Comes back. The Holy Eucharist is this perpetuation of the Cross until Jesus comes back..

One has to prepare oneself to receive Christ in the Eucharist by cleansing the heart and mind through repentance leading to confession and absolution by the priest. The process of repentance, confession and absolution is a process which leads to receiving another gift of the Spirit, penance or reconciliation. Because as Paul said: "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." (I Cor 11:27).

In the Eucharist Jesus, through the works of the Holy Spirit entrusts to his beloved spouse the church a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament (mystery) of love, a sign of unity, we partake of him and become one with him. It is a bond of Charity (caring love), a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

It is important to note that He said:".. Take eat, this is my body and he took the cup, .. and gave it to them saying drink ye all of it: For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt 26: 26-28). This is the reason we believe that the sacrament is true transformation, the works of the Holy Spirit, and is not just a memory as some say. We also fully recognize the words of Paul the Apostle "For I have received of the Lord ..." It is not Paul's interpretation of what the sacrament is knowing that he was not even converted when the Last Supper took place, he received this revelation, truth, from the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. **Unction (Anointing of the Sick):** The most neglected gift of the Holy Spirit, is the one of the most beneficial blessings of being Christian. We can receive divine healing if we ask for it in faith, believing that God answers the prayers of those who call him in honesty and truth: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders (priests) of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." (James 5:14). It is also important to realize that we have to believe even if we do not see the evidence immediately because as Christians, we should not fear even death: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things to come ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:37-39).

6. **Matrimony (Marriage):** The sacrament of Holy marriage, or life-giving oneness is a gift of the Spirit in which a man and a woman are united (become one): "At the beginning made them male and female. And said for this cause shall a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife: and they twain (two) shall be one flesh?" (Matt 19:4-6). Although it is important to look for compatibility and appropriateness, it is more important to make sure that you are making the right choice. We recommend that you consult your spiritual adviser, you priest, your close relatives: father, mother, sisters, brothers, .. etc. and your close friends. It helps if you consult people who know you and your future spouse.

Take your time, have a long enough engagement. AN engagement period is required for a church wedding in our Coptic Orthodox Church. and when you stand in front of God, and the Church, you both

have to be ready to love and cherish, forever do we part. The Holy Spirit will bless such matrimony and your union will be a oneness with God as well.

7. Priesthood: The sacrament of Priesthood or Holy Orders is the imparting of a special dispensation of the Holy Spirit on those who are called to become deacons (servants), priests (teachers/preachers), and bishops (administrators/leaders) of the church of God. There are three major orders: Episcopate, Priesthood, and Deaconate. One has to achieve the lower rank before aspiring to receive the higher one. Let's start with the Deaconate (Servants).

Deacons receive their Holy Orders sacrament from the a bishop who possesses the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. When a bishop ordains a deacon, he has to receive good recommendation from the local priest that the person is ready to receive the rank for which he is nominated. There are five ranks of Deaconia: Aghnastos (reader), Apsaltos (singer), sub-deacon, deacon, and archdeacon. A deacon is a fully commissioned servant who can assist in church service and teaching.

An archdeacon, is a person ready for the priesthood. If an archdeacon was married before receiving the rank, it is well. If he was not married, he has to either get married before receiving that high rank in church service or remain unmarried like Paul the Apostle, and our fathers the monks. The person qualified and recommended by the local congregation to become priest has to have achieved some of the ranks of deaconia. The ordination will elevate him to the archdeacon level before being ordained priest. In the Coptic church, a person has to be married before he can be ordained priest.

Our fathers the monks achieve the priesthood, but this is different. They stay unmarried and if they choose to get married after becoming monks and/or receiving the priesthood, they lose both honors. A priest can not marry again if he loses his wife (if she passes away). These are the laws of most Orthodox churches, they come from the teachings of the Apostles (Discolia) and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church. Bishops are chosen from the ranks of monks (celibate clergy). They are like the bible said: "...there be' eunuchs, which have made themselves, eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." (Matt 19:12).

A bishop is ordained by at least two bishops, by the laying of hands. In our Coptic Orthodox Church, the Pope leads the bishops in ordaining another bishop. They are bishops for episcopates, those are like being wed to the episcopate, he can not resign or retire unless under extreme difficult circumstance if at all. These days, we have many general bishops who are ordained and give responsibilities as the pope sees fit to help with the church administration. General bishops can get assigned later on to an episcopate if one is vacant. Episcopate assignment requires the approval of a majority of the people through petition.

In the Coptic church, the pope is chosen from the monks and/or bishops. Three or four most qualified individual are nominated by petitions, approved as qualified candidates by the Holy Synod (the council of bishops and heads of monasteries). An altar+) lot is performed in which the names of all qualified candidates plus a blank are included is on a pre-announced Sunday, usually, at the Great Cathedral in Cairo. The drawing is performed after the Liturgy, usually a child is asked to draw a name, the name that gets selected, is the chosen person to become Pope and Patriarch. This way the church has gone through nomination, and recommendation, and the Holy Spirit does the appropriation.

The selection is usually followed by the ordination by the laying of hands of all the bishops in attendance. This is an event, no bishop would want to miss. That is how our church selects the Pope and Patriarch of the see of St. Mark. This succession unbroken started by St. Mark the evangelist, our first patriarch. We are blessed in our generation to have had the departed Pope Cyril (Kyrillos) VI, the 116th pope, and our present Pope and Patriarch is Pope Shenouda III, the 117th of the popes of Alexandria.

Glory Always be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Holy Trinity, One God. Amen.

XXXVII. Christian Marriage: Can It Work?

The world we live in is full of temptation. Especially, the latter part of the 20th Century. The ability to create and propagate information almost instantly is a major cause. What they call multi-media. Video (pictures), Audio (sound), Communications (TV, Radio, Fax, and print) media are all much more advanced than our wildest dream. You hear about rent a companion, hire an escort, or even have a child, unnecessarily, conceived in a test tube or a surrogate womb.

The children of God who truly believe the words of Christ our Savior should be very careful, not to get involved in these things. The Lord God created man in his image and said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." (Genesis 2:18). Please not the word meet (matching or compatible). So marriage has to be a bond (strong relation) between compatible partners (a help meet for him). Then it says that he created woman (because she is taken from man). So, we strongly believe that marriage is a bond between man and woman. This law is evident in all the stages of revelation starting with the old testament and continuing with more clarity in the new testament, the gospel, the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the old testament it was an abomination for people to have sexual relationship with the same sex and/or with animals. The punishment for this abomination (grave sin) was death. Adultery, which was also not acceptable was also punished severely.

We, the Orthodox people take marriage very seriously, till death shall we part. For this reason, we have to approach it very carefully. Marriage to us is the strongest bond "the two shall be one flesh" (Mark 10:8). Marriage therefore, has to be a commitment between two compatible people, not a spare of the moment satisfaction of fleshly desire or financial need. When the pharisees asked Jesus about the subject of marriage he replied: "But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female, For this cause (reason) shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife. And they shall be one flesh. So then they are no more twain (two) but one flesh." (MK 10:6-8). When they asked him about divorce (why did Moses say that they give a book of divorce?) he said it was because of the hardness of your hearts) This heavenly law should never be broken, because, it is the commandment of our Lord. It is not from the disciples, apostles, or church teaching. It is directly from the mouth of Jesus. Our country (USA) and other countries in the west lost a great deal of family power because of liberal attitudes towards this subject. Statistics indicate 2 out of 3 marriages ending in divorce in the USA. Many children are being raised by single parents, step parents, foster parents, ... etc. You name it. We applaud the people who are doing that, but can not approve of their actions leading to the situation. Our Church and other Orthodox churches recognize only one reason for divorce: Adultery (proven by more than one witness or plainly admitted). In which case the injured party is granted absolution from the mouth of the Holy Catholic Apostolic Church. In a few cases a marriage is annulled because it was done on wrong basis to start with. In either case, the judgment is based on a church investigation conducted by a specialized church authority (Clerical Council).

When Jesus was asked once more about divorce by his disciples in private, he again reiterated his words adding: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another commits adultery. And if a woman shall put away her husband and be married to another, she commits adultery." (MK 10:11)

In the sermon on the mount which is the core of Christianity, Jesus said: "It hath been said that whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." (Matt 6:30-32). Please not the repetition of the phrase which is part of the Hebrew tradition of the old testament for emphasis.

When Paul the Apostle wrote to the Corinthians regarding marriage, he advised them based on the teaching of Christ saying: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman has her own husband. Let the husband render to the wife due benevolence (loyal protection, love, and respect). And likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife has not power over her own body, but the husband. And likewise also the husband hath no power of his own body, but the wife." (I Cor 6:1-4). This shows complete equality in responsibility and benefit not paralleled anywhere else during the time of the Apostles. It is to the credit of Christianity that it taught us equality before it was even popular to talk about equality. We know that many centuries after, people were still looking down on women, not if they were Christian. St. Paul

continues to explain the steps towards successful marriage: "defraud ye not one another, except, it be with consent for a time, that ye amy give yourselves to fasting and prayer and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your inconsistency." (I Cor 6:5)

The church commands men to be kind and helpful and we hope that the following words do not get misunderstood because they were meant to build and strengthen a marriage: "Likewise ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife as unto a weaker vessel and as being heirs together to the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered." (I Peters 3:7)

To young people who are considering getting married, we advice that you have a long enough engagement during which time you test each other, and if you discover incompatibility, please talk to your spiritual adviser, your parents, your local priest, or your closest friend. Here are some bad signs to watch for:

1. Insistence of one party on going through with marriage if you have known each other for only a short time.
2. If he/she has been using drugs and/or alcoholic and is continuing to do it openly or secretly.
3. If he/she makes statements like this: "I owe a great deal to my mother. It's my duty to make her happy." or, "You look like dad." in both cases, the person making the statement is showing a need for a parent figure more than a marriage partner.
4. If one party says things like: "I can't live without you." You might be dealing with a person with emotional needs that might exceed judgment regarding a life commitment.
5. If the majority of time you been together, you have developed a pattern of quarrelling, disappointing, seriously irritating, or hurting each other.
6. If many of the significant mature people in your life (parents, teachers, relatives, and specially good friends) indicate that you very likely are making a mistake.
7. If some very serious problem has come up and if it is definitely troubling you. Either confront it, or think about postponement.
8. If he/she had more than five jobs in the last two years.
9. If you are being pressured to premarital sex.
10. If you have been sexually involved with someone else, and now feel you have to get married.
11. If you are both 19 or under (your chances of broken marriage is three and half times higher than that of people 21 and over).
12. If you are marrying just because you have to get out of the house.
13. If you honestly are convinced that it is not going to work. We have seen people who ended up stuck in bad marriages or broken marriages because they did not pay attention to these signs. These signs and others that you might discover should be given serious consideration. Present the facts to a mature person you trust. Do not color or hide facts if you trust your adviser. You will be surprised how good council leads to proper decision making.

We realize the article might sound negative. It is not our purpose to give you a negative view, because we know that being careful will lead to a proper compatible choice. And they live happily ever after inspite of all the problems that will come their way, and we all have to cope with problems small and big in our lives. We pray to God Almighty that when you seek his council in honesty and truth, you shall receive all your hearts desires. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

XXXVII. Christ Is Risen, He Is Risen Indeed

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:" (John 11:25)

Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared., and .. they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. .. and as they were perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments, .. they said unto them, why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen." (Luke 24:1).

The Coptic Orthodox Church, guided by the Holy Spirit and at the request of the fathers gathered at the Council of Nicea, was given the responsibility of declaring the time of Easter celebration. Our Church has continued to carry the responsibility set by the fathers of the church and follows the guidelines set at Nicea as to when to celebrate Easter. Although, one should not make a big deal of when to celebrate an important occasion like Easter, it is better for the church if we all agree on one date. We Copts consider Easter the most sacred of all feasts and adhere to the rules set in the first Ecumenical Council at Nicea, 325 A.D.

In Arabic, we call Easter "Eid Kebeer" or the Great Feast as opposed to Christmas which is called "Eid Sagheer" which means Small Feast. This is in contrast to the Western Churches which start preparation for Christmas in July, and hardly make a mention of Easter. Easter is the celebration of resurrection, and without resurrection there would be no redemption "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). Christ died for us all on the wood of the cross carrying the sins of the whole world and by his resurrection he defeated death and sin. Satan, the prince of this world was defeated by Christ's resurrection, which is the reason of the unspeakable joy we sense when we think about Christ the Risen Lord.

Easter celebration gives us hope for our own resurrection in the latter day. We will rise again "the righteous will enjoy the resurrection of the righteous and share in his glory of our risen God and the evil to the resurrection of the wicked where eternal punishment will be in the fire of damnation". It is the pleasure of the righteous to think about Easter, because he can see that life of pain and sorrow is not the aim, but rather a transition state in which we prepare ourselves for eternal life with Christ and his saints about which the Apostle

Paul said: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phi 1:21). This is the first time man speaks about death without fear. Instead, the Apostle considers it gain because through Christ's resurrection we all received the promise of the same victory over death: "Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (I Cor 15:51-52). Hence we fear death no more: "O death, where is thy victory?" (I Cor 15:55).

Satan and his agents may grudgingly accept the Holy birth of Christ, but they can never see him risen again. That is why many resist accepting the fact that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again in spite of the overwhelming evidence. The authenticity of the bible has been proven many times over. Pontius Pilate wrote a complete report to Caesar, Historians were able to find it and translate it from Latin to live languages, it details all the events mentioned in the four Gospels about Jesus crucifixion and death. Jesus is the only historic figure whose tomb is empty.

The excuse the Roman soldiers gave was very lame, poor scared fishermen could not steal a corpse of a person condemned by the head priests and executed by a governor who could not find a single fault in him except for trying to appease his accusers. Pontius Pilate was warned by the leaders of the Jews that he was to guard his tomb heavily. The napkin of Veronica and the shroud of Turin are relics which were kept for centuries. The cross uncovered by Queen Hellen(a), the mother of the pious emperor Constantine, was passed from generation to generation. My grandparents as well as many others were given a small piece of the cross when they visited the Holy Land in the 1940's. Only a small piece is kept in the museums of the Vatican. We believe it not only because it was told, but also, because it makes life worth living. The God of the Universe dies for his creation, so we can claim

our place of eternal life with him through the forgiveness of our sins. One philosopher said it: 'If Jesus did not exist, Paul the Apostle would have invented him' I dare add because it made great sense to this gifted scholar who studied under the feet of Ghamalael. Listen to Ghamalael himself in the book of Acts: "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." (Acts 5:38,39)

We believe it not because of the physical evidence, but more importantly because our hearts are convicted that we need our salvation and in the fullness of time Jesus was born, lived among men, taught us the ways of salvation and committed the greatest act one can do for his beloved. There is no love greater than this: For one to die for his beloved. Can you imagine life as described by Jacob the Father of the Fathers, as the church calls him: "Your servants days are 4 scores and ten (130 years), the best of it is sorrow and pain" This was his reply to Pharaoh when he asked his age. He was the father of a great nation, but he did not have the privilege of salvation yet! Solomon the great wise king wrote: "all is vanity and no use under the sun." No one was wiser or richer in his time. That is the reason we see our own resurrection in Christ's resurrection. We see joy everlasting in him risen: "for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. Bus as it is written: eyes have not seen, nor ears heard neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who " (I Cor 2:8-). So experiencing Jesus, the joy of knowing that we were raised up with him, we can say with Paul the Apostle: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, because it is much better" instead of fearing death as other peoples do. Easter gives a sinner hope and a motive to repent, because if Christ rose again, he can raise us from the death of sin into life everlasting.

It is most appropriate to celebrate Easter in the Spring which is the time of growth. As plant life blossoms after the dead of winter, so do our souls, they blossom again on Easter, the Spring of spiritual life after we were dead because of sin.

The church leads us through a systematic experience to appreciate the meaning of Easter. We go through the season of the Great Lent which is a time of humility (lowering ones' self) and fasting (self-affliction), it is followed by the Paschal Week in which we relive the passion and sufferings of our Lord. We spend most of Thursday remembering the Lord's supper, most of Friday fasting and praying for Jesus crucified. Friday night and Saturday early morning remembering Apocalypse (The Revelations of St. John), contemplating the prophecies regarding the events that are to come on the world in the latter day and Jesus second coming. We start Easter celebration Saturday evening, and conclude the service very early Sunday morning.

The celebration of Easter continues for 50 days (Pentecost) season of church celebrations in which fasting and matanias (prostrating one's self) are not permitted because it is a season of joy, happiness, and peace everlasting. All services in the church during Pentecost include the song of victory "Ekhristos Anisti Eknikron ..." (Christ Rose from the dead. Through death He defeated death, and those who were dead rose again with him and received the promise of eternal life. Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit now and at all times and forever and ever . Amen).

And as our forefathers always said on this occasion in greeting each other:
"Ekhristos Anisti. ... Alithos Anisti"
Christ Is Risen. He Is Risen Indeed.

Happy Easter.

XXXVIII. Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost

After appearing to his disciples and many of the believers for 40 days, Christ ascended to heaven on the 40th day after resurrection. The stories, wonders, and miracles that preceded Christ's ascension are accounted for in the four Gospels. We believe that Christ miraculously ate with the disciples after

resurrection. However, his entering while the doors were closed and locked was not a miracle! Because He arose from the dead in His glorified body: "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. ... so also is resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body .." (I Cor 6:40-55).

The celestial body of Christ is what is promised to all believers who will be with him in his glory, because we were created in the image of God and will be like him when we be with him in his glory. The appearances of Christ are mentioned in Matthew (28), Mark (16), Luke (24), and John (20,21). Also it is mentioned in the first Chapter of the book of Acts for background and continuation. Paul the Apostle also wrote about Christ and his appearances to more than 500 brothers, many of them were alive even at the time of his conversion. He then spoke about his appearing to him on the road to Damascus.

In the Gospel of St. Mark: "Afterwards, he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat (to eat) and upbraided (scolded) them for there unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not then which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, go ye into the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:14-17).

In the gospel according to St. Luke, even more accounts of his appearances are mentioned: " ... And behold two of them went out the same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three score furlongs .. And it came to pass while they commuted together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered all these things, and to enter his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets he explained unto them in all the scripture the things concerning himself .. " (Luke 24).

In the Gospel according to St. John: "Jesus saith unto her (Mary Magdeline) touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father .. Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and said unto them, Peace be unto you .. And after eight days again his disciples were within and Thomas (the doubter) was with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger and behold my hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless but believer." (John 20). [Please read on to the end of John 21.]

About his ascension: St. Matthew wrote: "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them and when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them saying: All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach the all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost (Spirit): teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Mat 28:16-20).

St. Luke details these events which took place between the resurrection and ascension even more. He then concludes: "And he (meaning Jesus) led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen." (Luke 24). No one could have painted a more glorified

picture of ascension than Luke; a physician and painter. He also was of Greek origin and wrote as well as any one who studied the Greek culture could which is not only inspired but also very appealing. St. Luke continues painting this glorified picture in the first two chapters of the book of Acts which he wrote to a noble man, Theophilus of Alexandria.

The Pentecost season is a beautiful time in the life of the church, and in the life of the individual Christian person. The church performs most of the weddings, ordinations, and joy producing activities in this season in particular. No fasting or matanias but prayers and praises with joy. We feel victory, so much so, that we always sing the song of victory anytime we congregate for prayer, even in funerals, we put aside the prayers of the dead and instead sing the song of victory, as if we are telling the departed: blessed are you to depart now as we commemorate Christ risen, and up in heaven, and the Holy Spirit is with you and all of us to guide, support, and comfort. Jesus Is Risen. He Is Risen Indeed. By death, He defeated death, and those who were in the tombs received the promise of eternal life. Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God. Now and forever and ever. Amen.

Because now there is no condemnation to them who believe and accept Jesus God Incarnate, crucified, buried, risen, and in heaven whose presence is felt every moment through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and comfort. The Author can't resist but quote Paul the Apostle: "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." (Romans 8:1). Walk in the spirit, follow the commandments of our risen Christ. Do it diligently and quickly because the day of the Lord is near and "this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner" (Acts 1:11).

It is comforting to learn that his departure did not cause sorrow or pain, instead they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They also continued to meet together in the temple (the house of God) to praise and worship God. Another thing was clear in their minds and it became more vivid in their mind, was expected, after his ascension. This is what he promised them earlier: "But now I go my way to him that sent me, .. It is expedient for you that I go away. for if I go not away, the comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." (John 16:5-12). These words" said Jesus unto his disciples before his passion and they came to pass on the day of Pentecost (50th day following resurrection).

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully came (the ninth hour, 3 PM, the middle of the day), they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them clover (split) tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:1-4).

So as we celebrate the feasts of Ascension and Pentecost, we must feel that the commandments given to the Apostles and Holy Disciples are passed onto us and it is our duty to follow them like Simon the son of Youna (Peter) to whom Christ three times said: "Simon the son of Jonas do you love me more than these? Feed my sheep .." (John 21). Those commandments to feed the sheep, which came to us through observing the events of Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost can be summarized as follows:

Love one another..

Continually be in the temple (the Church) to praise and worship him that is above all names. Praising and worshipping and praying always: in all conditions, for all condition, and upon all conditions.

Go into all the world, to all nations, preach the gospel to all creatures (all peoples).

Advise the new comers to repent and be baptized

Cast out devils without fear, because Satan, the prince (ruler), of this world has been condemned (defeated).

6. Speak the new tongue of Love and salvation unto all nations.

Love, because God Is Love, and He is now in us and we are one with him. Feed the sheep, as Jesus fed the multitude not only the food of the flesh but the food of eternal life, the manna that came from heaven, the Word of God and the sacraments of the Church which are gifts of the Holy Spirit. When Christ saw the disciples of Emmaus "he said unto them, what manner of communications are these .. and

why you are sad? ..” we also should not be sad, because we have the promise of the Father. The same commandment to preach the whole world, baptizing in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit is even more pronounced in the Gospel according to St. Mark, the Father of our Church: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them .. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up to heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." (Mark 16).

Nothing is more beautiful, nothing is more pronounced. Preach all creatures, preach, teach, baptize. They shall speak a new tongue, they will speak (witness) for me through the Holy Spirit. They shall have no fear of anything: serpents, evil, poisons or anything you can imagine to befall us, because the Lord is with us when we are with him, when we learn and be sealed by the seal of baptism. Why this was told then?

As Christ completed his works on earth (and before his ascension) he gave the instructions to his saintly apostles and holy disciples to complete the work of the Kingdom of God which he started in his short life, of 33 1/2 years, on earth, and his short service of about 3 1/2 years. I am always reminded that Christ changed the world in a very short period of time. We also can cause wonderful things to happen, wonders and miracles in the name of Christ through the Holy Spirit of God. And this can be accomplished in a short period of time. We just have to cast out all fear, and do the work of the Kingdom of God now, trusting that it is not our own effort, but the works of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church (body of believers). Glory be to God forever. Amen.

XXXIX. 'Sham Al-Nasseem' (The Spring Festival)

The ancient Egyptians celebrated Spring by going out on the first day of Spring to smell the fresh air ('Sham Al-Nasseem'). This festival continued after Christianity spread in Egypt, even to this day. They started by coloring eggs early in the morning and followed by hanging fresh plants on the doors (green onions, and 'malana' garbanzo beans are popular Spring green vegetables in Egypt). They ate eggs that morning and went out to the parks for a big picnic which featured salted fish ('Feessekh' (slated bass), and 'Mollohah') with green onions and 'malana'

Shaam Al-Nasseem now coincides with the day after Resurrection Sunday and as we continue the tradition of our ancestors, we should remember the spiritual meaning of that feast, because as the Spring festival is a reminder of fresh and new plant life after the death and stagnation of Winter, so is Easter is a reminder of rebirth, growth, and new spiritual life through Christ's resurrection.

Happy Spring Season, "Shaam Al-Nasseem."

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