THE COPTIC ORTHODOX PATRIARCATE
ST. GEORGE AND ST. RUEISS CHURCH
SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

GRADE ELEVEN

Revised Edition 2005

PREPARATION AND WRITING
Father Rueiss Awad
St. George and St. Rueiss Coptic Orthodox Church
Toronto, Canada.

To Order Write To
St. George and St. Rueiss Coptic Orthodox Church
141 Bond Avenue
Toronto, Ontario, CANADA M3B 1M1
(416) 444-1092 or (416) 447-0108

Copyright © 2005 by
St. George and St. Rueiss Coptic Orthodox Church
All rights reserved
No portion of this book may be reproduced or copied in any form without a written permission from St. George and St. Rueiss Coptic Orthodox Church, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Α
Ω
Ι Η̄С·
Χ Π̄Χ̄С·

SAINT MARK

H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate
FROM H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III
Deir Anba Rueiss, Ramses Avenue, ABBASSIYA,
CAIRO, EGYPT.
CABLE : ELANBARUEISS, CAIRO.

ⲧⲓⲱⲙ ⲛⲓⲁⲣⲭⲓⲁⲣⲭⲏⲥ ⲁⲡⲉⲗⲗⲁ
ⲛⲟⲣⲑⲟⲇⲟⲝⲟⲥ
البطريركية الأقباط الأرثوذكس

Date / / 19
/ / 17

+

الى الدينيه المباركيه القمص مرقس الياس عبدالمسيح
والقس تادرس يعقوب ملطى

سلام ومحبة وبعد ،

زارنى ابننا د. فوقد وعرض المنهج المقترح لدارس التربية الكنسية بالمهجر. وقد درست معه الخطوط الاساسية للمنهج، دون الدخول فى التفاصيل. وأبديت له بعض ملاحظات عن جملة مناهج العقيدة والطقس ؛ وفى الواقع أنه الجهد المبذول جهد كبير جداً يستحق الشكر. ومع ذلك تحتاج دروس الكتاب المقدس الى زيادة. وسأرسل لكم ملاحظات اخرى بالتفصيل بمشيئة الرب .

فليبارك الرب كل ما قام به ابننا فوقد من مجهود فى اعداد المنهج ، وفى جمع المادة ، وفى عمل الترجمة . وليبارك الرب أيضاً كل من اشتركوا فى العمل ، وفى المراجعة

وليكن صدقنا هو ما نستطيع الوصول اليه من كمال على قدر امكانياتنا . ويمكنه تزويد المنهج أيضا بالصور المناسبة والتى تقربها كنيستنا من النواحى العقيدية والطقسية والتاريخية

الرب معكم . كونوا بخير

٧٩ ٨

عيد القديسة العذراء ١٩٨٦/٨/٢٢

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate
FROM H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III
Deir Anba Rueiss, Ramses Avenue, ABBASSIYA,
CAIRO, EGYPT.
CABLE : ELANBARUEISS, CAIRO.

+

To my blessed two sons: Hegomain Fr. Marcous Elias Abdel Massih and Hegomain Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty.

Peace and love be with you.

Dr. Mahfouz has visited me and brought with him the suggested Sunday school curriculum for the land of immigration. I have studied with him the basic topics of the curriculum without getting into details. Although that I have pointed out some concerns on the doctrine and dogma curriculum, it is clear that the amount of work spent on preparing the curriculum is huge and worth thanking. Nonetheless, the Bible study part of the curriculum needs to be increased. God willing, I will also send you additional details on this curriculum.

May the Lord bless all the effort that our son Mahfouz has done in preparing the Sunday school curriculum, in collecting the relevant topics, and in performing the translation of subjects. May the Lord also bless all those who have joined him in preparing this project and those who revised the topics.

Let our goal be performing our best to try and arrive at perfection given what we have from abilities. Lastly, I would also suggest the addition of different recognized pictures according to our doctrine, dogma and history to the Sunday school curriculum.

May the Lord be with you. Be in peace.

Signed

Pope Shenouda III
22 August 1986
The feast of St. Mary

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM **10**

INTRODUCTION **27**

SEPTEMBER **29**

FIRST SUNDAY 29
THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS: WHY DID THEY LOVE MARTYRDOM? *29*
SECOND SUNDAY 35
NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (I) *35*
THIRD SUNDAY 41
NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (II) *41*
FOURTH SUNDAY 49
CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF SUCCESS & THE MEANS OF ACHIEVING IT - (I) *49*

OCTOBER **55**

FIRST SUNDAY 55
CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF SUCCESS & THE MEANS OF ACHIEVING IT – (II) *55*
SECOND SUNDAY 61
EVIL COMPANY – (I) *61*
THIRD SUNDAY 67
EVIL COMPANY – (II) *67*
FOURTH SUNDAY 73
CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US *73*
FIFTH SUNDAY 79
IMPORTANCE OF LIGHT/WITNESS TO THE WORLD *79*

NOVEMBER **89**

FIRST SUNDAY 89
ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(I) *89*
SECOND SUNDAY 97
ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES – (II) *97*
THIRD SUNDAY 103
SERVING THE LORD – (I) *103*
FOURTH SUNDAY 111
SERVING THE LORD – (II) *111*

DECEMBER **115**

FIRST SUNDAY 115
JOB'S WIFE - NARROW LOOK AT GOD *115*
SECOND SUNDAY 121
THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MIDNIGHT PRAISE *121*
THIRD SUNDAY 125
HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (I) *125*
FOURTH SUNDAY 131
HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (II) *131*
FIFTH SUNDAY 137
HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (III) *137*

JANUARY **141**

FIRST SUNDAY 141
THE JOYS OF JANUARY *141*
SECOND SUNDAY 145
STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (I) *145*

THIRD SUNDAY 149
STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (II) *149*
FOURTH SUNDAY 153
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (I) *153*

FEBRUARY **159**

FIRST SUNDAY 159
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (II) *159*
SECOND SUNDAY 163
PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT: JOEL - (I) *163*
THIRD SUNDAY 171
PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT: JOEL – (II) *171*
FOURTH SUNDAY 177
GOD'S LOVE AND HIS BALANCED COMMANDMENTS – (I) *177*

MARCH **185**

FIRST SUNDAY 185
GOD'S LOVE AND HIS BALANCED COMMANDMENTS – (II) *185*
SECOND SUNDAY 191
WHY SHOULD WE PRAY WITH THE AGPEYA? – (I) *191*
THIRD SUNDAY 199
WHY SHOULD WE PRAY WITH THE AGPEYA? – (II) *199*
FOURTH SUNDAY 207
FORGIVENESS – (I) *207*

APRIL **211**

FIRST SUNDAY 211
FORGIVENESS – (II) *211*
SECOND SUNDAY 217
PALM SUNDAY - IS MY HEART THE ALTAR OF GOD? *217*
THIRD SUNDAY 223
CHRIST, OUR PASSOVER WAS SACRIFICED FOR US *223*
FOURTH SUNDAY 229
RESURRECTION - OUR NEW LIFE *229*

MAY **237**

FIRST SUNDAY 237
MY COPTIC CHURCH HAS TAUGHT ME *237*
SECOND SUNDAY 241
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ICONS OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA *241*
THIRD SUNDAY 249
PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT – (I) *249*
FOURTH SUNDAY 255
PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT – (II) *255*

JUNE **263**

FIRST SUNDAY 263
PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT – (III) *263*
SECOND SUNDAY 271
THE HOLY SPIRIT THE PARACLETE *271*
THIRD SUNDAY 277
AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY OF MISSION (I) *277*
FOURTH SUNDAY 285
AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY OF MISSION – (II) *285*

JULY **295**

FIRST SUNDAY 295
AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY OF MISSION – (III) *295*
SECOND SUNDAY 303
AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY OF MISSION – (IV) *303*
THIRD SUNDAY 311
DEBORAH - IMPORTANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP (I) *311*
FOURTH SUNDAY 317
DEBORAH - IMPORTANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP – (II) *317*
FIFTH SUNDAY 323
DEBORAH – IMPORTANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP – (III) *323*

AUGUST **325**

FIRST SUNDAY 325
THE VIRGIN MARY'S MOTHERHOOD IN OUR DAILY LIFE – (I) *325*
SECOND SUNDAY 329
THE VIRGIN MARY'S MOTHERHOOD IN OUR DAILY LIFE – (II) *329*
THIRD SUNDAY 335
THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST – (I) *335*
FOURTH SUNDAY 343
THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST – (II) *343*
FIFTH SUNDAY 351
THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST – (III) *351*

MAJOR REFERENCES **357**

EXTRA TABLE OF CONTENTS **359**

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

Principal Goal of Christian Up-Bringing.

The child had and still has, first as a person and second as a child, a special importance to our Lord Jesus Christ. He called the children and considered them models of perfection, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:3-5).

Therefore, children are beloved ones to Christ and are His friends with their simplicity and purity of heart. Christ called them, blessed them and asked His Disciples and Apostles after Him to take care of bringing up children and prepare the suitable environment for their spiritual growth.

St. Paul advises parents saying, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged", (Colossians 3:21). From a Christian point of view, the general principal goal of religious up - bringing is the formation of the perfect man of God who is following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Also, our Lord said, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

Hence, a Christian up-bringing is not merely an education to be given or a curriculum to be taught, but it is rather a life that is given through example and behavior through teaching and discipleship. The saintly Fathers of the church have emphasized this fact. St. John said about his practice of life with the Lord "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).

The same fact was emphasized by St. Paul when he was talking to his disciple Timothy "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose,

faith, long-suffering, love, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium ... But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:10-15). Also in the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians 3:17, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern". Therefore, the principal goal of the Christian up-bringing is to change the life of our children to the life of Christ in them, i.e. to a life based on the work of Christ in them as true Christians and not just religious persons who fear God but deny Him.

The Starting Point in Achieving the Goal of Religious Upbringing.

The teacher should not start with the student from power Zero. The student comes equipped with many social and religious experiences. His religious experience, although it is limited, it has a strong basis that is ready for spiritual growth. In the Sacrament of Baptism, the student has already obtained the spiritual birth i.e. he became spiritually re-born. After his baptism he was anointed with the Holy Myroun (Chrism) and the Holy Spirit dwelt in him. St. John said "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you; and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him" (l John 2:27).

Therefore, by obtaining these two Holy Sacraments and the Sacrament of Eucharist, the student becomes a member in the body of the Lord and a living part of the body of the Holy Church. This means that religious up-bringing is not something foreign with respect to the student. The student is a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in him. This means that it is not the teacher who makes the student live a life for Christ, but it is the inside work of the Holy Spirit that makes the whole difference. The role of the teacher is to make the student aware of the effect and the work of the Spirit. In this sense the student becomes aware of the secret grace inside him and as a result the divine word inside him grows as the seed grows inside the earth.

The Difference Between Religious Education and Religious Upbringing.

We should not aim at providing lessons in the form of giving information, i.e. a mere religious education. In this case religious experience will never exceed the

circle of the mind and will never affect the heart and practice of the student. If we consider religious education as an element in religious bringing-up, we are in this case following Christ's plan in the development and building of the Christian personality. Christ with His example and His perfection gave us a model which should be followed and achieved. As for His teachings, they are meant to clear the way for us in order to follow them as examples and models.

The Need of our Church for a Coptic Orthodox Sunday School Program.

There is one basic difference between Eastern and Western theology; the latter depends on study, analysis and using scientific means, whereas Eastern theology is based on experience and depth which is mainly lead to true Christian life. The Eastern Church respects the role of the mind but it works under the supervision of faith.

The majority of recent Western Sunday School programs follow a pure analytical way of explaining the Bible. For example, miracles are explained through psychological and scientific factors. The man of God must accept miracles and believe them as they are. St. Athanasius said, "Our knowledge must not control (or have authority over) the word, but the word itself must have the control and authority over the mind".

Another basic difference is that our traditional Church uses the rites in education as a key in the process of living what is being taught.

Over and above what was mentioned before in relation to the basic differences in religious education between Eastern and Western churches, there are also basic differences in the various beliefs and the way Christianity is lived by in actual life.

We, as parents, teachers and clergy, are responsible in front of God to bring up our children according to the same spiritual Orthodox principles that we received from our saintly Fathers who shed their blood to perpetuate the perfect Orthodox faith . Therefore, our children must learn from the same source from which we learned before them.

The Sunday School program in your hands is a fruit of love granted by our Lord Jesus Christ to our children and a gift from Him to them. This program is purely Coptic Orthodox. All its references without exception are Coptic Orthodox (please review the reference list at the end of the book. In this manner all the information

that is in this book (as well as all the books in this series) can be used with total confidence as it is devised according to our glorified church. The spirit of the lessons is indeed the same spirit of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

About the Books in Your Hands.

These books in your hands are integrated series of books which were written for children from age 4 to 18. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, if the child at age 4 follows this series of lessons until age 18, he will obtain an all-rounded spiritual background. The books (covering the teachings from pre-schoolers to grade 12) cover a study of most of the major Biblical subjects of the Old and New Testaments, the celebrations of the church of our Master's feasts, the life of the Saints and their feasts, the divine liturgy with its rites and spirituality, the true Christian life and Christian behavior, church sacraments, fasting, prayers, the creed and its explanation, the Ecumenical Councils, the difference between the various major Christian sects, the Christian family, the history of our church, the major personalities in the Holy Bible, ... etc. The program is indeed comprehensive and it covers all the key areas of our Orthodox church. If these lessons were given in the spiritual way that was emphasized before, great results will be expected with the work of the Holy Spirit.

General Rules and Principles to be Followed by the Sunday School Teachers.

1) The teacher must know the stage and the characteristics of growth of the children that he or she is teaching. A child who is 12 years old is different than a child who is 8 years old. The teacher must know the level of his/her students, their abilities to receive information that he/she is giving and the differences between the various abilities in the same class.

2) The positive participation of the students is very important during the lesson and the effectiveness of teaching. One of the key incentives for the student is to give importance to the lesson and have an effective communication with the teacher and, above all, to define clearly the purpose behind it and present the lesson in the form of problems that attract their attention.

3) The teacher must follow a psychological order of the facts he is presenting. Our Lord Jesus Christ used effectively the psychological method of teaching through His parables. The parables in their simplicity are drawn from the daily life of the people. We must emphasize here that the psychological

method is not the only method of spiritual teaching. We should mention this method as one of the methods used. It is quite important to note that spiritual teaching must be imparted with certain goals in mind which are connected with the life of the children and related to the problems they face. We should provide guidance that is mostly needed for them.

4) The teacher must present the lesson and illustrate it with relevant information and present it as a coherent unity without ambiguity or contradiction. He may use illustrations to help him explain what he means.

5) Application of Christian principles to the actual social life must be emphasized in every lesson. The teacher should use stories (from the Old or New Testaments or from church history or church books) to attract the attention of the students and show the Christian principle in an applied manner. The teacher also may divide the subject into stages or small subjects. A good practice is to summarize the lesson or better still, ask the students themselves to summarize it.

6) The manner of expressing the lesson to the students is also very important. A teacher who is living by what he/she teaches will definitely be more effective in giving his/her message across. A teacher who is teaching under spiritual influence with compatible emotions to what he/she teaches will be definitely more effective than a teacher who is giving information.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the Coptic Orthodox children and youth, who are going to benefit a great deal from this revised Sunday School Program, I would like to express a word of appreciation and gratitude to:

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

This program leans quite heavily on the writings of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. The majority of the contents of the lessons and their attachments are based on His Holiness' writings. This is a very bright and important aspect of this program. In 1986, during the time in which there was no Coptic Orthodox Sunday School program in the land of immigration, His Holiness reviewed the general contents of the program, commented and modified many key subjects, and then authorized the use of this program in all churches outside of Egypt, on a preliminary basis.

I can safely say that, if it was not for His Holiness Pope Shenouda III's support, wisdom, and writings, this book would not exist. The whole generation is in debt to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, not only because of his great teachings and writings, but also because of his love and leadership.

His Grace Bishop Reweiss

His Grace Bishop Reweiss has been behind us all the way with his love and guidance. He wrote the forward for our previous version of the program in 1986.

His Grace Bishop Moussa

His Grace Bishop Moussa has provided constant support and encouragement in the completion of the previous program. Of course, His Grace's writings for the youth have been utilized in all the subjects directed towards the youth, in this book.

Fr. Tadros Malaty and Fr. Marcos Marcos

These Beloved Fathers reviewed thoroughly all of the contents of the first six books of the previous version of the program. Their dedication, experience, and wisdom have been an important factor in the quality of all the material. They contributed greatly towards setting up the lessons, in that sense. Father Tadros Malaty's deep writings, without any doubt, have been a key reference in the majority of the lessons. His latest advice to revise and enhance the previous version of the program has been held in the highest regards.

Dr. Fayek M. Ishak

Dr. Fayek Ishak (head of the English Department at Lakehead University) reviewed the first six books of the previous version of the program. He contributed, immensely, towards the setup of the lessons.

Fr. Gawargious Michael and Fr. Mikhael Armanios

These two beloved priests chose the proper songs to match the subjects of the lessons. They also arranged the proof-reading of all the books with a chosen group of youth.

Fr. Makary Silwanis

This beloved priest made all of the arrangements for revising the previous Sunday School Program. He single-handedly arranged to have the new program available online. His computer skills were a key factor in all areas.

Tassoni Ragaa

The continuous support and encouragement of Tassoni Ragaa played an essential role in the write-up of the previous version of the program, as well as in this revision. One of the aspects that kept this program centered and on track was her continuous reminder that this program is for generations to come and every effort is worthwhile for the sake of the upbringing of the children and youth.

The Youth of St. George and St. Rueiss Coptic Orthodox Church

There was a key participation from Heba Khattas in this revised version. She in total love and joy contributed with great efforts in typing, checking, proof reading and commenting. All these things by her own initiative despite all the other responsibilities that she had to do towards her family, her work and her study.

There was a key contribution from Marian Awad in this revised version. She proposed that the lessons for Grades 11 and 12 be totally redone in order to prepare the youth to face the challenges at the university level. This idea resulted in a huge change in the curriculum for these two grades, as well as in the writing of the "Contemporary Issues" book.

Ninette Bishay sang over 100 songs in order to make sure that all the lessons were accompanied by beautiful songs in a great language and tone.

Caroline Yassa typed many lessons for the author, mostly dictated over the phone, at times when his eyes were very sore from reading. Her efforts are greatly appreciated.

Comments and proof-readings of many of the youth are greatly appreciated.

Maha Takla	Mark Botros	Patty Ibrahim
Nermin Tawadros	Peter Messiha	Hani Khattas
Jessica Gobran	Margaret Bebawy	Michael Aziz
Elena Neagu	Youstina Hanna	Safwat Armanios
Marian Barsoum	Helen Hanna	Maria Nasralla
Angela Salama	Margaret Massoud	Martha Tawadrous
Mina Gindi	Nancy Bishay	Samih Kalilian
Fady Dawood	Nagat Yassa	Emad Iskander
Lillian Ibrahim	Christina Habib	Paul Tadros
Mariam Tawadrous	Donna Hanna	Dina Ayoub
Joseph Bishay	Dina George	Timothy Gindi
Sameh Barsoum	Marianna Nasralla	Samy Messiha
Sherin Ishak	Angy Hinis	Mariana Ramzy
Michael Malak	Monica Sourial	Nivin Bishay
Michael Kalilian	Mira Henis	Kamilia Beshara
Viola Iskander	Sarah Deif	Marina Mouharib
Hany Matta	Peter Gobran	Georgina Rizk
Marline Ayoub	Michael Abadir	John Hanna
Christina Salama	George Hanna	Irini Gad
Steven Messiha	Rasha Michael	Mohib Tawfik
Marilyn Yassa	Mina Elkatib	Nadir Deif
Sandra Eleigizy	Sherrine Fidal	Hidra Bastawrous

Fr. Rueiss Awad

TEACHER'S GUIDELINES:

HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM?

1. The teacher should realize that each lesson has been prepared to cover a specific point; starting from the title of the lesson to the end of it.

2. The teacher should read all the materials referred to in the lesson (i.e. the Holy Bible as well as any articles attached to the lesson), and then proceed by emphasizing all the points.

3. The teacher should enlarge the picture ahead of each lesson and use it as a visual aid as he or she is teaching the lesson.

4. The teacher should discuss the practical applications as he or she proceeds with the lesson.

5. The teacher should summarize the main points of the lesson with the students and give prizes.

FEATURES OF THIS SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

A COMPREHENSIVE SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

1. This Sunday School program was the very first program to be written in the lands of immigration. This work was initiated in 1974, and the first version was published in 1986. We thank our heavenly Father, Who has given us the opportunity to extensively revise and improve it, in 2005.

2. In this version of the program, any repetition that was in the previous program, has been removed, all lessons were upgraded in both coverage and depth. Moreover, a whole new book, on contemporary issues, has been added.

3. The contemporary issues book covers subjects that are important for children and youth in today's world. These lessons are optional. For churches with regular youth group meetings, these issues would best be discussed during those meetings. On the other hand, for churches that do not hold regular youth group meetings, those issues could be discussed as part of the Sunday School program.

4. This version of the program also includes lessons, which form a basis for a missionary service, a service that should in the ideal situation be practiced by every member of our congregation. The objective is that each child, every youth, and in the long run each Coptic individual can behave and act in a way, which is an embodiment of the teaching and tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church. In other words, our congregation would become role models in their communities, who attract people to our Lord Jesus Christ through their good practices: sincerity, commitment, hard work and dedication, tolerance, forgiveness, and all the other good qualities that differentiate a good practising Christian from those who merely have a Christian education.

5. In this Sunday School Program, we depended heavily on the writings of H.H. Pope Shenouda III as a reference for most of the presented material.

6. The lessons in this version of the program have already been tried in Sunday School classes, reviewed, improved and tried again. This ensures that the lessons are relevant and suit the level of the students.

7. In this version of the program, efforts were put forth to ensure that every aspect of the Christian life in the Coptic Orthodox Church is covered.

8. This Sunday School Program is not merely about giving specific education on Christianity to our children and youth but it is rather an attempt to deeply affect their feelings and spirituality. It is believed that such an approach will facilitate the practical application of the various aspects involved so that Christianity becomes a way of life for the individual, with deeply rooted Christian values, that are manifested as behaviour and attitude.

9. All copyrights of other Sunday School programs, and other writers, have been fully respected.

10. In this version, each lesson comes complete with pictures and songs that are suitable for the lesson.

11. This Sunday School program comes in various formats, for convenience. In addition to being available on this website for widespread use, it is also available, upon request, in hard copy format or on CD.

12. It is our strong belief that this Sunday School program will play a vital role in the spiritual upbringing of our children. May the Lord bless this Sunday School program and all other programs, for the growth of His Kingdom in us.

THE PREPARATION OF SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

A. What is a Sunday School Lesson?

1. It is not a record of events that we convey to the students with the hopes of appearing to satisfy the required preparation process in front of other people. Neither is it a lecture that we deliver to our audience or student regardless of their interest in the matter.

2. However, it is, on one hand, a fruit of the live reaction between the servant and the lesson and, on the other hand, between the servant and the students. The Holy Spirit maturates this fruit and directs this service towards the salvation of the students and towards the glory of God.

For if the servant who teaches the people does not teach himself, the voice of the Lord rebukes him saying, " You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself ? " (Romans 2:21), and again in James 3: 1: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."

Therefore, the servant should engage himself in the lesson through prayers, relevant spiritual readings, and practical application, so that when the servant speaks with his students from experience and true knowledge, he says, with St. John the Beloved, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-" (1 John 1:1)

If a servant is not aware of the spiritual level of his students, he may burden them with instructions and lessons which they cannot handle nor apply and this, in turn, may cause the students to go astray and lose their eternal life. Therefore, it is crucial for the servant to establish a healthy, trustworthy, and fruitful relationship with his students, as well as to share in their joys and cheers, and their sadness and fears, all towards Jesus Christ. This is what St. Paul refers to in his epistle to the Galatians when he says, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you..." (Galatians 4:19). This close relationship with the students allows the servant to choose the most appropriate lesson that applies to their needs.

Hence a Sunday School lesson is:

A live mixture between the personal lives of the servants and the students through the lesson; the Holy Spirit creates this mixture and allows it to result in the bearing of fruit.

B. The Requirements for Sunday School Lessons

1. Humility in prayer before God.

   God said, "...for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

   My beloved brethren, sit down in peace and tranquility with the Lord and talk to Him about your personal need for Him in your service. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and pray saying, " Guide me dear God. What would you like my students and I to learn this week ? " Be obedient to His voice. It would be suitable to maintain a prayer time which equals that of the lesson.

2. Accurate knowledge of the meanings contained within the lesson.

   This is achieved through:

   a) Occupying yourself throughout the week with understanding the new lesson, beginning from the end of the previous lesson until the beginning of the new one. It is wise to use your free time, time before sleep, and time with fellow servants to increase and enhance your understanding of the lesson.

   b) Resorting to spiritual and religious references and literature to help you develop the right understanding and concepts behind the lines.

   c) Resorting to general educational references and literature to embody this understanding and these concepts, making them clear in the minds of your students.

3. Aids of presentation.

   It is important that you transform your understanding of the lesson into a simple and clear presentation. It has been stated and proved that 85% of knowledge acquired is acquired through the sense of sight and visual

learning as opposed to the 10% that is acquired through the sense of hearing. The rest of the knowledge acquired is done so through the other three senses.

In reality, the least effective way of transmitting knowledge to others is by merely talking; this has the weakest influence on the students. In contrast, the most effective way to teach is to use the "Learning by Doing" method, which requires enough time as well as sound experience.

What differentiate between the effectiveness of the two means of presentation are the tools used in the presentation. These tools aid the students in effectively understanding and retaining the purpose of the lesson by engaging both senses of sight and sound. These tools may include audio-visual devices such as pictures and movies, spiritual trips and outings, role playing during class, intellectually stimulating games, etc.

C. Recording the lesson.

It is recommended that the servant records the following during the preparation of the lesson:

- Date of the preparation of the lesson.
- Date of the delivery of the lesson.
- Title of the lesson.
- Purpose of the lesson.
- References.
- Preface.
- Lesson.
- Inference.
- Bible verse.
- Homework.
- Aids of presentation.
- Other points for memory.
- Songs.
- Personal reflections of the servant.

Purpose of the lesson:

It is necessary for the servant to clearly understand the purpose of the lesson at the beginning of his preparation. It is also necessary that the purpose of the lesson should agree with the maturity level of the students. For example, it is more appropriate for children to learn about God's love; on the other hand, learning about the power of God in their lives and in the lives of the saints is more appropriate subject matter for youth. As for young adults, learning about Christian virtues and spiritual practices is most appropriate.

Most importantly, the purpose of the lessons should agree with Coptic Orthodox Christian teachings, whether in specific occasions or in general.

References:

References could include:

a. Stories, examples, verses, etc. from the Holy Bible.
b. Spiritual books and literature.
c. General educational books and literature.

Recording the references is very useful for the servant because it helps the servant to refer back to them, if forgotten.

Preface:

The preface is the background of the lesson. It cultivates the thoughts of the students and directs their thoughts towards the lesson. This allows the lesson to be implanted in their minds and to, eventually, bear fruit.

It is important that the preface remain simple, short, and concise. The introduction could be in the form of focused questions, but should not be in the form of stories. Several stories in one lesson may deteriorate its effectiveness.

The Lesson:

The lesson could be divided into the following sections:

1. Introduction - it should be quick and concise and related to the preface. It should introduce the lesson smoothly without interrupting the chain of thoughts.

2. Body of the lesson - it contains the principle subject of the lesson, and follows these guidelines:

a. You must be accurate and careful when explaining theological concepts.
b. You must be careful when relating events and examples to elucidate the subject of the lesson, in order to properly guide the students' imagination without restricting it.
c. You must diligently expose the Coptic Orthodox doctrine in the lesson.
d. You should not use more than one story during the lesson and the story used should be relevant to the subject matter.

3. Focal Point - the point during the lesson at which the purpose of the lesson is clearly defined. (Examples: The Lord responds to the prayers of a needy person, or the angels come to give the saints their heavenly crowns and take them to heaven after many trials and persecutions.)

4. Conclusion - it should be, like the introduction, short and concise. It can summarize the purpose of the lesson, without introducing any new concepts.

Inferences:

Inference is a method used to determine how much the students have absorbed and retained from the lesson. It should be in the form of questions with the following guidelines:

a. They should clearly show the purpose of the lesson.
b. They should suit the maturity of the students.
c. They should be simple and direct.
d. They should link to each other.
e. They should not be `Yes' or `No' questions.
f. They should each have one correct answer.

Bible Verse:

The memorization of a Bible verse is an excellent way to help the students remember the purpose of the lesson. The chosen Bible verse should meet the following guidelines:

a. It should show the purpose of the lesson clearly.
b. It should be short which allows it to be easily memorized.
c. Children can easily memorize, as well as understand it.

Homework:

The height of your diligence in preparing the lesson is in choosing the proper and effective homework or application. The homework should have the following characteristics:

a. It should contain practical applications that apply to everyday life.
b. It should suit the maturity level of the students.
c. It should help in mastering the comprehension and retention of the lesson.
d. It should not include more than one instruction, in order to simplify the application of the lesson.

INTRODUCTION
Teaching Grade 11

1) By definition adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood. The potential intellectual ability reached during this period is equal to that of adults. Adolescents go very rapidly through a period of physical changes, which causes awkwardness, self-consciousness and increased emotional instability.

2) One of the main characteristics of this period is the young people's **sensitivity** and dissatisfaction. They are dissatisfied with themselves, with their families, with their own appearance (wherein lies the cause of infatuation with any fashion of the day). Adolescents go through a period of painful dissatisfaction with their social life too. All these traits, though they often seem negative and painful, are part of a positive process. What adolescents are trying to do is to discover themselves, and to discover their relationship to others - to adults, to their peers of their own sex as well as of the opposite one.

3) The rapid growth of technological civilization during the last decades has made our children much more knowledgeable about sex, about social problems, race, crime, violence, science and technology. They are not more mature than adolescents used to be, but they know more, even though they often lack the maturity to digest this knowledge.

4) What then is the task of the Church in dealing with our adolescents? Basically, the Church has to offer them **meaningful values** that young people can consciously accept out of their own free choice at this special level of maturity and insecurity. The Church has to give them an image, a taste of what life should be, of what is meant by holiness, what is truth, faith and loyalty. The Church is where they can find forgiveness, understanding and love when they have done wrong and are confused and mixed-up. Adolescents need security-in-freedom.

5) Our adolescents need urgently two aspects of religious education in order to help them gain maturity. They need the opportunity to make religion a part of their own experience of life, their own thinking, and their own motivation, through very informal free discussions, through participation in church work and through friendship. They also need to acquire information that will allow them to think intelligently, and will, at the same time, provide some material for evaluation and judgment.

6) All the teaching they need to acquire about the Bible and about the Church will be better assimilated if they feel a need for it. Thus teaching should be structured around questions and problems that are real to young people. The information must be presented as a means of finding answers. This kind of approach is very demanding on the leader, not only because he must be well informed, and must know where he can find information, but also because he must be flexible and sensitive to what takes place in the students' minds.

Basically adolescents need information in the same areas that shaped our program for younger grades - doctrine, liturgies, Bible study, church history, spirituality and ethics.

7) Most important of all is the kind of relationship that is established between the adult leader and the young people. The leader should earn their trust as a friend, with understanding and sympathy, yet with firmness in his own convictions and genuine interest in their adolescent problems.

SEPTEMBER
FIRST SUNDAY

THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS: WHY DID THEY LOVE MARTYRDOM?

PLEASE READ:
The attached article entitled "Why did they love Martyrdom?", and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

In this lesson we do not just want to give an information session about "the Apostolic Fathers of the Church", but rather, to have a feel for their depth of love and faith, that made them able to overcome very difficult conditions and with great joy they loved Martyrdom.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"Let your good conduct be a teaching to the hypocrite and the wicked"***
> Part of the Epistle of St. Ignatius

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) <u>INTRODUCTION</u>:

<u>historical review</u>

After the generation of people who saw the Lord Christ Himself and were taught by Him (those who were His Disciples). Then came the generation of the Disciples of the Lord's Disciples. Those are called the Apostolic Fathers.

At that time the church was not only in one spot of the world, but there were churches in the east and the west. Those churches had one faith, one hope, one love, one prayer, one understanding and one liturgy. We can therefore say there were not many churches but one Apostolic Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

✞ **There were three stages in the history of the church:**

1. Between 95 to 150 A.D. - The era of the "Apostolic Fathers" of the church. In this stage the church was still in the beginning, trying to comprehend what she inherited of faith and doctrine and trying to respond to the action of the Holy Spirit in her. The "Apostolic Fathers" were the first ones to express not only the knowledge and comprehension of Christianity, which they inherited from the apostles themselves, but rather to express the pure life that they inherited from the Lord Jesus.
2. Between 120 to 220 A.D. - the church Fathers were defending the Church through the challenges that they were faced with.
3. Between 180 to 325 A.D. - the church Fathers were standing against the heresies that appeared during that time. We call them the "Fathers of the Ecumenical Council".

In this lesson we will focus only on the "Apostolic Fathers".

(B) Who are the Apostolic Fathers?

✞ They are the fathers who were contemporary with the apostles and were their disciples.

✞ They had the duty to deliver to the world their faith and their doctrine through their daily service and writings.

✞ Not everyone who lived at the time of the Apostolic Fathers and had some writings is considered to be an apostolic father. But we can say that there were three Apostolic Fathers:

1. St. Clement the bishop of Rome who helped St. Paul in his preaching.
2. St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, the bearer of the Divine.
3. St. Polycarp the bishop of Izmir, who was a disciple of St. John.

✞ Those heroes (i.e. the Apostolic Fathers) are saints: very simple, leading a righteous life and consecrated all their efforts for the One whom they loved from all their hearts (i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ).

(C) The problems at the time of the Apostolic Fathers:

- The church at the time of the Apostolic Fathers was still close to her beginning. There were two different cultures and philosophies surrounding Christianity at the time:

    1. The Greek
    2. The Jewish

    Both had great effects on the thinking and the behavior of the people of the world at that time.

    How can Christianity, at its early stage overcome such a huge opposing power with social, political, economical implications and coupled with many heresies? The fact was Christianity was able to overcome all these powers with very few people. Yet those few people were very strong because they were supported by God Himself.

(D) Some of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers and their characteristics:

- The writings of the Apostolic Fathers had two objectives in mind:
    1. Maintain the unity of the Church and her peace in the midst of many opinions, divisions and heresies.
    2. Maintain the faith pure from all foreign ideas coming from either the Greeks or the Jews.
- The writings of the Apostolic Fathers came in the form of short epistles.
- Some examples of their writings:
    1. The Epistle of St. Clement to deal with the division in the Church of the Corinthians.
    2. The Epistles of St. Ignatius, which dealt with faith, doctrines of the Church, and answering to the heresies, which arose at that time.
    3. St. Polycarp's letter, which addressed the subject of the depth of faith and the position of the church towards Martyrdom.
- One of the clear characteristics of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers was the "eschatological character" i.e. they were talking, writing and living in joy waiting for the second coming of Christ.

(E) An overview of the life of St. Ignatius, and his writings:

- St. Ignatius was the second bishop to Antioch. He started his service as a bishop around 70 A.D. He is called "The Bearer of the Divine".

- ☩ It is said that when he was a child the Lord Jesus put him in the midst of the Disciples as a model of meekness "Matt. 18:1". When Ignatius grew up, his love for the Lord Jesus, his faith, and zeal grew. He preached the name of Christ. The apostles appointed him bishop of the church of Antioch.
- ☩ He wrote letters to encourage the churches to stand firm in the Christian faith. He was able through his good reputation to attract many heathens to the Christian faith.
- ☩ Some of his sayings include: "Let your conduct be a teaching to the hypocrite and the wicked. With love and justice you can overcome their hatred and injustice and through patience and prayers you can overcome their slander. By being firm in faith you can overcome their unrighteousness. For Christ's sake you should endure every loss and insult. Remember me in your prayer, so that I may live on the bare minimum and gain comfort in the House of Grace." Close to his Martyrdom, he said, "I am tied with chains for my love for Jesus. I do not want your love for me to cause me harm. I don't like you to save me from death. If I am deprived from Martyrdom now because of your love, gaining Martyrdom later may be difficult. I desire Martyrdom to show myself a Christian not in words but in action. Let me be food for the beasts and wild animals. I pray to God and plead that these wild animals will leave nothing of my flesh on the ground, so that the remaining parts of my body may not cause suffering to anyone".

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. The church at the time of the Apostolic Fathers lived under very difficult conditions because of the Jews and the Greeks. Yet the Church came out victorious because of the strong faith of the Apostolic Fathers and support of God for them. We also are living in a difficult society today filled with wrong ideas, heresies and materialism and we can also become victorious over all these powers.

2. St. Ignatius loved to become a Martyr in the name of Christ. Can we also do our best to sacrifice some of our comfort, time, money, etc. for the sake of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ?

WHY DID THEY LOVE MARTYRDOM?

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Our fathers the martyrs received martyrdom, not only in tolerance and satisfaction, but mostly with joy. Thousands of the faithful traveled from Damanhore to Alexandria to be martyred. Along the way they sang chants joyfully.

It was also said about the twelve Apostles that when they were flogged and thrown in prison, *"They departed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." (Acts 5:41).*

St. Abu Pham the soldier, when he was called for martyrdom, he dressed up in his best attire saying, "This is my wedding day."

Why were our fathers joyful about martyrdom?

They considered martyrdom the shortest way leading to the joys of heaven. It is a matter of moments or hours, then one will be in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the assembly of the saints.

Therefore, in the story of the martyrdom of St. Ighnatios of Antioch, when the people of Rome wanted to kidnap him to save him from death, he sent them a message to stop them from doing that, saying "My beloved, I am afraid that your love will do me harm and after I reach my destination, I'll turn back my life-journey all over again."

They also looked at martyrdom as means of sharing in Christ's passion, in His death and subsequently in His glory. They used to look at the Bible's saying, *"If indeed we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified together." (Rom. 8:17).*

Some of them personally saw the crowns that they were striving to receive,
or saw the crowns of those who were martyred before them. And without seeing anything, they were confident through faith, of what God has prepared for those who love His Holy name, those who accept suffering for His sake.

They also used to look at martyrdom as the best way to express their love for God and the truth of their faith. And as it says in the Bible, *"Greater love has no one than this, to lay down His life for His friends." (John 15:13).* How much more deserving then for faith.

They loved martyrdom because they were certain of being strangers in this world. They also loved eternity in a way that took hold over their hearts and they never looked at death except as a release from the prison of the body.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

SEPTEMBER

SECOND SUNDAY

NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (I)
HOW DO I KNOW WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG?

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about making the right choice. In this lesson we focus on the need for discernment because not everyone is right.

MEMORY VERSE:

"Do not think I came to destroy the law or the prophets, I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" Matthew 5:17

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

INTRODUCTION

Not Everyone is Right:

1. Let us have a group of youth stand up in a room, close their eyes and everyone points out to the North direction for example. Let us all open our eyes. We will find that people are pointing to different directions and we know that there is only one true North. This experiment shows that everyone thinks that he or she is right. But this is not true. In the society that we live in, everyone says I am here to do whatever I want because everyone is right. Everyone is not right and everyone should not be allowed to do whatever he or she wants especially if it affects others. Examples: same-sex marriage, drug abuse, violence...etc.

2. One of the youth called John told me about his friend Peter when he visited for a few days. Peter has mentioned how the church that he serves strictly

tries to stop the smokers from joining in the church activities. During that Peter said that he bought on his way to his friend's house, John, some of his complementary needs on Sunday. John believes that to buy things and especially complementary needs on Sunday is wrong. In the meantime he believes that to stop the smokers from joining in the church's activities is a tough way of doing it. Then John asked me: Is smoking right or wrong?

- Is stopping smokers from joining the church activities a right thing or wrong?
- Buying things on Sunday is right or wrong?
- Then John started saying:
- How can we live as Christians?
- How can we make a good decision in all the situations in our lives?
- How do I know what is right and what is wrong?
- Then John said I am surprised because the Christians that I talked to do not agree about what is right and wrong.

These are vital questions many of our youth ask and we will try by the Grace of Jesus and the direction of the Holy Spirit to clarify this matter.

Before we discuss many details we first would like to say that Jesus Christ glory be to Him had clarified in a number of situations:

✞ That He wants to deal with us on the level of love and not on the level of inhibition orders and punishment for the faults that we commit. "God wants everybody to be saved and to come to know the truth."

✞ That our Lord looks at the heart, He wants us to give him our hearts...He wants to exchange with Him our hearty love.

✞ That our Lord wants mercy not sacrifice. In other words, Our Lord is merciful and righteous God...wants us to be broadminded.

(B) THE NEED FOR DISCERNMENT

Read the Bible according to St. Matthew Ch. 12:1-8 about two situations for people that did what had appeared to be in contradiction with the law. At the same time what they did as a whole showed that it was acceptable to God's eyes. According to the explanations of our Lord Jesus Himself. "At the time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath and his Disciples were

hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your Disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" Then he said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 'how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?' Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath that priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless, 'But I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless for the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'"

In Verse 2 - the Disciples of our Lord Jesus were criticized from the Pharisees because they plucked and ate the heads of grain on the Sabbath. As well, they walked in a field that they did not own. And this criticism from the Pharisees seemed to agree with the fourth commandment "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy six days you shall labour and do your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work, you nor your son, nor your daughter nor, your man servant, nor your maid servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days, the Lord made the heavens and the earths, the sea and all that is in them and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and honoured it." (Exodus 20:8-11).

But the Lord of glory defended his Disciples for what it seemed something wrong they did. He used other situations in the Holy Bible and accepted them to be correct while it superficially seemed against the law.

The First Situation (1 Samuel Ch 21:1-6)

David came to Ahimelech, and Ahimelech gave David and the men with him some of the showbread which was sacred. No one other than the priests are allowed to eat it as shown in Leviticus 24:5-9 and from Exodus 29:32-34.

Because of that Ahimelech the priest was in contradiction with the law when he gave David the bread but our Lord Jesus considered this situation to be acceptable because, on the other hand, when a person is hungry or in need and asks for food, he should be fed as it is mentioned in the letter of the apostle James "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, depart in

peace, be warmed and filled, but do not give them the things which are needed for the body. What does it profit?" James 2:15-16.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus by giving permission to pluck spikes on the Sabbath didn't contravene the doctrine but showed that feeding the hungry had a priority on plucking of spikes on the Sabbath and he said "Do not think I came to destroy the Law or the prophets, I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." Matthew 5:17.

From this situation we come to the conclusion that we should not look at one situation or one verse or look at any situation from one angle but we should consider the different angles. This is also clear from the second situation that the Lord clarified.

The Second Situation:

The Lord Jesus, glory be to Him, gave the situation of the priest presenting the sacrifices on the Sabbath and this function is in conformity with the law as is stated in the book of Numbers, Ch. 28:9-10.
"And on the Sabbath day two lambs in their first year without blemish, and two tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with oil, with its drink offering. This is burnt offering for every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering" but offering these sacrifices need raising fire, and raising fire on the Sabbath was something not permitted according to the law as it is clear in the book of Exodus 35:3 "You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day." And according to that, Our Lord, glory be to Him, clarified that the priests' offering on the Sabbath was accepted and raising fire on the Sabbath for this purpose was permitted.

Lord, how do you want us to live as Christians?

1. The Lord wants us to live according to the Holy Bible in all the situations we face, but in a general way and a broad aspect; not to take one verse or one situation but look at everything in a realistic and practical way.

2. We read in the Gospel according to St. Mark Ch. 7:1-13 "Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of his Disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault for the Pharisees and all the Jew do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. When they come from the market place, they do not eat unless

washed. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels and couches. Then the Pharisees and Scribes asked him, why do your Disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? He answered and said to them "Well did Isaiah prophesy to you hypocrites, as it is written: These People honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandment of men, for laying aside the commandment of God. You hold the tradition of men. The washing of pitchers and cups and many other such things you do. And he said to them "All to well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said "Honour your father and your mother and he who curses father or mother whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban and you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother. Making the word of God no effect through your tradition which you have handed down and many such things you do."

In this situation the Pharisees kept the tradition of the elders and asked to apply this also on the others. And on holding on the letter in imitating the elders they lost to discernment and the real meaning of the commandment of our Lord.

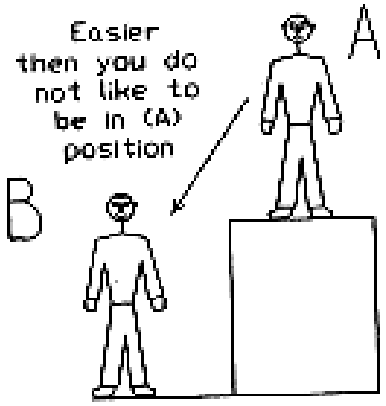
Our Lord Jesus clarified the difference between the commandment of God that is supposed to be kept and the tradition of the people that is less important that it does not have the general aspect on all the people. The Lord Jesus showed us that the Pharisees did not obey the commandment of God to honour the father and the mother so they could keep the tradition to give money to God while they didn't care to help the parents who were in need of money. Hence, the Pharisees kept the tradition as a way to show people their faithfulness to God while they neglected to honour their parents who needed the necessary money. In this situation Our Lord, glory be to Him, clarified the difference between the commandment of God in the Holy Bible and the importance to stick to it in our behaviour as Children of God. Certain behaviours that we hear about from friends and relatives which they wish to generalize in order to become basic principles and try to raise to the level of our Lord's commandments.

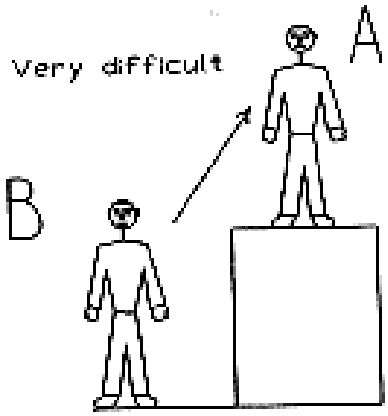
WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

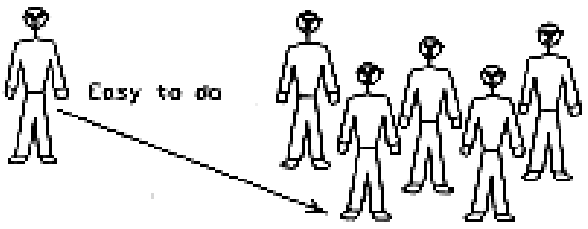
(1) The Holy Bible must be looked at in its totality i.e. not to look at one verse or one situation in the Holy Bible.

(2) We must identify our priorities in life very clearly: first our eternal life, second our life here on earth.

(3) The commandment of God is first and the tradition of the people is second.







SEPTEMBER
THIRD SUNDAY

NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (II)
HOW DO I KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT & WRONG?

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is lesson two in a series of two lessons about making the right choice. In this lesson we focus on some practical applications.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"But seek first the Kingdom of God ..."*** Matt. 6:33

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

<u>Our Daily Behaviour:</u>

Our daily behaviour must be in conformity with the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Bible. The Holy Bible is not a history book or a study book, but a book given from God to give us the broad lines or the basics that we should closely follow in our lives for our good. Some of the basic lines that the Holy Bible mention of which we should get the precise and detailed rules for our lives are as follows:

A. To love God over everything and to love others as yourself. Matthew 22:35-40. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

B. Seek the Kingdom of God. Matthew 6:33 "But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things shall be added to you.

C. To honour your parents as it is shown in Exodus 20:12 "Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you." From St. Mark 7:10 "For Moses said, Honour your father and your mother and he who curses father or mother let him be put to death."

D. We do the just, love mercy and walk humbly. Micha 6:8 "He has shown you, O man what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

E. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Food for the stomach and the stomach for food but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immortality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. God rose both, the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you now know what he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For 'the two, he says shall become one flesh'. But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. Flee sexual immortality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, who you have from God, and you are not your own. For you were brought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's." 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

Although the Holy Bible gives us these commandments and other commandments it does not give us a specific rule on: smoking, drugs, wearing safety belt during riding the car or listening to different types of music or watching movies but from the commandments that are mentioned above and especially what St. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 in Section "E" as mentioned before we can conclude that to glorify God in our bodies and spirits we find definite answer to all these matters of which we think.

Smoking: Harmful to the health and it reflects on the human psychological and spiritual life which is wrong, the same goes for with drugs.

Wearing the safety belt is the proper action when riding a car because it agrees with the law of the country we live in and also good for us in case of an accident.

Music affect the listener's soul and if some of it was like the music of the church hymns it brings calm, pleasure and comfort to the soul, while the worldly music arouse excitement and wrong emotions and they are harmful.

Movies. Also watching educational and religious movies has a great benefit while many of the movies that the secular people show to earn profit contain information or scenes or raise harmful emotions in our bodies and souls. Therefore it is harmful to us.

✞ St Paul the Apostle at the time when he told his disciple Timothy "No longer drink, only water but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" 1 Timothy 5:23. He said to the Ephesians "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation but be filled with the spirit." Esphesians 5:18.

And so if a person attended a party and was offered a beer he would be able to realize that he is not taking it because of medication or specific benefit for the body and hence it is understood accepting a bottle of beer is wrong because if it will not probably make him drunk it will enslave him with the need for it and the inability to stop it. This is the first step. The second step is having a lot of it and getting drunk and what will follow of obscenity and committing of sin.

✞ From the Epistles according to St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans showing the general basics also for those who want to live for Jesus Christ. Romans 12:1-2 "I beseech you therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this worlds, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will to God."

✞ On the subject of obeying the parents and honouring them there are two points to be taken into consideration. The first is the commandment of the Holy Bible in the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians 6:1 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right," and Exodus 20:12 "Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

But if the parents were not Christians or Christians by name who want to stop their children from praying, worshipping the true God or from going to church to attend the Sunday Liturgy there is the commandment in the Gospel according to St. Matthew 22:37-38 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment."

Accordingly, this commandment to love God from all the heart takes priority. The person finds a definite answer when what the parents want contradicts the commandment of our Lord.

✞ We should also realize that few of the written rules in the Old Testament are not obligatory for us in the New Testament. But we should follow all the Godly commandments in this generation although it was written thousands of years ago. However, we find few rules and detailed practices in the Old Testament that the Lord gave to his people to coincide with their circumstances and lives in that time and we shouldn't do it now. We mention as an example from Exodus 23:14-17 "Three times you shall keep a feast to me in the year. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt none shall appear before me empty), and the feast of Harvest, the first fruits of your labours which you have sown in the field, and the feast of ingathering, which is at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of labours from the field. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord God."

The Lord ordered his people to celebrate three feasts in the year. The unleavened bread, the feast of Harvest and the feast of Ingathering. The celebrations of the feasts have stopped for us Christians after Jesus came. Colossians 2:16-17 "Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbath which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." Because the Mosaic law requirements have spoken of the coming of our saviour there is no need to celebrate these feasts but we have the masterly feasts (relating to the Master Christ) and the feasts of the Saints and those of the Church which conform to our present lives in the grace era.

How would I know the right or wrong behaviour?

First: I look at the things from the Bible's point of view.

The Holy Bible teaches us in a clear way that the things God created are good (1 Timothy 4:4) "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving."
Also in Romans 14:14 "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean."

Things like alcohol, cigarettes, coffee, tea, decoration articles for ladies; all of these things are not evil as they are. "They all perish with use" Colossians 2:22. And therefore not using these things as they are will not make the person more holy as our Lord, glory be to him, said in Matthew 15:10-20 "Then he called the multitude and said to them: Hear and understand. Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man. Then His disciples came and said to him, do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying? But he answered and said, 'every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted, let them alone. They are blind leaders of blinds. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch', then Peter answered and said to him 'Explain this parable to us', so Jesus said: 'Are you also still without understanding, do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of our mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

And because these things are not an evil in themselves and are not defiled, but the Lord may want us to abstain from for other reasons. Still the main principle is "glorify God in your body" 1 Corinthians 6:20.

It is meant that food, medicine and all the other things that we take must be used in a way leading to our personal benefit and health and won't affect the others also.

Also, the Holy Bible teaches us how to own and keep things rather than being greedy. Our Lord Jesus in the Gospel according to our teacher Luke 12:15 says: “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he processes."

Also we find in the letter according to our teacher Paul the Apostle to the Colossians 3:5 "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth, fornication, uncleanliness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

Second: <u>Follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit</u>

In our reading of the Lord's word to us in the Holy Bible we have to depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to teach us the way to God in our lives. Our righteous saviour has promised that the Spirit of the Holy God leads us in the proper way. John 16:13 "However, when He, the spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

In our new life with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will be free from slavery of the old rules. Romans 7:6 "But not we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."

Also Romans 8:14 "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God these are sons of God." In the book of Acts Ch.10 we find God's Spirit guides St. Peter the Apostle to preach to Cornelius. The same spirit is able to lead all our behaviour as well. Also in the book of Acts Ch. 15-28, after the first Church council discussed in Jerusalem few matters concerning the behaviour of the members of the first church and the faithful agreed to one thought and started saying: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things."

And according to this the Holy Spirit of the Lord that abide in us is able to brighten our minds and understanding to solemnly behave in all the situations that we face if we deliver to him our lives and its leadership.

Third: <u>The right thinking and not the emotion</u>:

We must build our behaviour in a situation on right thinking and not only on emotions or personal rush because it is built on timely pleasures and emotions. We are created on God's image and likeness of mind and proper understanding of the word of God that is written in the Holy Bible.

And we are also a new creation in Jesus Christ as St. Paul the Apostle says "And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him." Colossians 3:10.

Because of that while our feelings have then status as to our behaviour, a mature Christian subjects these feelings to his brain control and every decision would be built upon the right education of the Holy Bible and put to test in ample time before final decisions are taken.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Life is filled with choices. Choosing the right directions is very important. This can be done by: 1) Viewing things in a biblical manner, 2) Following the guidance of the Holy Spirit and 3) Using the right thinking should prevail not emotions.

(2) One may seek the advice of the Father of confession or parents before making an important decision. One must be flexible.

NOTES

SEPTEMBER
FOURTH SUNDAY

CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF SUCCESS & THE MEANS OF ACHIEVING IT - (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about Christian understanding of success. In this lesson we focus on the meaning of success in Christianity.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prosper"*** *3 John 1:2*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) INTRODUCTION

Success is a wish that every normal person seeks in fulfilling a certain target.

- ✞ Some find success in obtaining high grades that will enable them to enroll in a certain university or college.
- ✞ Some find success in getting a highly paid job.
- ✞ Some find success in marrying a beautiful and wealthy wife.
- ✞ Some find success in becoming famous and rich and obtaining the praise of people.
- ✞ Some find success is in having internal happiness and peace.

If you ask many people of their understanding of success, you will get different answers according to the personal feelings and views of the individual. What is your understanding of success? It would be beneficial if you write it down specifically.

(B) What is the understanding of success for the worldly people?

For the worldly people, success is limited and does not involve the depth that would ensure the internal peace. Moreover, you will find that those who are successful according to the worldly standards are in ruins internally.

- ✞ We heard in the news that a famous American actress is being blackmailed by killing her son because of her expensive jewels. She is always frightened and in constant misery because of these jewels. Did fame and possessions guarantee her success?

- ✞ We heard in the news about a famous rich man who chose to commit suicide rather than live unhappily. Is this success?

- ✞ If we went back with our memories across history, we find Ahab the vicious king unhappy "unable to sleep", "So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him" 1 Kings 21:4.

How could it be that there is no happiness or internal peace with wealth, possessions and high grades. Is this success? Definitely not. The obvious reason is that if the person is made only of body then his success would be linked to these materialistic aspects. But being created from both body and spirit according to God's image, these materials cannot guarantee his success. St. Augustine says "Lord, You created us in your liking, so we have no peace except with you." The Psalmist says, "No peace for the villains" and he says, "The villain escapes and there is no one chasing him." Therefore, success of the worldly people is phoney and limited and does not ensure this person's place, happiness and eternal life. It seems successful from the exterior but in fact it is loss and failure.

(C) What is the understanding of success for the Children of God?

St. John the Evangelist says, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." 3 John 1:2. Accordingly, success for the children of God is not limited to one aspect but it is an ultimate success, "prosperity and health."

The ultimate success in the lives of the children of God includes the following: -

1. Success in the spiritual life:
This ensures the internal peace. It appears in the love of others and the pure heart that loves God and hates sin.

2. <u>Success in studies and work</u>:
The Christian student is successful in his or her studies and the person who works succeeds in his or her job and is honest and admired by his colleagues.

3. <u>Success in physical health</u>:
Apart from the maladies that God permits in order to test our faith and spiritual growth, the successful Christian is also physically healthy. He eats wisely, keeps his body fit and gets rid of the bad habits that cause harm like smoking and drinking.

4. <u>Success in psychological health</u>:
The successful Christian is flexible in dealing with others, not stubborn butcalm.

Therefore, who is the successful Christian? One who is balanced with correct personality, spiritually, physically, emotionally and practically successful. Is this possible? Yes. "Therefore you shall be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect." Matthew 15:48. The perfection mentioned here is comparative because the absolute perfection is in God only. "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

(D) <u>Is there an example for this personality?</u>

If we searched through history we find many people who followed the way of God and were successful. A good example is Joseph who was a successful servant in the house of Potiphar. You can read his story in detail in the book of Genesis chapters 37 and 39 to 45. The deepest sentence said about Joseph was "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man." Genesis 39:2. Also, "His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand" Genesis 39:3.

If the secret behind Joseph's success is that the Lord was with him, then this is the secret for the success of any person.

What does God give the person who follows Him to enable him of such success?

a) He gives him the faith in Him which will take away all fear. "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid" (Mark 6:50). The Lord was with Joseph so he did not fear the well nor his brothers' hatred nor the job as a slave nor the power of his mistress. He was not afraid to fall in sin, nor face the criminals in prison, nor failure when he was responsible for the state. When a person has the faith in the presence of God with him, this is a valuable treasure. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Romans 2:31. The faith in God is the confidence that God is with me personally "They shall call His name Emmanuel" which is translated, "God with us" Matthew 1:23.

b) He gives us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" 1 Corinthians 3:16. When the Holy Spirit dwells in us, He works by giving us the beautiful fruits of making my soul heavenly. "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." Galatians 65:22-23. These fruits have worked in Joseph's heart so he was loving towards his enemies, his brothers, his fellow servants and his fellow prisoners. Joseph loved everybody and was a successful person. He was honest and diligent in his work without waiting for a reward. He loved purity and in the midst of the temptation he said "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Genesis 39:9. "Flee also youthful lusts" 2 Timothy 2:22. Purity and chastity are a success and a triumph. No matter how successful a person is in all his deeds in front of others, if he is conquered by his desires he will feel beaten and unsuccessful. “He who rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city." Proverbs 16:32. Joseph was successful in his purity.

c) He gives us the blessing of son-ship by sending His only Son to the world. He blessed our nature in the Incarnation of His Son through the Virgin Mary and through the Holy Spirit. He was like us in everything except sin. This is the blessing of the New Testament which was fulfilled by the coming of the Son, the Logos. "In this the love of God was manifested towards us, that God has sent His only begotten son into the world that we might live through Him" 1 John 4:9. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God" 1 John 3:1.

I discovered God's love for me and this became a great power in my life, in fact, it is the source of my success because if God "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) A true Christians is a successful individual in all aspects of life. Not only jobs or money or materialistic things, but a true Christian is successful here on earth as well as in having a place in heaven.

(2) Success comes from faith in the Salvation that was offered by the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

OCTOBER
FIRST SUNDAY

CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF SUCCESS & THE MEANS OF ACHIEVING IT – (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a series of two lessons about Christian understanding of success. In this lesson we will focus on how can we achieve success.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***" I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"*** *John 10:10*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Please start by reviewing the previous lesson.

A. The blessing of Our Lord Jesus Christ in my life appears through 3 actions:

1. <u>His redemption on the Cross</u>
"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.." 1 Peter 3:18.

"The Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world." 1 John 4:14.

2. <u>His Salvation</u>:
He gave us true peace "therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" Romans 5:1.

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" John 10:10.

He ensured my salvation, "nor is there salvation in any other" Acts 4:12.

"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" 1 John 1:7.

3. <u>He granted me to stand before God the Father not guilty, through His sacrificial intercession</u>.

"If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." 1 John 2:1.

<u>An Example:</u>

After Saul's meeting with Our Lord Jesus Christ and believing in Him, he changed from an unsuccessful person, filled with envy, co-operating with the murder of Steven to become a successful person leading a fulfilled life and his heart is full of peace even inside the jail where St. Paul rejoiced at the salvation of Christ. "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" Romans 8:35. And he said, "As having nothing, and yet possessing all things" 2 Corinthians 6:10.

What do you think when you see someone like St. Paul saying that we possess all things; isn't this the complete sufficiency and the true success. God was with St. Paul in prison, that was enough to make him succeed.

B. How can I be a successful Christian? This is what we will answer now.

Firstly: The necessity to abide in Christ to ensure the true success "He who abides in Me, and I in him bears much fruits" John 15:1.

There are 4 means to ensure my unity with Christ the Saviour: -

1) The Sacraments of the Church:

Baptism	=	Regeneration
Unction with the Holy Chrism	=	Acceptance of the fruits of the Holy Spirit
Repentance & Confession	=	Renewal
Holy Communion	=	Unity with Christ

2) <u>Prayer</u>

"Men always ought to pray and not lose heart" Luke 18:1. There are different types of prayers and a Christian needs them all:

- ✞ Prayer with the Agpeya
- ✞ Arrow Prayers, which are short and comes directly from the heart reaching the heavens
- ✞ Prayer in Church
- ✞ Family Prayers
- ✞ Personal free prayers

3) <u>The Bible</u>:

Read the Bible daily to come closer to Jesus Christ and to learn how to deal in life through its teachings. "Your words are a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalms 119:105. Your readings in the Bible should be slow, respectful and attentive. "This Book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success" Joshua 1:8.

4) <u>Serving</u>:

- ✞ Serving in the family.
- ✞ Serving in school by being a good example to others "That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven," Matthew 5:16.
- ✞ Serving in Church and in social activities.

Secondly: <u>The need for work and spiritual perseverance. "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin" Hebrew 12:4.</u>

1) <u>Serious positive work and studying diligently</u>.

God made work sacred by working Himself and He is always working. When He sent His only son to the world, He was going around doing good and he said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." John 5:17. And He said too, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day." John 9:4. The Lord called His Disciples to follow Him from the midst of their jobs, like Peter and John when they left the fishing boats and followed Him.

2) Resist the devil. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." James 4:7.

We have to resist the devil and not surrender. "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" 1 Peter 5:8.

We are able, with the power of God, to conquer the devil, because then God would not have asked us to resist him nor would He allow him to fight us.

3) Control the five senses:
Sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. These five senses are entrances to the soul and the human sensation. If we put them under control, with the help of God, then the temptation of the world would not reach the soul.

"Each one of us is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death." James 1:14-15.

4) Never Lose Hope:
"Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" Galatians 6:9.

5) Fix your goals and press towards them forcefully:
Make your goals clear and press towards them with force. Like the prodigal son who fixed his goal clearly by returning to his father. He said, "I will arise and go to my father" Luke 15:18.

A young man has to choose his friends carefully because he could lose drive towards his goal if his friends do not have it.

6) Meet failure with a spirit of courage:
"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works" Revelation 2:5.

7) Have a positive outlook to life:
"I do not count myself to have apprehended but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press towards the goal" Philippians 3:13-14.

Summary:

If you want to succeed make a promise to yourself now:

1. Have a Spiritual Father.
- Regularly listen and obey his directions.

2. Follow a Spiritual Program.

- Regularly keep it and give it priority.

3. Be in a Spiritual Surrounding.

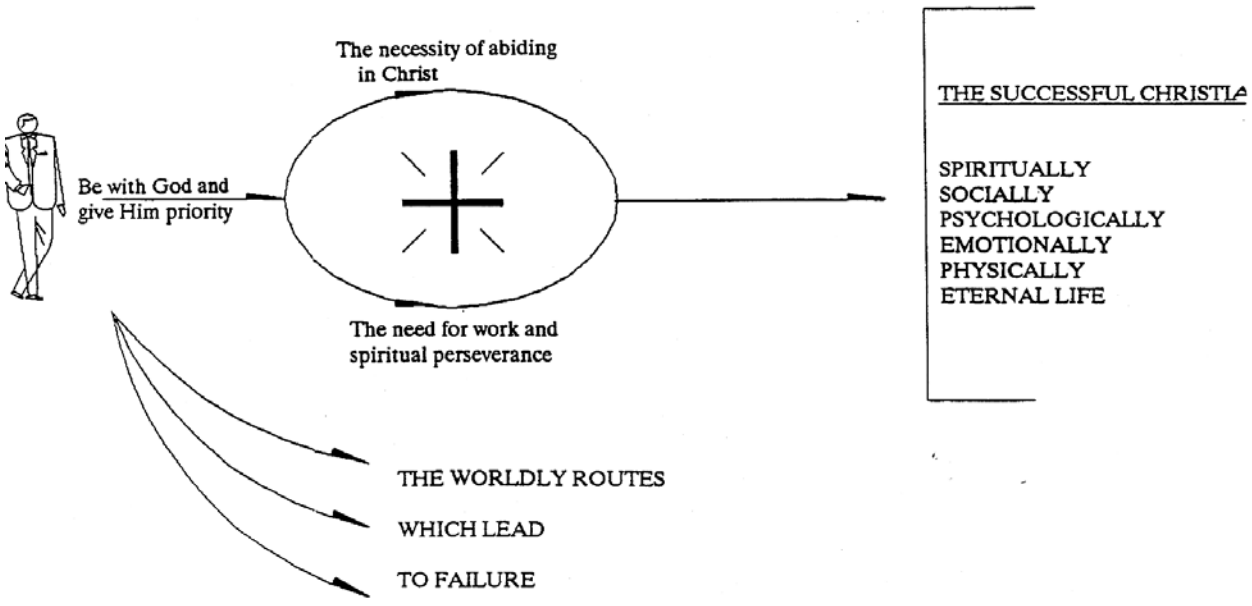
- Spiritual friends - attend church regularly - visit monasteries and holy places.

Finally, dear brother, I submit to you what was written by my beloved late Father Bishoy Kamel in this respect:

- ✞ Success is not in ranks but in the presence of God with you.
- ✞ Your faith that God is with you grants you peace and takes away fear.
- ✞ Your love to others is the measure of your success.
- ✞ Your honesty in your studies and work is a sacred order for your success.
- ✞ Your social relationships should be according to the Biblical teachings.
- ✞ Purity in your youth is the certificate of your success.
- ✞ Service is in the nature of the successful person and is the cause of that success.
- ✞ The church pleads for you with St. John, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." John 3:2.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

The "3 S program" **S**piritual father of Confession, **S**piritual program and **S**piritual friends is the best program to achieve all success here on earth as well as eternal life.



NOTES

OCTOBER
SECOND SUNDAY

EVIL COMPANY – (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is lesson one in a series of two lessons on the dangerous effect of evil company. In this lesson we learn about the commandment of God in order to avoid evil company.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"Evil company corrupts good habits"*** *1Cor. 15:33*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. INTRODUCTION: THE HUMAN PERSONALITY

The human personality consists of 2 important elements:

1st an inborn element (which is with us since our birth) like the instincts and the sense of belonging to the father and mother and many other personal habits.

2nd an acquired element (which we obtain in our experiences in life) like the sentiments, habits, directions, way of thinking and different values.

These 2 elements form the personality of a person and results in many different personalities as the components are different. What happens if the youth followed the ways of the Lord who started by a loving call and said, "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth." Eccleiasties 12:1. He will obtain an acquired element which has a trace of the qualities of the Lord and can become a sharer of divine nature, escaping the evils of the world. The Holy Spirit that he took in the sacrament of baptism will give him many divine blessings because the Holy Spirit

is the Spirit of God. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Galatians 5:22-23.

What happens if the youth followed friends with bad influence? It is said in the Bible, "Evil company corrupts good habits" 1 Corinthians 15:33. As to corrupted morals you will find written in the Holy Bible, "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissension, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in the past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God." Galatians 5:19-21. Therefore, there is a big difference between the personality of a person who is living according to the ways of the Lord and one who is following the evil company.

B. The importance of these lessons for the youth in the land of immigration.

Our children, in different age groups, are exposed to different kinds of friends. Some of them will be atheists, who do not know God and do not believe in His existence. Some of them are from non-Christian sects like Jehovah's witnesses. Some of them come from families without values and some of them are even thrown out of the house to live freely. Only a few of them have the love of Christ in their hearts and live according to His values.

Our children have tried some of these friendships and some of them started to suffer both psychologically and spiritually. Their problems are increasing at home, in school and even in church. What could be the reason? One of the main causes for this is the effect of evil company which corrupts the good habits.

C. The Lord forbids the evil company with reference to the Holy Bible.

✞ **In the Book of Psalms**: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night." Also, "My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; He who walks in the perfect way, He shall serve me. He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence." Psalms 101:6-7.

✞ **In the Book of Proverbs**: "My son if sinners entice you do not consent, if they say, "come with us, let us lie in wait to shed blood; let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; let us swallow them alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who go down to the pit, we shall find all kinds of precious possessions, we shall fill our houses with spoil; cast in your lot among us. Let us all have one purse. My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path." Proverbs 1:10-16.

Also, "My son, fear the Lord and the King; do not associate with those given to change." Proverbs 24:21.

✞ **In the Book of Numbers**; the Lord did not want His people to mix with heathens, and said, "A people dwelling alone." Numbers 23:9.

✞ **In the Epistles to the Galatians**, "A little leavens the whole lump." Galatians 5:9.

Therefore, the Holy Bible presents clearly the Lord's command to avoid the evil company and the friendship of those following that rout. But why? Definitely because these friendships could lead to harmful consequences which are summarized in this verse, "Evil company corrupts good habits." 1 Corinthians 15:33.

D. The Evil Company: Its Harmfulness and Bad Effects:

1) The evil company takes the person away from the fellowship of the Lord.

No one can enjoy living with God and the evil company at the same time. The main loss for those who follow the evil company is the deprivation from the Holy light and the separation from God and this is mere death. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness and lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever, and what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord, do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you." 2 Corinthians 6:14-17.

2) The evil company makes a person worship another god, not the true One.

This is what happened to the people of Israel when they mingled with the heathens, as the Bible says, "But they mingled with the gentiles and learned their works; they served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. Thus, they were defiled by their own works and played the harlot by their own deeds. Therefore the wrath of the Lord was kindled against His people." Psalms 106:35-40.

3) The evil company is followed by poverty and all the social defects.

In the company of the Lord we feel satisfied but in the evil company we feel poor, hungry and exhausted. "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed." Proverbs 13:20. Also, "He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough." Proverbs 28:19.

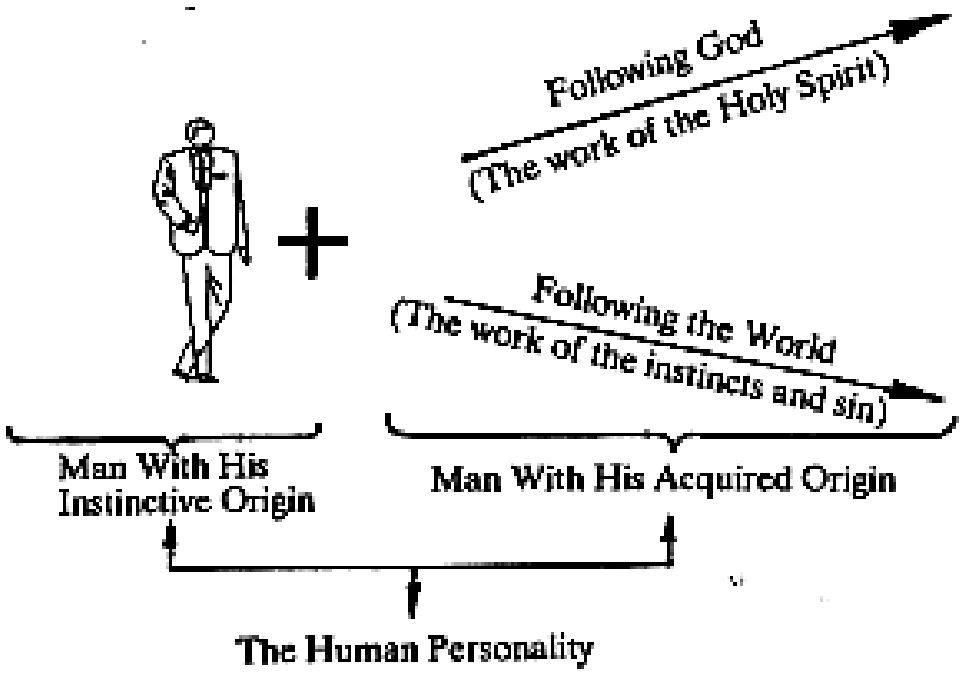
4) The evil company: its limitless disadvantages.

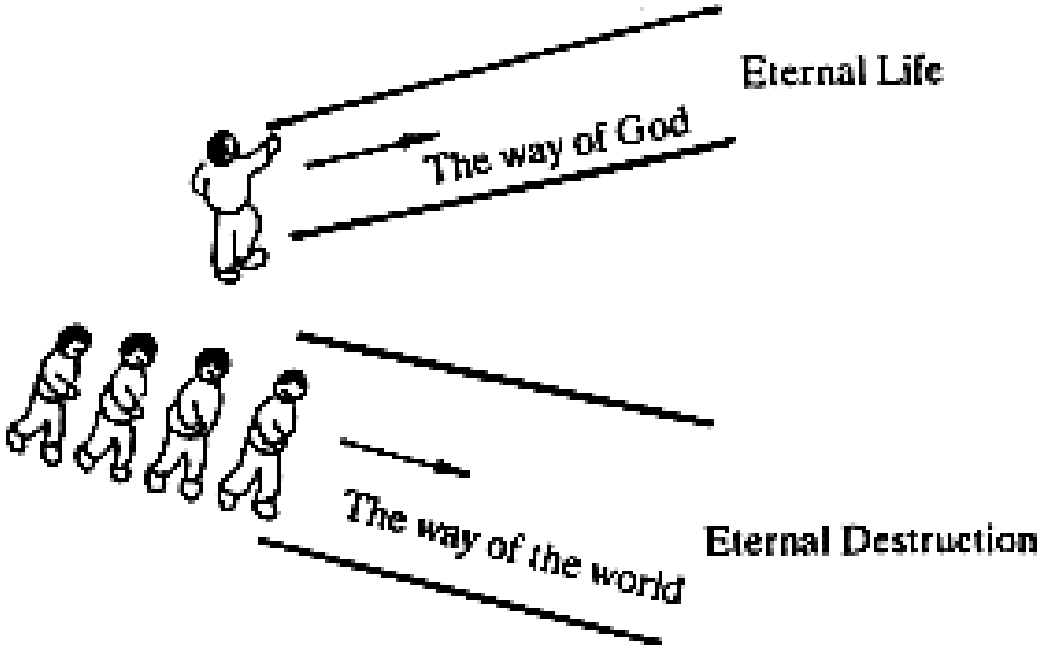
If a member of the family is affected by the evil company we find that it becomes contagious and the other members suffer too. In the youth meetings, if one of our youth is influenced by an evil company from outside, close observation is necessary so that it does not affect the rest of the youth. The Holy Bible mentions the dangers of bad influence that started by evil company, "wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good." Ecclesiasties 9:18 "Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment and cause it to give off a foul odour, so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honour." Ecclesiasties 10:1.

So St. Paul also says, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" 1 Corinthians 5:6.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

> We must be very choosy when it comes to friends. As soon as we find someone leading a sinful life, we must only terminate friendship with him or her immediately.


Following God
(The work of the Holy Spirit)
Following the World
(The work of the instincts and sin)
Man With His
Instinctive Origin
Man With His Acquired Origin
The Human Personality


Eternal Life
The way of God
The way of the world
Eternal Destruction

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

OCTOBER
THIRD SUNDAY

EVIL COMPANY – (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is lesson two in a series of two lessons about evil company. In this lesson we learn how to deal with the evil people in the society we live in.

MEMORY VERSE:

"Evil company corrupts good habits" 1Cor. 15:33

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
Start by reviewing the previous lesson.

A. The attitude of the Christian youth towards the evil company:

1) Do not befriend the followers of evil

If a person is considering his/her eternal life seriously, he/she should avoid all causes of temptations that could have an affect on him/her, and could cause the loss of the Kingdom of God. "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; ...if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you..." Matthew 5:29-30.

2) Do not make enemies with the followers of evil

Although the Bible confirms not to befriend those who follow the evil company, it also does not encourage making the enemies, "if anyone does not obey our word in this epistles, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be

ashamed. Yet, do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." 2 Tessalonians 3:14-15.

3) Do not copy the followers of evil

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Romans 12:2.

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart, who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ." Ephesians 4:17-20.

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not be partakers with them...and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." Esphesians 5:3-11.

4) Escape from mingling with the followers of evil.

Two angels came to Lot who chose to live in the city of Sodom, where evil was prevailing. When the angels entered with the intention to spend the night at Lot's place, the evil people of the city surrounded the house and wanted to attack them. But the angels struck the men with blindness that they could not even find the door. Then they said to Lot "Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters and whomever you have in the city - take them out of this place... So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside that he said, "Escape for your life, do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain." Genesis 19:12-17.

Therefore, we should not stay in the places where evil is present.

5) Do not get involved or get married to the followers of evil.

"Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but you shall go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac. And the servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?" But Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there." Genesis 24:1-5. Abraham's servant came back with a wife for Issac and Rebecca was a good wife from the same tribe and had the same traditions and values.

Therefore, it is important for every Christian who is getting ready for marriage, besides the necessary education and job, spiritual, physical and emotional growth, he should rely on the decision of making choice of his partner in the hands of God and refrain from choosing someone from the followers of evil. The way to repentance is always open but in the case of marriage, it has to precede it.

In the case of King Solomon, son of David, his foreign wives caused him a lot of trouble. But King Solomon loved many foreign women...from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. For surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods..." For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father, David. For Solomon went after Astoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after the Milcom the abomination of the Ammonities Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord...So the Lord became angry with Solomon." I Kings 11:2-13.

In the Book of Nehmiah, the Lord says about the foreign women in the lives of Solomon, "Did not Solomon King of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin." Nehemiah 13:26.

6) We should be a good example to the followers of evil.

We should not be proud or despise our brethren who follow the ways of evil but we should pray for them and be a good example for them in all our manners so that the name of the Lord be glorified so that they refrain from doing the wrong thing. In the sermon of the mountain, Our Lord Jesus Christ said to his disciples, "You

are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world...Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven." Matthew 5:13-16.

B. The attitude of the parents and the father of confession towards the evil company

Do not consider the parents' asking about the caller on the phone as an intrusion in your private matters or freedom. They ask just to make sure that your friends are not bad company for you. Remember that the evil company corrupts good morals. The same goes for your parents' questions about your friends, and your going to the youth group in church.

You should be honest with your father of confession and tell him the truth about your friends to enable him to help you. Be careful in your confession - do no condemn your friends in your confession, but if their friendship is causing you a problem, you should mention it.

C. Get rid of the evil company before getting involved in it.

If you feel that one of your dear friends started to have problems, you should retreat from him quickly and avoid any fellowship with him. But do not let him drown in evil. Tell the priest and ask him to help your friend. But you have to escape from that place. Do not take position of a teacher and try to help him because you could both drown. Pray for him, put his name on the altar, ask the priest to interfere and follow the matter with Abouna until your friend retreats from his evil ways.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1) Be very careful in choosing your friends.

2) Be very careful in choosing your partner in marriage.

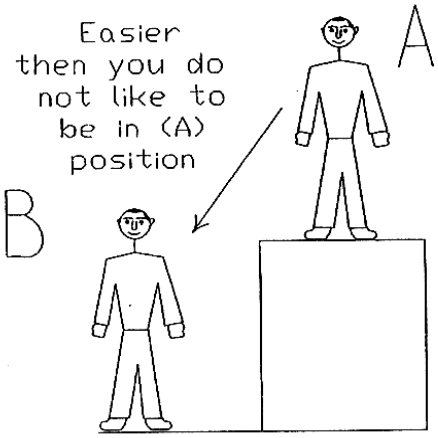
3) Do not look down on those who are following the evil ways because you could fall too.

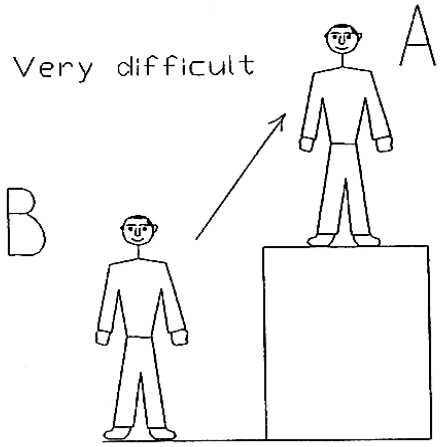
4) Pray for them and be a good example.

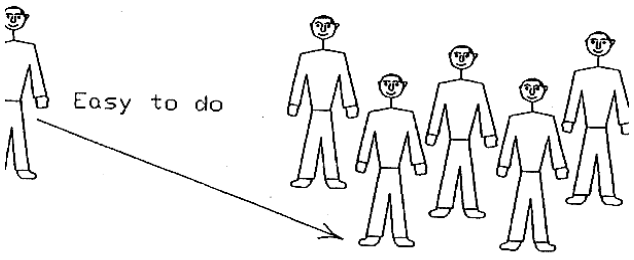
5) Mention their names in the Holy Liturgy.

6) Learn this verse by heart, "The evil company corrupts good habits."

7) Take care of your senses and all that reaches them. St. Isaac said, "These senses are the doors of the thought."







NOTES

OCTOBER
FOURTH SUNDAY

PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT
ELIJAH THE PROPHET
CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons on Elijah the prophet. In this lesson we focus on our confidence in God's presence with us.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***Then Elijah said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today."*** *1 Kings 18:15*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. The circumstances in which Elijah the prophet lived:

Following the kingdoms of Saul [1095 B.C.], David [1055 B.C.] and Solomon [1015 B.C.] the Jews split onto two kingdoms: the north kingdom [called Israel] and the south kingdom [called Judah]. This happened around 975 B.C. Hereunder is the chain of kings after the split so that we may be able to understand the events that followed.

Year of Coronation	Kings of Judah	Kings of Israel
975 B.C.	Rehoboam, the son of Solomon	Jerobam, the son of Nebat
958 B.C.	Abijam, the son of Rehoboam	

955 B.C.	Asa, son of Abijam (relatively good)	
954 B.C.		Nadab, the son of Jeroboam
930 B.C.		Elah, the son of Baasha
929 B.C.		Zimri
929 B.C.		Ahab, the husband of Jezebel the wicked
914 B.C.	Jehoshaphat (relatively good)	
898 B.C.	Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat	Ahaziah, the son of Ahab

Based on the above chart, we find that the Holy Bible has describes all these kings as having walked in the way of evil except those described as good. Kings increased in evil one after another till they ended up in captivity whereby the north was taken to Assyria in 722 B.C. then to the south to Babylon in 587 B.C. Elijah the prophet was born at Tishb of Gilead in the northern kingdom. The word "Elijah" means, "God is my God"

Elijah the prophet lived in the era of the evil king Ahab, the son of Omri. Omri married his son to a very evil woman, whom the Holy Bible describes as the most evil woman and who was the daughter of the king of Tyre in Lebanon.

This woman used to worship the Baal and set up an altar for it. Of course, this evil wife tremendously affected her husband Ahab who deflected towards the idol and was followed by the people.

The world became exceedingly dark during the era of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. It is extremely important when selecting a partner in martial life that they be God-fearing and leading a righteous spiritual life, otherwise they would bring upon their spouse too many evils.

However, we see now that it is time for God to work amidst this darkness and teach humanity a spectacular lesson by sending Elijah to witness for Him in mighty power before a tyrant, cruel and pagan king and his evil wife Jezebel.

B. The secret power in the life of Elijah the prophet.

(1) His adherence to the words of the Holy Bible.

It appears that Elijah the prophet has learned since boyhood at desolate Gilead how to study the Holy Bible and has believed in the validity of both the promises and words reported therein.

That is why we see that he sticks to the same words Moses said, "Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you" Deut. 11:16, 17.

So, Elijah stood before King Ahab and said, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word" 1 Kings 17:01.

(2) His glowing zeal to worship God... and being self-inclement in service.

The Synaxarium reports about Elijah (on the sixth day of the blessed month of Toba) "And his spirit was tortured day after another because of the mean deeds of this king who turned away from worshipping the God of Israel to worshipping idols."

Hence, he stood before him once and said to him "...There shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word." Therefore, when the Lord saw that he afflicted himself with starvation as well, out of ardency the Lord ordered him to go to Brook Cherith."

What a great servant. He was not clement to himself in service; rather, he was austere and strict with himself also for the sake of his keen fervor to worship the real God only.

(3) The feeling of God's permanent presence with him.

It means that he is in God's presence. Therefore, we see him say in the presence of King Ahab "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand," because he sees himself standing before God all the time without being intimidated by his presence before an earthly king or any other person.

By the same token, we recall this same strong feeling on the part of David the prophet "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved." Ps 16:08.

Let us feel that God is always present with us, overlooks us, sees, hears and will manage everything.

Experiencing perpetual prayer "men always ought to pray and not lose heart" Luke 18:1, prayer makes man always in contact with the heavenly father. Let us not neglect brief prayers.

(4) Life of retreat... depth in communication with God... and not worrying about the dry brook.

"Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying 'Get away from here and turn eastward and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.' So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook. And it happened after a while that the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land" 1 Kings 17:2-7.
From this we understand that the voice of God was inviting him to "hide"- that is to be in retreat far away from the noise of the world and the evil king. In his retreat Elijah experienced further depth in God's care and love.

In His love, God has turned the ravens-the nature of which is to snatch meat, sometimes even pull out humans' eyes, and be careless about their youngsters-into care givers, making them bring bread and meat to Elijah in the morning and in the evening.

What were Elijah's feelings when he would look at the Brook Cherith daily only to find the water level lowering in there? Elijah was not afraid the brook would dry up because he knew for sure that God always, always has His own way.

Elijah was certainly aware that it was God who sent him and it was also God who would take care of him. Hence, Elijah was not worried about the dried up brook.

Let us always pray to God asking him to pour into us the firm faith so that we may not be shaken, rather feel always that we are being taken care of by God and are included in His plan for us.

(5) Example for obedience and blessing.

"Then the word of the Lord came to him saying 'Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.' So he rose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gates of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks.

And he called to her and said, 'please bring me a little water in a cup that I may drink.' And as she was going ot get it, he called to her and said, 'Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' Then she said, 'As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.'

And Elijah said to her, 'Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterwards make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel: the bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.

'So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah." 1 Kings 17:8-16.

Elijah had acted according to the Lord's saying and went to a widow to provide for him in time of famine. How can a poor widow provide for Elijah in time of famine?

With God it is unbecoming of us to wonder how because everything is possible for God. Such was Elijah's obedience that he encouraged the widow asking her to make him the last cake saying to her "Do not fear."

Already his faith transferred to her and so did his firmness so much so that she became obedient herself.

No sooner had she obeyed than she enjoyed a great blessing "the bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry."

We may recall a famous chapter on obedience and blessing Deuteronomy, chapter 28, as well as the miracle of filling the multitudes Luke, chapter 9:10-17. Let us all obey God at all times so that we may lead a life full of blessing.

(6) Not losing temper in time of anger.

Elijah was not at fault in anything towards the widow and her son. Contrarily, he brought blessing to their life when the widow's son passed away she said to Elijah "what have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?" Here, Elijah was not angry or disturbed. Rather he took the son and prayed.

Likewise, we should always manage all the hardships we encounter in full confidence that God can conquer our difficulties, so we need not feel disturbed nor worried nor angry.

However, Elijah cried out to the Lord by saying "O Lord my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge by killing her son?" 1 Kings 17:20 Elijah, of course, does not mean here that God has committed a sin-God forbid. Elijah was only crying out to God and humbling himself in His presence as if he were asking, "Why did You allow the death of this poor widow's only begotten son?"

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) As Elijah lived in a different society we also live in not a too much different condition. His sources of power were the same as ours.

(2) God is looking at us. So, let us not be afraid or troubled by anything. With God, do not ask “how”?

(3) God is looking at us. So, let us be careful not to hurt His feelings by our sinful actions.

OCTOBER
FIFTH SUNDAY

PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT
ELIJAH THE PROPHET
IMPORTANCE OF LIGHT/WITNESS TO THE WORLD

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is the second lesson in a two-lesson series about Elijah the prophet. In this lesson we focus on the importance of light/witness to the world, witness to civil authority and place of civil authority.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"You are the light of the world..."*** *Matt. 5:14*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
Start by reviewing the previous lesson and discuss its practicality to us now.

Elijah the prophet...a lightful candle in the dark society [1 Kings chapter 18]

A. The meeting of Elijah and Obadiah [1 Kings 18:1-15].

When it was time for God to send rain, He asked Elijah to meet Ahab and tell him about that. God arranged for this meeting to take place in a way appropriate for God's word and will, and also appropriate for Elijah, man of God. God's arrangement was that when hunger became severe, King Ahab went his way searching for water.

In the meantime, the king sent his servant Obadiah, who was described as God-fearing (which is a very magnificent characteristic that ensures the appropriateness of Man's behaviours and God's fear in his heart) another way to look for water.

Through God's arrangement, Obadiah met with Elijah the prophet. "Then Elijah said, 'As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today.'

“So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him and Ahab went to meet Elijah." [Kings 18:15-16].

Our remarks are as follows:

(1) Elijah always felt that he was standing in God's presence whether when he met king Ahab or the king's servant Obadiah. It was the same approach: "The Lord of hosts before whom I stand."

(2) Ahab's walk for meeting with Elijah was like a thirsty man walking in search of water and like the world thirsty for divine blessings with only one way ahead, meeting God or His saintly figures.

B. The meeting of Elijah and Ahab [1 Kings 18:17-20].

Ahab asked Elijah "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" Elijah answered that all sadness and trouble-maker is the worship of another god-other than the real God.

But you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals. [1 Kings 18:18].

Worshipping money brings forth sadness, worshipping sinful desires causes sadness, and worshipping idols of whatever kind results in sadness.

It is as if Elijah's announcement were intended for every and each person seeking to know the cause of trouble in his or her life-which is worshipping anything in heart-in place of God.

Indeed Elijah was courageous and daring in this situation in front of King Ahab. He was not intimidated, rather he was bold and straight.

Now, what was Elijah's plan to show who the true God was?

C. Elijah and the prophets of Baal [1 Kings 18:21-40].

(1) Elijah faces the immersed-in-sin people saying "How long will you falter

between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." [1 Kings 18:21]. To thee, O Lord, we pray that Thou lead us unto firm belief in Thee-not into faltering between two opinions, rather let us have one Lord, one God and one church.

(2) The sacrifice of the prophets of Baal is a speechless one void of any power. It failed to engage any heavenly power because it was a sacrifice for Satan with which Satan would be pleased since it was far and away from the true God. Such a sacrifice is useless for any person and is good for nothing.

As for Elijah's sacrifice "Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and then wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench." [1 Kings 18:38] such was a heaven-supported sacrifice.

Elijah was full of fervor, so much so that he could not stand still seeing evil engulfing people. His burning jealousy was demonstrated through his saying to the Lord, "Let it be known this day that you are God." [1 Kings 18:36].

Thus, Elijah did not mean to fight for his own personal interests nor for self-profit, rather, for God to be glorified in the life of His children.

What a splendid scene on Mount Carmel where Elijah stood on one side and looked as if he were defenseless, while 450 prophets of Baal walked in and stood in dignity and majesty, confident of the support of the royal court, because of which they challenged Elijah shamelessly.

Yet, how quickly their blood was shed and Elijah came out of the fight victorious through his God.

D. Elijah and Ahab...once again [1 Kings 18:41-46].

Elijah thought that there was no need for famine because God has been glorified amongst His people and so he asked the Lord for rain. As he was aware of Ahab's weak personality and his worldly desires for food and drink more than his salvation he said to him, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of abundance of rain." [1 Kings 18:41].

So Ahab went up to eat and drink whereas Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel; then he bowed down to the ground, and put his face between his knees and started praying to the Lord. Then he asked his servant to go up and look toward

the sea. So he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And seven times Elijah said, "Go again." Then it came to pass the seventh time that the servant said, "There is a cloud as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So, Elijah asked his servant to go up and tell Ahab to go down to the city quickly before the rain would stop him. In the meantime, the sky became black with clouds and wind and there was a heavy rain following a cessation of three years and six months.

E. Elijah the prophet collapses when he felt he was alone without God [1 Kings 19].

1. Elijah the prophet experiences weakness...but God supports him with His angels [1 Kings 19:1-8].

How would this great prophet run from the face of the wicked Jezebel? Was he running away from evil or from fear? Elijah ran away because of the severe disturbance, fear and distress so much so that he asked for death for himself.

A person may undergo a phase of weakness when he or she feels that God is not present with him or her. Jonah the prophet asked for death for himself because of his extreme keenness on the salvation of the people of Nineveh and his great fear that God might destroy the city.

Thank God, He does not leave us in our despair and weakness for He sent the angel twice to awaken Elijah from sleep and give him food and water. How would God not support him when He is our satiation and the giver of all blessings? God supported Jonah the prophet throughout his affliction with the plant, which gave him shade. He also supports us in all our distress and does not abandon us in time of ordeal or weakness on our part.

The secret of the weakness and collapse, which Elijah underwent, is revealed in the following extract from the chapter, where Elijah feels he is alone and is no longer saying, "As the Lord lives, before whom I stand."

2. God's meeting with Elijah through the still small voice [1 Kings 19:9-14].

The secret of the fall of that great man was his feeling of being alone "I alone am left". Amazing!! He who used to say, "As the Lord lives, before whom I stand," sees that he is alone now and, therefore, wishes death for himself.

When Peter was walking on water, as the wind was boisterous against the boat, his eyes were fixed on the Lord. Hence, he was peaceful steadily walking on the water. However, no sooner had he looked away from Christ, then he started to drown and cry.

Likewise, we are all that man: As long as I feel and firmly believe that God is with me, I should fear no evil "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

At the time when Elijah felt he was alone, there were 7000 whose knees have not bowed to Baal yet.

At the time when St. Macarious, the father of all wilderness fathers, wanted to know how saintly he was, through God's blessings, the Lord revealed to him two unknown women in Alexandria who loved each other, loved their respective husbands and children without discrimination. Thus, these two women, through that much love, surpassed the perseverance of this saint.

Saint Augustine says that even though this world is full of leaves [the evil], it is also full of fruits [the good].

Elijah was ardently jealous but he was furious. Therefore, he was in need for the spirit of tranquility and meekness. That is why God did not show up to him in the wind or in the earthquake or in the fire-rather in the still small voice.

The approach elaborates and demonstrates that one of God's characteristics is meekness, which was revealed in the Logos about Whom it was said "He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets." [Matthew 12:19]. Likewise, whosever wants to give a testimony for the Lord and preach by His holy name should be having the spirit of tranquility and meekness. The Bible says about the witnesses of the Lord "There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." [Ps. 19:3].

God's revelation to us occurs only in tranquility. Hence, we should practice retreat and silence, so that we may hear the voice of God.

Practice: keep saying the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ in order to feel the perpetual presence of God around you.

3. The Lord said to Elijah: "Go, return on your way" [1 Kings 19:15-21].
This phrase of "go, return on your way" means that Elijah's weakness and fury made him retreat and go backward. Why was all this? All this was because Elijah needed to go back to retreat and tranquility. Thus, the Lord said to him "Go, return in your way to the Wilderness of Damascus." [1 Kings 19:15] Then the Lord arranged for a disciple for Elijah i.e. Elisha who used to serve him [1 Kings 19:21].

✞ Elijah the prophet witnesses for divinity with all might... [2 Kings 1].

✞ The sin of King Ahaziah [2 Kings 1:1-2].
He sought recourse to Satan in order to obtain an answer from him-instead of God. Why didn't Ahaziah ask God for recovery? So does every soul far away from God. It would rather go to the evil one-because it is soaked in evil, than pray asking for recovery and salvation.

✞ God's interference to reveal who the real God is [2 Kings 1:3-17].
God declares, through Elijah the prophet the error King Ahaziah committed and also the punishment which He would allow to befall him.

Amazingly enough, King Ahaziah sought violence instead of humbling himself before God so that God might make mercy with him. Contrarily, he dispatched fifty of his men with orders from the king. So, Elijah asked for fire to come down from heaven and consume this arrogance represented in the dispatch of these fifty men and also the second fifty men following the first fifty. As for the captain of the third fifty, he went forth in humbleness and, therefore, was not hurt and even Elijah went down with him.

✞ Elijah and the chariot of fire... [2 Kings 2:1-11].

✞ The last moments of Elijah in this world [2 Kings 2:1-11].

✞ "The Lord has sent me on to Bethel...The Lord has sent me on to Jericho...The Lord has sent me on to the Jordan."

F. When Elijah was about to be taken up into heaven, he was in a state of total submission to the command of God.

This has always been a characteristic required for any person desirous to have a share in heaven i.e. that he be in full submission and utter obedience to the word of God.

Whoever goes up to heaven has to pass by Bethel, which is the church and, pass by Jericho, where the victory over evil and the forces of devil took place, and then pass by the Jordan, where the river is a symbol of baptism and re-birth.

✞ **"Stay here"**

Thus Elijah wanted to go up to heaven without being seen by anyone. Therefore, he said to his disciple Elisha "stay here." Elijah wanted to leave this world alone all by himself so that he would not reveal the secret of his departure to anybody, otherwise, all the people would be standing to watch this amazing scene that humanity has never seen before.

Let us all deny ourselves and not be boastful of any service we render for the church.

✞ **Elijah's love for Elisha, "ask! What may I do for you?"**

One of the most important tasks and duties of the spiritual leader is to make disciples of spiritualists who would take over after him. Thus, Elijah was keen on discipleship, which is why he asked Elisha "ask! What may I do for you?"

It is worth mentioning that Elisha did not ask for any materialistic things, rather, his request was a spiritual one "Please let a double-portion of your spirit be upon me."

✞ **The Lord gives Elijah lavishly**.
Loving Providence allowed for this Elijah, who desired death in a moment of weakness, while running away from Jezebel the wicked, not to experience death but rather depart the world alive [and he will return at the end of the world, as per the prophecy of the Book of Revelation.]

G. What does Elijah's ascension into heaven mean?

1. A confirmation of the existence of another and eternal life.
2. A confirmation of the validity of Elijah's mission so that people might not have thought that he was a recklessly minded person and a troublemaker.
3. A witness for his corrupt generation.

H. Similarities between Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist.

The Lord Jesus Christ likened John the Baptist to Elijah indicating the fulfillment and implementation of the prophecy which re-affirms the necessity of Elijah's return first-as reported in Malachi 4:5.

The similarities between Elijah and John the Baptist are as follows:

1. Celibacy.
2. Asceticism
3. Harshly and severely rebuking the people for their heedlessness towards the law of God. [1 Kings 18:21-22] [Matthew 3:7-12].
4. Rebuking kings because of their infringement of the law without being afraid of their tyranny and despotism.
5. Kings' hatred of both of them and the torture inflicted on both through the instigation of those kings' wives. [1 Kings 19:2] [Mark 6:19-29].

I. Elijah as a symbol of Jesus Christ.

1. Miracle-wise: raising the dead, curing the sick, and blessing the insignificant.

2. Fasting on the mountain for forty days.

3. Elijah was not afraid of King Ahab nor was Christ afraid of Herod when hesought to kill Him. [Luke 13:31-33].

4. Some women volunteered to serve both of them and, because of that, they were given great blessing.

5. Elijah elected his disciple Elisha to succeed him before the end of his service and so did Jesus Christ by electing His Disciples in order to use them as pillars of the church after His ascension.

6. Both ascended into heaven.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. We have a role to play in this society that we live in. We have to be a light to this world.

2. We must witness to the truth among all people including civil authorities. But our methods that we are using towards achieving our goals must be "Christian in nature" i.e. loving and respectable.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

NOVEMBER
FIRST SUNDAY

ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons on Answering Jehovah's witnesses. We must be ready and capable to answer when needed.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. INTRODUCTION:

Our youth come across people of different religions. It is important that our Christian youth be able to answer back when they are confronted by those people so that no one can shake their belief. It is also important for our youth to be informed about the origins of these modern religions in order to be aware of them. It is also possible to attract such people to the true Christian faith. In these two lessons, we are going to concentrate on Jehovah's Witnesses by covering the following:

1. **Who are Jehovah's Witnesses?**
2. **The Work of the Few and the Work of the Many in Jehovah's Witnesses**
3. **Jehovah's Witnesses and the Holy Bible**
4. **Some beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Answers to those beliefs**
5. **How can I deal with the preachers of Jehovah's Witnesses.**

B. <u>Summary about Jehovah's Witnesses and their doctrine:</u>

Jehovah = Yahweh from the Hebrew "to be" meaning "the Self-existant one" or "the one who causes to be" (see Exodus 3:14 "I AM WHO I AM").Jehovah's Witnesses are non-Christians because they do not believe in Christ being the incarnated God. They belong to one of the modern religions that appeared in the 20th century which are called "cults". Their leaders are 4 Americans led by

Charles Russell and their present head quarters is in the City of New York. They believe that God is "Jehovah" and He created Jesus Christ, who was first Archangel Michael, who came from heaven to Mary and was born from her as a human being. Then He died and God "Jehovah" raised him as a spirit that went back to heaven as Michael again. As for the body, it was taken by Jehovah. They do not believe in the Holy Trinity. Their main concern is the timing of the end of the world but all their dates have not been accurate so far. At the time of the end of the world, there will not be the second coming of Christ. Only a few of Jehovah's Witnesses (144,000) are going to have a place in heaven with Jehovah and Jesus Christ. The rest will have a paradise here on earth. As to those who are not from Jehovah's Witnesses, they are doomed to be destroyed eternally with the devil.

They have a bible of their own called "*The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures"*, but they do not encourage reading it and if needed it should be accompanied by the explanations provided by their leaders known as "The Watch Tower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom". Without these articles, the bible could lead to total darkness.

C. Who are Jehovah's Witnesses?

They are a group of people who founded their religion in the 20th Century by Charles Russell, Joseph Rutherford, Nathan Knorr and Frederick Franz.

What was the starting point? In his studies of the Holy Bible, Charles Taze started by rejecting the Christian explanation of the Book regarding:

a) The Holy Trinity
b) The second coming of Christ
c) Hell and torment of the evil one

He, and the above three leaders mentioned, declared that Jehovah's Witnesses are the only right religion and that the Christians, being Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox are a group of liars and their beliefs are not correct.

Charles Russell started writing many articles which developed into what is now known as the "Watch Tower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom". These four have founded a religion which was sparked by prophecies regarding the end of the world with dates. Many people were attracted, but when these dates passed and nothing occurred, they changed the dates.

1. The Work of the Few and the Work of the Many in Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that there are a few people who govern and lead the rest. The head office is in Brooklyn in the State of New York and consists of 14 to 18 people. They speak on behalf of God "Jehovah", and no one can question God, but rather obey only. So is their power, rules and behavior. Whoever questions or opposes them would be doing wrong to God Himself.
Not only do these few rule over the rest but there are only a few who will be saved. They believe that 144,000 persons, including the members of the ruling committee, will be saved in heaven and they refer literally to the Book of Revelation Chapter 20. But what about the other people who follow the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses? They will receive a new place here on earth when the end of the world takes place but they have no place in heaven with the few who will be with Christ the King. How could one be from these few. This can only happen when he/she puts extensive efforts in preaching the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. Every member of the Jehovah's witnesses has a responsibility of preaching from door to door and of passing out articles to attract new members. They receive a lot of training to perform this task. The time that the individual spends preaching and getting new members to Jehovah's Witnesses decides the position he/she gets after his/her life on earth.

2. Jehovah's Witnesses and the Holy Bible

Jehovah's Witnesses do not encourage anyone on reading the Holy Bible or referring to it in any context other than their words and the books of Charles Taze and the 3 who followed him. Charles Taze Russell said whoever reads the Holy Bible without his personal writings will end up in complete darkness. On the other hand, if his writings are read as an important base, then that person will live in the true light with or without the Bible.

Although they do not encourage reading the Bible, they state that the Bible takes the first position, i.e. their own translation of the Bible which is "The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT). Their translation is not easily understood without their own books and all their printing is from the watchtower and awakeness.

D. Some beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Answers to those beliefs

(I) <u>God to Jehovah's Witnesses</u>:

- His personal name is "Jehovah”

- Jehovah has no beginning and no end. i.e. self-existent, eternal
- Jesus Christ is not God. The Holy Spirit is not God but the Power of "Jehovah" that He works with.
- At a time, only Jehovah existed and all the power and thoughts were within him
- Satan came with the idea of the Holy Trinity in the One God.

Answering Jehovah's Witnesses

- "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" Genesis 1:1.
- "To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him." Deuteronomy 4:35.
- "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and Truth." John 4:24
- "For there is One God and one Mediator Between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 2:5
- "Go therefore and make Disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19.
- "Then Jesus, when He had been baptized came up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16-17.
- "Come let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Genesis 11:17.
- "Come near to Me, hear this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning: from the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me." Isaiah 48:16.
- "For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one." (1 John 5:7)

(II) Jesus Christ According to Jehovah's Witnesses:

- He is not a God, but the first son that Jehovah brought. He was the first creation of Jehovah. In their bible John 1:1 "The word or Logos is "a God" but not God.
- Jesus Christ was present before coming to earth. He was archangel Michael then he came and was born from the Virgin Mary.
- When Christ was baptized he was anointed and became Jesus Christ. Then He submitted to "Jehovah" and died a humiliating death to give salvation to those who obey Him. Then God raised him as a spirit only

and his body was taken by "Jehovah." Jesus Christ went back to heaven as a spirit and he is archangel Michael.

Answering Jehovah's Witnesses:

1. Jesus Christ is the incarnated God.

- "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1.
- "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel. Which is translated "God with us"" Matthew 1:23.
- "And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and My God."" John 20:28.
- "Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name, Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14.
- "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the God head bodily." Colossians 2:9.

2. Jesus Christ was called "Kirios"

* The Word "Kirios" is originally Greek and it means "Lord". In the New Testament the Lord Jesus Christ was called "Kirios" as in:

- "And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep." Acts 7:59-60.
- "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9.
- "Therefore, I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:3)
- The same word "Kirios" which is the Greek word for "Jehovah" that was used in the Old Testament.
- Is it not clear that the Lord Jesus (Kirios) is "Jehovah" i.e. God?

3. Jesus Christ in the New Testament is "Jehovah" in the Old Testament.

* Compare Isaiah 6:1-10 "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings, with two he covered his face, with two he

covered his feet and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. Then I said "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts," then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged". Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us? Then I said, "Here am I, send me." And he said, "Go and tell this people, "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return to be healed." Isaiah 6:1-10.

*** With John 12:31-42:** "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." Then He said, signifying by what death He would die, the people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever, and how can You say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up?" Who is this Son of Man? Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you walk while you have the light lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them. Although He had done so many signs before them, they do not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke; "Lord who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, "He has blinded their eyes and hard dressed their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart, lest they should turn, so that I should heal them." These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. Nevertheless, even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue."

⇨ So St. John is saying that Isaiah saw the glory of Christ and talked about it.

- **Also compare Exodus** 3:14 "I AM WHO I AM"
- **With John 8:58** "Jesus said to them 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM'"

These two references clearly show that Jesus is Yahweh/Jehovah/God!!!

⇨ **Also compare Exodus 34:14** "For you shall worship no other god..." Where is it mentioned that we do not worship another except Jehovah.

⇨ With Hebrew 1:6 "When He again brings the first born into the world, He says, "let all the angels of God worship Him." Here it is mentioned that the angels worship Christ and also, so do the people in Matthew 14:33. "Those who were in the boat came and worshipped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

⇨ In Isaiah 44:6 "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and His Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, "I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God."

Jehovah is called the First and the Last, same as in Revelation 22:13 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."

4. The Description of Our Lord Christ Reveals that He is God.
   - He knows all things (John 1:48, 2:25, 6:64&16:30)
   - He is eternal (Micah 5:2)
   - He has full authority (Matthew 28:18, Hebrew 1:3)
   - He is without sin (John 8:46)
   - He does not change (Hebrew 13:8)

   As these are descriptions of God, therefore Christ is God.

5. Certain Deeds that Declare Christ Being God.
   - He has the power to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-7)
   - He has control over nature (Matthew 8:26)
   - He gives eternal life (John 10:28 and 17:2)
   - He condemns the world (John 5:22 and 27)

   As only God can do these deeds, therefore Christ is God.

(III) The Holy Spirit According to Jehovah's Witnesses:

The Holy Spirit is the invisible power that "Jehovah" works with in His people. The Holy Spirit does not have a divine character. He is just the energetic power of God.

Answering Jehovah's Witnesses:

- ✞ "But when the Helper comes I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me." John 15:26.
- ✞ "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment." John 16:8.
- ✞ "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come he will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears he will speak, and he will tell you things to come." John 16:13.
- ✞ "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." John 14:26.
- ✞ "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." Romans 8:11.
- ✞ "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation but be filled with the Spirit." Ephesians 5:18.
- ✞ "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" I Corinthians 3:16.
- ✞ "For there are three who bear witness in heaven; the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit and these three are one." I John 5:7.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Jehovah's witnesses have a very wrong faith about God and the Holy Trinity. Their beliefs are not backed up by the Holy Bible. They are not Christians.

NOVEMBER
SECOND SUNDAY

ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES – (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is the lesson two in a series of two lessons on answering Jehovah's witnesses. In this lesson we continue to show the wrong beliefs of Jehovah's witnesses. We also focus on how to deal with them.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

IV. Sin According to Jehovah's Witnesses:

- Sin is behaving against the laws of God.
- Adam and Eve both sinned by disobeying God. When they died they went back to earth and eternal non-existence. All the generations that followed inherited the same fate.
- Accordingly humans lost any hope for a perfect and pure life on earth.

Answering Jehovah's witnesses:

- ✞ As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one." Romans 3:10.
- ✞ "Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips." Romans 3:13.
- ✞ "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us". I John 1:10.
- ✞ "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." I John 1:118.
- ✞ "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." I John 3:4.
- ✞ "All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death." I John 5:17.
- ✞ "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." Romans 14:23.

V. Redemption and Salvation According to Jehovah's Witnesses:

- Adam and Eve are among those who will suffer. They had the perfect life and they lost it willingly so they cannot be saved. This fact caused all the generations that came after them to live in sin.
- Jesus Christ sacrificed the perfect life that Adam had and lost. Redemption is the price that Jesus the person paid, who died for a sin He did not do.
- Salvation is for the perfect life for a person here on earth. This is the life that Adam lost which was retrieved by Jesus Christ. But there are 144,000 who are going to be saved and will have a place and a position in heaven. The rest of the believers will be resurrected after death then eternal life on earth after being altered to be a paradise.

Answering Jehovah's Witnesses on the Subject of Redemption:

✞ "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Ephesians 1:7.

✞ "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." I Peter 1:18-19.

✞ "From Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever- Amen." Revelation 1:5-6.

✞ "According to the law all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." Hebrews 9:22.

✞ "By Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Colossians 1:20.

✞ "But this Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God." "For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." Hebrew 10:12-14

Answering Jehovah's Witnesses on the Subject of Salvation:

✞ "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Acts 16:31.

- ✞ "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." John 1:12.
- ✞ "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." John 3:18.
- ✞ "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." John 3:36.
- ✞ "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."
- ✞ "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."
- ✞ "Being Justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Romans 3:24.
- ✞ "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Romans 10:4.

VI. Retributions according to Jehovah's Witnesses:

- There is no punishment of the evil after death. The belief that there is such punishment is wrong.
- The person who did evil does not feel anything after his/her death. They become inactive and do not differ from animals. He/She would die without any eternal life.
- On the Millennial judgment day, there will be a war between Jesus Christ and the devil. Jesus Christ will conquer the devil in the place called in Hebrew Armageddon.
- The final test will be when Satan is released from his chains on the millennial year. Those who are with Satan at that time will be thrown in the lake of fire where they will be doomed forever without any resurrection.
- All those who reject the message of Jehovah's Witnesses will be destroyed.
- All believers in Jehovah's Witnesses will rise at the end of time either to inherit an earthly paradise or if they are from the chosen few, they will have a place in heaven and will be among the 144,000.

Answering Jehovah's Witness on the Issue of Retribution:

- ✞ "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23.

- ✞ "And many of those who sleep in the dust of earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." Daniel 12:2.
- ✞ "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." Hebrews 9:27.
- ✞ Revelation 20:12 "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books."
- ✞ "To give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power; when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed." 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.
- ✞ "And if your foot makes you sin, cut if off. It is better for you to enter life lame, than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched." Mark 9:45.

VII. The End of the World and the Second Coming of Christ according to Jehovah's Witnesses:

- Jehovah's Witnesses concentrate on the issue of the timing of the end of the world. They predicted it several times with different dates each time.
- At the end of the world there will not be a second coming of Christ. Those who expect the second coming of Christ as mentioned in the Bible will be disappointed.
- For about 79 years, Christ is present on earth in an invisible royal image. Only some people feel him.
- At the time of the end of the world the following events will take place:

  a) Jesus Christ will rule after the resurrection.
  b) Christ will overcome the devil in the war between them in the place called Armageddon. Revelation 16:16.
  c) The chosen 144,000 will be with Jehovah and Jesus Christ in heaven.
  d) The rest of the followers will stay in an earthly paradise. Those who do not believe will be destroyed.

Answering Jehovah's Witnesses:

- ✞ "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him saying, "Lord, will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." Acts 1:6-7.
- ✞ "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." 1 Thesalonians 4:16.
- ✞ "After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God." Revelation 19:1.

5. How can I deal with the preachers of Jehovah's Witnesses.

a) We should not deal with them at all. Close your door and do not allow them to talk because they are "enemies of the Cross of Christ." Philippians 3:8. "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." 2 John 1:10-11.

b) Their Bible is not original and is called "The New World Translation of the Holy Scripture" and all their writings are wrong. Do not read it.

c) If you had to talk to one of them, keep your own church teaching and your faith that you have received from your fathers. Do not accept any misleading translations. Confront them with the fact that their Bible is not original and their leaders are humans who have nothing to do with God.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) There are many wrong beliefs around; one of which is Jehovah's Witnesses. We must avoid being friends with them or even discussing anything with them. But if we had to discuss we must be ready with all answers.

(2) We appreciate our Christianity and we are thankful to God because we belong to a correct faith.

NOTES

NOVEMBER
THIRD SUNDAY

SERVING THE LORD – (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about serving the Lord. In this lesson we focus on the definition of a true servant of Christ.

MEMORY VERSE

> ***"But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ"*** Phil. 3:8

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. INTRODUCTION:

A seventeen year old youth asked the priest to permit him to start teaching in Sunday School classes. The priest asked him which level would he want to teach. His answer was that he was ready for any level. This request showed good intentions to serve the Lord and the church, but on the other hand, it reflects insufficient understanding of the service of the Lord and the needed preparations for it.

1. A sixteen year old youth told the priest that he wants to join the priesthood in few years and that he is longing for this to happen. The priest asked him the reason for this demand. The youth said he loves the church hymns, the service of the Holy Mass and all other services in the church. Again this request showed good intentions, far better than the youth's longing for bad relationships and misbehavior, but on the other hand, it lacks the knowledge that priesthood is not the service inside the church with the congregation or the other church services. In

fact it is taking the responsibility of these souls in front of God and this is not an easy matter.

2. One of the service persons in the church told the priest that he wants to extend his service in church. Instead of being a deacon, he wants to be an arch-deacon and instead of being a teacher he wants to be the administrator of the Sunday School Service.

These big responsibilities in the church are the centre of his demands in life. As to his personal eternity and the necessities of his family and their eternity, that was not an important issue. What can I say? The service of the Lord is not about positions but about taking the last place. It is similar, to the Lord's service when he washed the Disciples' feet.

B. WHO IS THE TRUE SERVANT?

First: The true servant is the person who tasted the life with Christ and loved it.

He who lacks something cannot give it. If a person tried to speak about Christ without having experienced life with Him, he will sound theoretical and will not be fruitful. But if he experienced being in contact with Christ and tasted the beauty of living with Him and formed a practical knowledge, then the simplest words coming from his heart will have the power and effect to reach other hearts.

a. St. Peter the Apostle was able to convert 3000 souls in one sermon after completing his faith, receiving the power of the Holy Spirit and experiencing the true life with Jesus Christ (Acts 2).

b. St. Paul the Apostle, after experiencing life with Christ, said "But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ." (Philippians 3:8). Nothing on earth was comparable to his love of Christ. St. Paul's service was very fruitful as is obvious in the book of Acts and his Epistles.

c. Andrew the Apostle called upon his brother Simon Peter after his true experience of Christ. Philip called Nethanael too. "Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples, and looking at Jesus as he walked, he said, "behold the Lamb of God!" The two Disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" which is to say, when translated, Teacher) "Where are You staying?" He' said to them, "Come and see". They came and saw where He was staying and remained with Him that

day (now it was about the tenth hour). One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him: "We have found the Messiah "(Which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "you are Simon the son of Jonah, you shall be called Cephas." (which is translated A Stone). The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me". Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "we have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom no guile". Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him., "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, "I saw you under the fig tree' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." John 1:35-51.

Notice the similarity between both calls. Andrew told Peter, "we have found a Messiah, (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" John 1:41-42. Philip told Nathanael "we have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph Come and See."

Therefore, the servant needs first to have a true relationship with Christ. Then he presents, to the Lord Jesus the soul that he wants to serve. At this point the soul is joined with its creator, Who provides for everything and will give salvation and eternal life.

Second: The true servant is he or she whose service generates from his love to Christ, to his brethren, to his family and to his heavenly reward.

The basis of the service of the Lord is the internal love in the heart. Love is light and the servant's heart must be lit with love. The love of God, those he serves in heaven. "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, I am nothing." I Corinthians 13:3.

The servant loves the Lord Jesus Christ and feels that He has given him a special commandment to take care of his brethren. This is clear when the Lord said to Simon Peter "Simon, do you love Me? Tend My Sheep" Therefore the servant looks at every person who needs service as being recommended by the Lord personally. The servant of the Lord, looks at the poor, the bare, the miserable and he who lives in sin, as a valuable soul and the Lord asked him to care for him. "Everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him". I John 5:1. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our true example, demonstrated a service full of love and compassion.

✞ "and for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth". John 17:19.

The meaning of sanctify here is "designate" and this is an admirable love from Our Lord Jesus, Who designates Himself for our salvation. "You did not trust anyone for our salvation, neither an angel, nor an archangel, nor a prophet but You, without change, have been incarnated and took our human form" The Georgian Liturgy.

† Our Lord served with love and compassion "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary Matthew 9:36.

† Moses the prophet had the same type of service full of love and compassion of those he served. When God said to him, "Let Me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." Moses said to God, "If You will forgive their sin - but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which you have written."

† St. Paul the Apostle also has a service full of love and compassion, when he said, "I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to flesh". Romans 9:3. And in his Epistle to the Philipians he says, "Therefore, my beloved and longed for brethren ..."

† St. John says in affection, "The elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only 1, but also all those who have known the truth." 2 John :1.

† As to the love of the poor, we find Abba Abraam Bishop of Fayoum. In the love of congregation we have Abba Boutros the last of martyrs who died in place of his congregation and asked the soldier to kill him behind the prison so that his children do not see him.

† Other examples from this century are the deceased, the Hegomen Bishoy Kamel who is a true example of the love of every soul and of building churches for the salvation of people.

† The blessed Hegomen Michael Ibrahim who was an example of loving the believers, carrying their burdens and leading them to Paradise.

† The blessed Pope Cyril the sixth who is an example of leading people's hearts towards the heavens with his daily masses his many prayers and the sweet smell of incense.

You will find Pope Shenouda III, may the Lord give him plentiful years, who is working day and night, teaching his children with many sermons, and books; building churches and ordaining priests and bishops; building monasteries. All this for the sake of the salvation of every soul inside and outside of Egypt.

There are many other examples in this century which I do not know, of people who deeply loved the Lord and extended that love to all those they serve who were recommended by Christ and whose love was extended to the heavens and the heavenly reward.

All those who served the Lord, through the ages, know well that the worker deserves his pay. They know that he who gives a cup of cold water will not lose his reward. They know that the Lord said, "Where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour." John 12:26. The Lord also said "Come, you blessed of My Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer Him saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and fed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You? And the King will answer and say to them. "Assuredly,I say to you, in as much as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." Matthew 25:34-40.

All these servants had their hearts longing to heaven and they served for the sake of building the heavenly kingdom for the others as well as for themselves.

Third: The true servant is he or she whose aim is to attract souls to Christ for their salvation without ignoring their daily life.

What is the aim of the Church? The aim of the church is to attract the hearts of the people to Christ, to heaven, so that the spirit of life will run in their hearts... David the prophet says, "You who seek God, your hearts shall live". The human being extends the eternal life from Christ, as the Lord said in his concluding prayer, "Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify you, as you have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as you have given Him and this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." John 17:1-3. Therefore, the aim of the service of the church is for the person to have life in him, "You who seek God, Your hearts shall live" and your soul will be attracted to heaven.

As to the soul that is living in sin, it is dead and does not have any spirit or life. It is not attracted to Heaven but all her concerns are earthly, as was said about the Prodigal Son, "For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Luke 15:24. The church and all its servants are parts of the sacred body of Christ who have one aim which is serving the souls and their salvation. Every soul with its own position: serving the children is different from serving the Youth. Serving the elderly is different from serving the sick and needy. The servant's aim is to attract the soul to heaven without overlooking its position and its daily life. St Paul says, "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ," 2 Corinthians 11:2. He also says "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

St. John the Baptist diverted the people and drew them towards Christ not to himself. He said that he should grow and I should decrease. A true example of a faithful servant is in drawing the souls towards Christ. The Lord said about him, "Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." Matthew 11:11. He prepared the way before the Lord with the light of his life, although he did not do any miracles. The ego disappears in the ministry of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and He drew our hearts to the Heavenly Father, although He was in the Father the Father in Him. (The ego disappeared in the ministry of St.

John the Baptist and he drew our hearts towards the Lord Jesus Christ.) The ego disappeared in the ministry of St. Paul and he drew the hearts towards the Lord Jesus, and said, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God". I Corinthians 15:9

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Serving the Lord must be first based on tasting a true relationship with Him. This intimacy with the Lord Christ can be obtained only through the basis of love. This same love will be extended to include brethren, family members and the members of the society. This love will be translated into service. The service will have one good which is to attract souls to heavenly kingdom without ignoring their daily life

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

NOVEMBER
FOURTH SUNDAY

SERVING THE LORD – (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a series of two lessons serving the Lord. In this lesson we focus on how can a youth proceed towards a strong service of Christ.

MEMORY VERSE

"And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken" Acts 4:31

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. THE SERVANT'S WEAPON IS THE POWER FROM THE TRUE LIGHT AND THE PRAYER FOR THOSE HE/SHE SERVES.

The service of the first church was very strong because it was fortified with the power of the Holy Spirit and the prayers of the Apostles. The church was so strong that it is said in the books of Acts, "The Lord added to 'the Church daily those who were being saved.'"

† Our Lord Jesus the incarnated God and the source of all power and blessings, the Bible said of Him, "So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." Luke 4:22. He also said about Himself, "the spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor." Luke 4:18. In His service He said in an admirable humility, "For I have given to them the words which you have given Me." John 17:8.

† Moses started his ministry with the human weakeness and thought that with his physical power he could serve the Israelites. He killed an Egyptian man who was beating one of the Hebrews. Then he ran away and lived in the Land of Medean as a shepherd until the Lord called on him to lead the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt. The Lord told Moses, "Now, therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what to say." Exodus 4:12. The powerful ministry of Moses started here after being fortified with the Lord's support.

† In the ministry of the Apostles, the Lord told them, "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with the power from on High." "And they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." Luke 24:49-50.

The Book of Acts says, "And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying; Peter, James, John and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with His brother." Acts 1:13-14. "Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit". Acts 2:1-4.

Since that time the ministry of the Apostles was fortified with the power of the Holy Spirit. Some even call the Book of Acts, the Book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled." Acts 4:13. When they released Peter and John, they came to their friends, "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken." Acts 4:31.

When Peter was imprisoned, the church used to pray fervently to God for his sake. The Lord sent His angel and got him out of the prison. "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." Acts 9:31.

The servants of the Lord were supported by the power of the Holy Spirit and their lives were filled with prayers. Therefore, the ministry was very successful. The Lord used to support their ministry by performing miracles, "And these signs will

follow those who believe; In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover." Mark 16:1718. This had happened and is still happening in the church to all who serve the Lord in spirit and in truth.

B. THE PRIORITIES IN THE MINISTRY: "YOU SHALL , BE WITNESSES To ME IN JERUSALEM AND IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA AND TO THE END OF THE EARTH." Acts 1:8.

With this organization, the Lord decided on the priorities of the ministry so that they do not get hindered or become fruitless. Jerusalem then Judea then Samaria and the end of the earth.

✞ **Jerusalem**

Being the City of the Great King that has the altar it suggests the heart and the spiritual life of the person, being the altar of the Lord. It means I should take care of my spiritual life and my eternity first as St. Paul told his disciple Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." I Timothy 4:16. So the person continues his service with constant repentance, confession and receiving holy communion for the salvation of his soul.

✞ **Judea**

The Jews are the nation to whom Christ came but they rejected Him. The testimony in Judea is the ministry of the servant in his own house, with his family and the small community he lives in. "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."I Timothy 5:8. "For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the children of God?" I Timothy 3:4-5.

✞ **Samaria**

Samaria was a mixture of Jews and atheists. The testimony in Samaria represents the ministry of the servant amidst the diligent believers and the weaker souls.

✞ **The end of the earth**

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things". Romans 10:15.

It is preaching among the other religions and those who have no religion.

C. Specific Steps in Preparing the Youth for the Service:

1) The youth have to experience the relationship with Christ in their personal life through their continual confession, repentance, receiving Holy communion, spiritual readings and attending church regularly.

2) A youth should always be careful of his salvation and should behave properly among his family and friends at school or at work.

3) The youth has to start his/her service by simple jobs and not to hasten to taking teaching or controlling positions in the church. A youth could serve in the social activities, the library, taking care of the church building and the sacred vessels. If he was blessed by being a deacon, he should enjoy the beauty of the hymns and the service in self-denial.

4) The youth will then evolve in love, disregarding the ego and love of self; and start serving the sick, the disabled and the needy.

5) Gradually, the youth will start, according to the Lord's gift for him, teaching a small class of Sunday School. Then to a larger class if God permits and lastly, the youth service or any other services.

Therefore, the movement from one stage of the service to the next should be very gradual. The servant has to feel unworthy and should totally submit to the will of God.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

The successful service must be based upon the support of the Holy Spirit and prayers. Then it must go gradually according to the calling from God. The calling from God is manifested by the calling of the church authorities, the comfort and satisfaction of everyone.

DECEMBER
FIRST SUNDAY

JOB'S WIFE - NARROW LOOK AT GOD

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
To show that the narrow (or incorrect) look at God will lead to lack of endurance of pains and loss of patience.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"My Brethren, count it all joy, when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" James 1:2-3***

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. INTRODUCTION

In the book of Job we read about the family of Job's wife. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, one that feared God and shunned evil. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys and a very great household, so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the East. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent, sanctified them, rose up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings, according to the number of them all; for Job said, it may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus Job did continually." Job 1: 1-5

So the Lord described Job as "the greatest of all the men of the East and that he was perfect, upright and feared God and shunned evil". His family seemed to be loving. But did his wife have a role in this family? Of course, she had a major role, she was a mother of ten. But his family went through very hard times, with the Lord's permission.

Satan complained against Job (Job 1: 6-19) saying; "Does Job fear God for nothing?" The Lord permitted Satan to test Job. He lost his cows, camels and female donkeys quickly. And eventually the house fell on his children. In all this, Job said, "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Satan came again and complained about Job and the Lord permitted him to test him in his body but not his mind to show his great faith. Already Job was struck with many diseases and illnesses.

B. Job's Distress:

The attitude of his wife and his three friends added much psychological distress to his physical pains. Why did the Lord permit for this pain to happen to this family? Definitely, it was not only Job who was suffering from these pains, his wife also mourned the loss of all her children which was very hard on her as a mother. Although Job was a perfect man, according to God's words, these tests were to purify his faith, he was at fault because he was virtuous in his own eyes. He says, "I am blameless" Job 9:21 and also, "when the ear heard, then it blessed me and when the eye saw, then it approved me." Job 29:11. For this reason, the Lord permitted these trials to happen to Job in order to purify him (as gold is purified with fire), and to deliver him from all self-righteousness for the love of the Lord to be his only virtue.

This whole situation was very hard on Job's wife. She lost her family and her husband was going through unbearable pains. She was unable to see things the same way as her husband because she did not have her husband's strong faith and tolerance. For through all these pains, he never mentioned the Lord in a bad manner. But she criticized him saying, "Do you still hold to your integrity? Curse God and die". Job 2:9. Her husband's answer explains the source of the difference between Job and his wife. "But he said to her, "you speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips." Job 2:10. Both Job and his wife believed in God's presence, but each of them saw Him differently and understood His ways differently. Neither of them denied the existence of God.

Indeed, Job did not comprehend, either, why all these losses and pains were happening to him. Even his three friends did not understand what was going on and thought that what had happened to him was the result of a sin- something many of us do when trials, losses and adversities hit. We interpret these as a consequence of sin. But Job felt that God was aware of all this and in charge of everything. He believed that God was a loving God so he was fully accepting God's will. We should realize that these events took place before the coming of Christ- who declared to us God's love. These events were even before Moses and the divinely written commandments. Job's time was between Noah and Abraham, according to most scholars. Job had a very deep faith, which helped him tolerate his pain with patience. We should take him as an example. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." James 1: 2-3

C. The Problems of sin and pain:

- The two problems, sin and pain, are still present in our modern world and are an issue of concern to all. God does not want these problems, nor sends them, but He permits them to happen and uses them in a wise way for our good. Job and his wife did not understand this. After repenting his feelings of self-righteousness, the Lord accepted Job who passed through his journey in the valley of darkness and pain with complete faith though unaware of God's mercy.

- Job had no sense of encouragement throughout his painful experience. In fact, his wife and his friends were blaming him for keeping his faith. And such blame and pressure increased Job's pain. But Job was not affected by them. What did his wife mean by "Do you still hold to your integrity?" Is she trying to instigate him to forget about God and curse Him? She could not bear seeing him suffer so she wished him death. The sentence "still hold to your integrity" was the same description that God used in Job 2:3.... And still he holds fast to his integrity ..." But God used it in his defense of Job when talking to Satan. His wife, on the other hand, said it with grumble and in a disapproving sense. We do not want to judge Job's wife unfairly and call her "the grumbling woman, or the woman who did not support her husband." But we say what she said was due to the fact that the trial was beyond her tolerance, so she collapsed under the pressure. She did not share her husband's level of faith.

- She did not think of God the way Job did, nor did she have her husband's tolerance and patience. Her heart was torn apart and she would have rather seen her husband dead, than seeing him go through this pain. Would we have the same attitude towards our sick ones, i.e. wishing them death to be relieved of their pain? This was the effect of her words to her husband at his weakest point. Do we consider other people's state before voicing our views? Job was in need of a word of encouragement and support, but his wife was unable to give him this support because she was down herself. Maybe it would have been better if she did not talk. One of the saints said: "I many times regretted talking but never did I regret being silent".

- How could it be that Job's wife failed to benefit from her husband's strong faith? How come she even was unaware of her husband's robust faith? She lived with him for a long time but considered him from her own personal perspective and could not share his views. We do the same in our own lives when we look at things or events from our personal viewpoint. But Job was compassionate towards his wife and talked to her with extreme respect saying, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks." Job 2:10. He did not call her, you foolish woman, lacking faith, annoying and nagging ... But he said, instead, "as one of the foolish women", as if he felt that she was going through a moment of weakness. Job did not forget his respect and love for his wife, nor did he forget his God and never talked badly about Him. In truth, Job gives a good example of a husband showing respect to his wife even when she makes a mistake by tolerating her and treating her "as one of the foolish women".

- It is noteworthy that Job did not forget his duty as a husband. He drew his wife's attention to the mistake she was committing, which is a duty in marriage. Both the husband and wife should bring to each other's attention the wrong doings of the other in a nice way without reproach. Job said to his wife, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" Job 2:10. He is telling her that she used to thank the Lord for all the good things and gifts He provided for her, why not now? God is always the same, in His love and fatherhood. When we pass through a trial, do we believe that He will change it to our good and, thereby, we do not complain? As if Job is telling his wife, "you should praise God while you pass through this hardship believing that He will deliver us throughout it". Job wanted to teach his wife what she lacked i.e. faith in God's merciful hand and to hold on to His promise that He will not allow any harm to destroy His children, even though trials look like evil.

✞ The church teaches us this lesson in the prayer of thanksgiving. "We thank you, O Lord, in every way and for everything." We should try to apply this to our lives. Lord have mercy on the weakness of our faith. We should learn to thank the Lord not only verbally but from the depth of our hearts, in times of peace as well as in times of trouble so that we may find rest. In his first Epistle to the Tessalonians, St. Paul urges us to be loving and quiet "to lead a quiet life ..." Thessalonians 4: 11. But how can one keep his peace and quiet in the midst of ordeals and troubled times? The answer would be to learn how to accept the good and the troubled times with faith in - and thanks to - the Lord.

To reach that stage of faith we should concentrate focally on our Savior Jesus Christ and not on the trial. In the Gospel of St. Matthew 14: 22-33, we notice that Peter - Christ's disciple - experienced profound peace and was able to overcome the strong waves of the storm as long as he was focused on Christ. However, he lost it all when he took his eye off Him and looked around, he started to drown and cried out "Lord save me."

✞ How did Job's wife story end? What happened to her family after those hard times? God overlooked Job's wife weakness for the sake of her husband's faith and patience. The whole family passed through safely because one of the parents had a good relationship with God. In the books of Acts Chapter 27, the Lord saved the sailors and the voyagers and the angel told Paul "...indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you." Acts 27:24.

After Job's repentance, he experienced further depth of faith and said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42: 5-6

✞ We see Job's reward in Job 42:10 "The Lord restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." If we compare Job's possessions before the trial to those after it, we find that the Lord rewarded Job twice as much in all his possessions. And because the sons and daughters, whom Job lost, were still present in the other world, they were replaced by seven sons and three daughters born unto him.

Job's wife must have experienced God's love and justice. As St. James says, "You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord, that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful." James 5:11

The Limited View: Job's wife had a limited view of God and of her husband and she based her judgment only according to her personal view of things. She failed to realize that God is responsible for His children, in charge of their purity and piousness and wants to rid them of self-righteousness - the reason why He put her husband to test. She was unable to adopt or embrace her husband's perspective as pious, God - believer and a patient man. We should try and put ourselves in other people's shoes and ask ourselves this question, "What would we have done had we been in their place?"

Job's wife did not benefit from her husband's deep faith: Spiritual growth is very essential in marriage. No person is perfect in all virtues. However, if each partner benefits from the other's virtues in a spirit of love and humbleness, marital life would constitute a real spiritual growth for both partners. Apparently, Job's wife did not avail herself of this growth.

How did Job fail to reach his wife so that she might benefit from his faith?
Was Job self-centered around his virtues and self-righteousness? Did he, therefore, ignore serving his wife and forget her growth so that, in the depth of the trial, he discovered the inner weakness she was undergoing?

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1) Let us pray to God in order to enhance our faith so that we can endure through tribulations.

2) Let us accept some suffering in our life and proceed accepting our life as it is thankfully. Situations will not be ideal for us because nothing is perfect.

3) We must look at the final results of things because the final is what matters. We must thank God under all conditions and endure pains knowing that after these pains there will be joy.

DECEMBER
SECOND SUNDAY

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MIDNIGHT PRAISE

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
To have a glance over the spirituality of the Midnight Praise in the Coptic Orthodox Church. This praise becomes a participation with the heavenly chorus.

MEMORY VERSE:

"So continuing daily with one accord in the temple...praising God..."
Acts 2:46-47

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) General introduction to the service of praise:

☩ The service of praise is an expression given to the praises that precedes the evening raising of incense (Vespers) and the morning raising of incense (Matins).
☩ Some of the meanings of the words that are used in the service of praises are:

1. Psalmody is the book which has the collection of praises. There are two types of Psalmodies. The regular Psalmody (year round) and the Kiahk Psalmody (dedicated for the month of Kiahk).
2. **Canticle** this word in Coptic is hos and it means praise.
3. **Psalie** is a Greek word, which means singing.
4. **Theotika** is a Greek word, which means glorification for St. Mary the Virgin.
5. **Lubch** is a Coptic word, which means explanation.
6. **Zoxology** is a Greek word, which means glorification and blessing.
7. **Difnar** is a Greek word, which means short history.

8. **Adam** this word is used for hymns, used on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.
9. **Vatos** this word is used for hymns used on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The two major tones of hymns in the Coptic Church are the adam and the vatos and are taken from the first word of the theotika of Monday (adam) and Thursday (vatos) which means the bush.

(B) The praise is part of the nature of the church:

☥ The praise is one of the key functions of the church, considering that the church is the living Body of Christ. So the church practices praising as an explanation of her status of resurrection which she lived in the Lord Christ. In the service of praise, the church rejoices in her living hope that everything will work out for the benefit of the church.

☥ Therefore, the service of praise is known to be done together with the unseen heavenly power and with the victorious church in heaven, 'so continuing daily with one accord in the temple.....praising God.....' Acts 2:46-47.

(C) The relationship between the Midnight Praise and the Divine Liturgy:

☥ The Coptic Orthodox Church places a great importance on the prayers and praises as preparation for the Divine Liturgy. Imagine that a king is coming and you have to prepare your place for him. Similarly, the midnight praise is the preparation for the Divine Liturgy, so that we receive the King of kings in our hearts. The midnight praise is the best way to prepare our minds, our feelings, and our hearts to receive the Lord Christ in our hearts. In fact, the preparation for the Divine Liturgy starts from the night before, in the evening raising of incense and the service of praise that is before the vespers.

☥ What is the best way to prepare for the Mass? The best way is to attend the service of praise before the evening raising of incense, the midnight praise before the morning raising of incense and participate in all parts of the liturgy from the evening before. Not just a mere participation but praising the Lord in full respect, in joy, in concentration and in humbleness.

(D) The service of praise as a sacrifice offered to God:

☥ We need to know that the service of praise, when done properly, the angels will participate with us as they are praising the Lord at all times. So the

service of praise is a heavenly work. We read about it in the Book of Revelation in which we find the angels, the Four Incorporeal Creatures, the twenty-four priests and the one hundred and forty-four thousand undefiled virgins praising the Lamb of God. We can clearly see that our service of praise combined with the praise of the heavenly powers is a great honor for us that we do not deserve. The service of praise is offered as a sacrifice to God accepted by Him, 'let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice' Psalm 141:2.

(E) The contentment of the soul with the service of praise:

✞ The person who is practicing the service of praise in humility, calmness, and concentration will find his/her soul in full peace and contentment. Not only understanding the meaning of words, but the depth and the emotion of the prayers and praises. Regardless how simple they were, they will make the individual be filled with peace and contentment.

✞ As we participate in the service of praise, we must remember the occasion in which the Lord worked with His people. For example, as we sing the praises of the first canticle we remember the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and their passing over the Red Sea to their freedom (exodus 14:28).

(F) The service of praise with the spirit of obedience and humility is the only one acceptable to God:

✞ The Lord has declared many times that He does not accept any prayers or fasting except those done with the spirit of obedience and humbleness.

✞ For our prayers to be acceptable we have to have faith in God, 'therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray believe that you receive them, and you will have them' Mark 11:24. For our prayers to be acceptable we also have to forgive others who do mistakes against us, as we say in the Lord's prayer, 'forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us'.

(G) The Holy Trinity as manifested in the service of praise:

✞ The service of praise is filled with expressions that are taken from the Holy Bible that talk about the incarnation of God, the action of the Holy Trinity in our life and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the Saints. All

these deep meanings when it is done with the beautiful music of the church, it gives a great effect more than we can express in regular words.

✞ Therefore, the hymns in the church became like the wings on which the spirit flies and discovers these beautiful spiritual meanings.

(H) An overview of the midnight praise

1. The midnight praise starts with the first service in which the gospel reading talks about the ten virgins who came out to meet the bridegroom.
2. 'The second service' in which the gospel reading is about the sinful woman in the city who taught us that repentance is not just words.
3. 'The third service' in which the gospel reading is about the promise of God to give us (the small flock) a place in His Kingdom.
4. The first canticle
5. The second canticle
6. The third canticle
7. The praises of the three young men in the midst of the fire
8. The commemoration of saints
9. The doxology
10. The fourth canticle
11. The psalie of the day or the feast
12. The theotika of the day
13. The lubch
14. The ending of the theotika
15. El difnar
16. The orthodox creed
17. God have mercy
18. The absolution of the midnight praise prayed by the priest

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) It is an excellent practice for everyone to join the service of praise with the chorus. It is a great enjoyment to sing with the angels.

(2) The best preparation for the divine liturgy is to attend and participate in everything, starting from the service of praise before the evening raising of incense until the end of the Mass.

(3) Remember that all prayers and praise must be done in spirit of obedience, humbleness and in focus.

DECEMBER
THIRD SUNDAY

HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (I)
THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS: DOCTRINES

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of three lessons to show that the roots of Christianity goes back to the book of Genesis. In this lesson we focus on the Doctrines of Christianity in the book of Genesis.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. INTRODUCTION: The Importance of the Book of Genesis:

The Prophet Moses wrote the Book of Genesis in Hebrew in the middle of the fifteenth century B.C.

Many are of the opinion that the Book of Genesis is the most important book in the Holy Bible, so to speak, on the grounds that it lays the foundation to the following items: -

- ✞ The orthodox theological concepts which lead to the sound knowledge of the Holy Trinity and the Divine commandments, as well as God's Guidance in man's life and his/her personal freedom.
- ✞ The formation of the human family, which is the primary cell in God's congregation.
- ✞ The holy church with all its sacraments, the overture of heavens towards earth and the preparation of the human soul to be an unblemished bride for the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ✞ Bringing to light the war between man and Satan.

Hence, we can safely say that the Holy Bible in its entirety builds upon the Book of Genesis, and substantiates what has been reported in it.

The Book of Genesis has revealed a vitally important aspect concerning our relationship with God. God considers man as His own ambassador sent to this planet as a free master amongst earthly and heavenly creatures, yet a unique one bearing the earthly characteristics in body and the divine one in spirit. God bestowed upon man the free will thereby differentiating between him/her and all the other earthly creatures. The awesome earth and impressive galaxies move around pursuant to laws of nature exclusively designed for them. Animals, as well, have their own behavioral instincts. Man, however, has been created identical to God's image in freedom, holiness and eternity.

When man fell in sin, the Book of Genesis discloses to us the salvation that has been prepared for him. Rather than the materialistic heaven and earth God created for man's comfort, convenience and enjoyment, man now manages, through salvation, to enjoy a brand new heaven and earth at an angelic and eternal level. Such is God's perpetual tender loving care for man, for whom He prepared everything so ideally and so optimally. Even after Adam's fall, God did not forsake man, but rather saved him; additionally, He prepared everything at a much higher level, an eternal level not to become corruption ridden at any time in the future.

B. The Doctrine of the Coptic Orthodox Church as manifested in the Book of Genesis:

(1) The existence of God

God exits as can be seen in all the earthly creatures. Thus, the opening sentence in the Book of Genesis reads "In the beginning God created the heaven's and the earth." (Gen. 1:1)

Therefore, God exists and both nature and the universe speak of God's existence. Whilst we cannot perceive God using our limited five senses, we still believe in His existence and "see" Him in all these creatures He made. Similarly, there are many other things we do not see, yet believe in their existence through certain tangible media. For example, we cannot see the air but we still feel it clearly as it moves around us. However, it is not only through the cosmos and its creatures that we feel the presence of the Great Creator, but also through His incessantly flowing

love for us and into us. Consequently, His life-giving touches were really crystal-clear throughout the Book of Genesis.

(2) Monotheism in the Holy Trinity.

Indeed we believe in one God and we, as such, are monotheists. Hence, the opening sentence in our Creed of Faith, reads, "We believe in one God". This comes in stark contrast to the pagan religions, which embrace polytheism.

The first sentence in the Book of Genesis reads "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen.1:1) Here, the word "created" is in the singular form. However, "God" in Hebrew is translated as "Lohim", which is plural form. It follows then that the creator is the Holy Trinity, the One in His Essence, Nature, and Divinity.

Note: It is worth mentioning here that God created man in His image and likeness, that is, the likeness of the Holy Trinity. Thus, man is a **living reasonable being**. And while man is one essence in his being and nature, this "being" is not the same as LOGIC and both are not the same as life. The difference between God the Trinity and man from this perspective is that God the Father is the self-existence, God the Son is the Logos or the Reasonable Word, and God the Holy Spirit is the life of the Holy Trinity altogether. In other words, God enjoys Omniessence: He, as the Father, is self-existent, reasonable through the Son, and living through the Holy Spirit.

(a) The opening sentence in the Book of Genesis reads "**In the beginning**," God created the heavens and earth ... And the Spirit of God, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." (Gen.1).

Also, the opening sentence in the Gospel according to Saint John reads, "**In the beginning**" was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... in Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1)

"The beginning" referred to in the Gospel according to Saint John purports eternity, implying no beginning. On the other hand, "the beginning" referred to in the Book of Genesis implies that the physical or material world has a beginning, contrary to what some philosophers' claim that it is co-eternal with God.

Indeed, it was that doctrine that Saint Basil the Great confirmed in his book "**The Hexameron**" i.e. the six-day creation. In this book, he wrote "The phrase 'In the

beginning does not indicate a given or specific point in time, because time did not exist then, as the galaxies with all their sophisticated structures were not there yet. The word 'beginning' here involves **prime movement** rather than time quantum."

(b) If the Divinity has stated that God the Father created heavens and earth using His LOGIC, "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth." i.e. His Word the Logos, then it is here that we come to know about the role of the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit that hovered over the face of the waters in order to turn the void earth into a beautiful world. And it is exactly the same Holy Spirit that still hovers over the baptismal water fountain to consecrate it and, consequently, metamorphoses the person who has been marred by sin, into a new creature.

(3) The concept of the Divine commandment: why did God give the commandment to Adam?

God does not want to dominate man, which is why He created him as a free human being. However, this is not inconsistent with God's decision to grant man His beneficial commandment, while giving him/her fully unrestricted liberty as to whether to accept it, thereby gaining benefits, or repudiate it, thereby incurring losses. Thus, God does not give man His commandment out of self-interest, but rather out of His keenness on man's well-being. In the meanwhile, God's past knowledge that man was going to disobey Him, however, would not discourage Him from advising man, and enlightening him/her as to what harms and hurts men. Most assuredly, God's commandment is for man's ultimate benefit, and is an irrefutable indication of God's love of, and interest in, humankind. Hence, God's earlier knowledge would not interfere with His unlimited love.

It is noteworthy in this context when God gave man His holy commandment, He knew well beforehand that man was going to disobey this commandment, but would nevertheless give it to him. It is true that man, after all, lost to evil and fell in sin. Yet, it is also equally true that man managed to rise from his stumble, learning from his sin and disobedience, and thereby, get back to the paradise lost through this sin and that disobedience. Furthermore, God who has been kind enough to find an exit for man, making salvation accessible and obtainable. Thus done man an additional favor, whereby deepening man's love and appreciation for Him and for His favor.

Based on the above-mentioned, people's relationship with God has become more strengthened, due to the salvation offered to them and their consequential return to

an everlasting and angelic paradise, together with all the blessings of the New Testament. Humanity would not in any way have gained all this and that had it not been for Adam and Eve's fall, which was rectified through the salvation which God offered to them and to their posterity.

Therefore, we ought to appreciate all God's Divine commandments, and understand that they come out of the love of His Kind bosom, not out of a desire to control us or deprive us of the freedom He himself has given us.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Adam and Eve were both created not born and, as such, neither of them inherited corruption from a previous nature. God created the couple after His own unsurpassable image and likeness. Adam and Eve used to know only what was good, and they never knew what was evil. That is why it never occurred to their minds, when they were tempted, that the snake could have been deceiving and lying to them. After all, words of lying and deception were not in existence then, nor were they in the diction of their day-to-day life. "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." (Gen. 2:25).
Both Adam an Eve were happy in the Garden of Eden, enjoying co-existence with God. They both used to possess an extremely celestial nature, and they both enjoyed God-given freedom. However, such freedom existed side by side with the potential for fall. And, in truth, it was only through interaction with Satan that evil infiltrated into the mind of both Adam and Eve. Hence, the couple who once used to know only what was good, now came to know what is good and what is evil, thanks to evil companionship. "Evil company corrupts good habits." (1 Cor. 15:33)

Once this evil, nourished by Satan's temptations and illusions, made its way into our first parents, they lapsed into a series of sins including pride, desire and belittling the words of God. As for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil it is believed that the tree was given this name after the fall, because our first parents did not know what was evil prior to their fall. They would not even know about this through the spontaneous process of physical growth and mental maturity. The fact of the matter is that man would be able to tell evil either through an inward feeling of committing a mistake, or seeing others commit a mistake. Let it be known then, that this tree was not called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because it used to possess such a power endowing our first parents with knowledge of what was good and what was evil. After all, neither enjoyed such knowledge in the first place. As a matter of fact, the name given to the tree in question had its

roots in the commandment related to it i.e. that once they ate it, they were supposed and expected to be able to discern the huge gap between what was good and what was evil.

What is it about this question concerning the duality equation of knowing good versus evil for man? Here is the answer: should the first party to this equation be nourished vis-à-vis the second? Then the first would have its scale outweighing the second. That is to say, if the element of goodness is well nurtured in man's heart, then this goodness would not only prevail, but also dispel evil out and away from that person's heart and becomes dominant in his/her life. Conversely, should the second party to this equation be nourished vis-à-vis the first, then this second party i.e. the evil, would have its scale outweighing the first one as evil is nurtured with the worldly temptations and satanic warfare.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Man holds both earthly and heavenly characteristics. He was created in God's image in freedom, holiness and eternity.
(2) God exists. We believe in One God. We believe in the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity: The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
(3) God gave us His commandments not to restrict our freedom or exercise authority over us. But He gave us His commandments for our goodness sake.

DECEMBER
FOURTH SUNDAY

HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (II)
THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS: SALVATION

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a series of three lessons to show that the roots of Christianity go back to the book of Genesis. In this lesson the focus is on Christ the savior and His identity as revealed in the book of Genesis.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
Start by reviewing the previous lesson with the students and discuss the previous aspects with them.

INTRODUCTION: Jesus Christ the savior of the world as per the Book of Genesis:

Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, is the pivotal focus of the Holy Bible in both of its testaments. The Book of Genesis is replete with prophecies; references and symbols concerning the entity and identity of our Savior whereby His Divinity and eternal work in man's life are reflected perfectly clear. Definitely speaking, it was only this salvation that enabled man, through the work of the Holy trinity, to return to a paradise far brighter and more lustrous than the fist one.

Please read hereunder some of these references and symbols.

(A) The Eucharist and the Tree of Life

The first man was created so as to live in the Garden of Eden eating from its trees and enjoying the service of angels and companionship with God. It is evident that the main tree that was in the middle of the garden was the tree of life. "And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and

good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Gen. 2:9)

However, both Adam and Eve fell before eating any of its fruit and rather than eternal life, they brought death upon themselves, and upon the entire human race. In this context, the Liturgy according to St. Gregory says "Thou has opened unto me the Paradise to enjoy, and has committed to me the percepts of Thy knowledge. Thou has manifested to me the Tree of Life, and made known unto me the sting of death. I plucked for myself the sentence of death." Consequently, man was expelled from the garden. On the other hand, the Lord God placed Cherubim, being the closest to His throne, with an every-way-turning flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen. 3:24)

Jesus Christ was this tree of life "She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her." (Prov. 3:18) By the same token, St. Ephraim the Syrian says, "The Garden of Eden is Mary from whom springs the tree of life which restores the exiled to the paradise." As well, the Lord Jesus Himself confirms that "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day ... he who feeds on Me will live because of Me." (John 6:54-57) We also read about the tree of life in the Book of Revelation as follows "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." (Rev. 2:7 & 12:11)

Therefore, now the path towards the tree of life has been paved and cleared. This is not something that is waiting for us in eternity. Rather, it is something present in this current life. Father Sawyrus, the Bishop of Ashmonin, confirms here that "In the church, there is the real tree of life, which is the body and blood of Jesus Christ, about which the Lord Himself said that whoever eats my body and drinks My blood will live forever." By the same token, the fraction prayer of the divine liturgy on the Holy Saturday says "Thou, our Master, hast come and saved us through the real knowledge of Thy crucifixion, and hast bestowed upon us the tree of life, which is Thy divine body and real blood."

Then the Holy Divine relates on the tree of life in the Book of Revelation, where we read the following "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Rev. 22:12)

These verses are part of the description of the eternity of those who have been saved. They describe the place where God co-inhabits with His congregation forever. For this tree of life used to occupy a prominent position in the Garden of Eden, and now we see that it occupies a prominent position in the everlasting life as well. The crystal-clear water waters this tree. It is well known that water from a Biblical perspective symbolizes the Holy Spirit. This water proceeds like a river from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Highlighting the fact that the throne of God and the Lamb confirms the belief that the tree of life draws its life, existence and effect only after God and the Lamb sit on the throne. Needless to point out here, the reference to the Lamb in this context is symbolic of the incarnation of the Son of God, His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and sitting at the right of the Father. John the Baptist refers to Him saying "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

This means that beyond the tree of life, its existence and effect, there is a reference to the reality of the Holy Trinity and the reality of incarnation. More importantly, it is within the authority of this tree to heal all nations. In truth, this is the effect of partaking of communion (the holy body and blood of our Good Savior), which heals both our bodies and our souls.

(B) The Eucharist and the offering of Melchizedek

The Lord's institution of the sacrament by choosing the bread and wine, which Melchizedek used in Gen.14 in place of the animal sacrifices the Jewish priests used to offer, elaborates Christ's overall call. This call is not restricted to a certain tribe or people, but rather to all people. "The Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast."

(Isa. 25:6). Saint Cyprian says, "We see the symbol for the Lord's sacrifice as per the testimony of the Book i.e. that he offered bread and wine, since he was a priest and blessed Abraham." The fact that Melchizedek was a symbol for Christ is declared in the Holy Bible [please read Ps.110]. It narrates that Melchizedek was the priest of God, as he brought out bread and wine as he blessed Abram.

Saint Augustine relates Malachi's prophecy concerning the Eucharist offering "For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place, incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations, 'says the Lord of hosts." (Mal. 1:11), to Melchizedek's offering, saying "Open your eyes at any time to see

from sunrise to sunset that the Christians' offering is given not at only one place as was the case with the Jews, but rather everywhere, even in Jerusalem itself, and not pursuant to the order of Aaron [repetitive offerings], but rather pursuant to the order of Melchizedek [only one offering existing in heaven, that is, the slain Lamb of God, from which we take, and of which, we partake in each and every divine liturgy;".

Hence, so many fathers have associated the current Eucharist with Melchizedek's offering in olden times, especially that this Melchizedek was "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning nor end of life, but made like the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3). Thus, in His offering of the bread and wine, in particular, Jesus Christ wanted to draw our attention implicitly, speechlessly, and awesomely to His eternal priesthood, and spiritual kingdom, as a King of peace, and also to His historic personality. "Before Abraham was, I AM." (John 8: 58).

And just as the bread and wine, while in Melchizedek's hands, drew from him the material blessing, and spiritual support for Abraham in a secret or sacramental manner, so was Christ when He offered the bread and wine to His disciples. The significant difference between the two practices, is that Christ's offering was not a stereotype repetition, or a lifeless ritual image meant to give just blessing, but rather an everlasting reality, an infinitely sacrificial deed, and superbly divine sacraments. It was here that our Lord revealed the real concept of the bread and its essence. While it was in Melchizedek's hands sheer corn bread for blessing and support the same bread in Christ's hands became the real living, and heavenly manna coming to us from above. Indeed, it became "**althea**" or authentic bread, the divine body in truth, whereby whomever eats from it shall not die, but rather sticks to God, and lives for ever and ever more, and rises on the last day.

Note: The word "althea" in Greek means "real" or "authentic", implying permanency, perpetuity, and purity. Such were the words favored and used by our Lord Jesus Christ to describe Himself, when He gave His parables such as the real vine, the real light, and the real bread, thereby elevating the material description to the "althea" level [i.e. that which does change or vanish].

(C) The Other Symbols in the Book of Genesis

After the fall, worship began with bloody sacrifices, symbolizing the blood of Christ being the unique sacrifice.

- ✞ The ark of Noah and the flood symbolized Jesus Christ the giver of life to the world, not through the water of the flood, but rather the baptism water. The wooden ark, which kept all inhabitants intact and safe, symbolized the wooden Cross on which our Good Savior held His arms wide open to embrace all humankind, and save man from the "flood" of sin and consequent damnation of death. (1 Pet. 3:20-22)

- ✞ Isaac's obedience of his father Abraham's words, carrying wood, and offering himself up to death (Gen.22) symbolizes and embodies the incarnate Son's obedience of His Father, whereby carrying the wooden cross (Phil. 2:8).

- ✞ The ladder Jacob saw reaching from earth to heaven, with angels going up and down on it, (Gen.28), symbolizes the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the heavens reconciled with earth. (2 Cor. 5:18, Eph. 2:16 and 2 Col. 20:21)

- ✞ Joseph's life was abundant with symbols associated with Jesus Christ, particularly when he saved his brothers' lives, thereby symbolizing Christ, who saved humanity and gave everlasting life to those who believe in Him.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM HIS LESSON?

(1) Man is now able to go to a better paradise through the action of the Holy Trinity in man's life.

(2) The tree of life is now in the church that is the Body and Blood of Christ which gives eternal life as the Lord Christ paid. The bread and wine in Melchizedek's hands drew from him the material blessing and spiritual support for Abraham in a secret manner. Yet in the case of Christ when He offered the bread and wine to His Disciples, it offered them everlasting life in reality.

NOTES

DECEMBER
FIFTH SUNDAY

HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (III)
THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE BOOKS OF GENESIS: SPIRITUAL, SACRAMENTAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson three in a series of three lessons to show that the roots of Christianity go back to the book of Genesis. In this lesson the focus is on spiritual, sacramental and social issues.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
Start by reviewing the previous two lessons and discuss with the students.

A. Christianity's Fundamental Principles in the Book of Genesis

✞ God's Love and Justice

No one can grasp the love of God "And no manner of speech can measure the depth of Thy love toward mankind." However, God is also just, whereby he dismissed Adam and Eve from the paradise (Gen.3) because of disobedience, and also destroyed the ancient world through flood (Gen.6)

✞ Satan is Deceitful and is Man's Enemy

This is evident in his deception of our first parents. Indeed, it was that deception that caused their fall, as they lent their ears to him, whereby allowing sin to sneak in and consequent death to enter into the world. Thus, the old/pre-Christ world became corrupt, but was saved by very few people such as: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph etc.

✞ Spiritual Life Requires Futuristic Outlook

This is crystal-clear from Jacob's speech to his servants so that they might be well-prepared to meet his brother Esau. Jacob's speech included three questions that we,

as well, ought to ask ourselves. "To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose are these in front of you?" (Gen. 32:17). We should all check ourselves frankly enough, in light of these three questions, to see whether our spiritual life is progressing along the right track, leading up to heavenly Jerusalem, and whether our current spiritual lifestyle would ultimately pay off dividends good enough to qualify us for incorruptible shares in the paradise of joy. Let us all ask ourselves these following questions: who is it that domains over my entire life, body and soul? And what about my future life, now and after death? Most importantly, what about everything God has given to me in my lifetime: what am I doing with it now, and what am I going to do with it in the future?

✞ Sunday is the Day of the Lord and is the Weekly Day of Rest

God rested on the seventh day. However, resting in this context does, in no way, mean that God got tired, nor does it suggest that He, the Almighty, ceased to work. What it does mean here is that God felt satisfied and pleased at the creation and creatures that He made, and that He found them very good. Saint Augustine says, "We rest when we do good deeds and that is why it is written about God "He rested on the seventh day." In fact, God the Father's rest was in the presence of Adam, the man He created in His likeness, in His Bosom. Hence, Jesus Christ has been our "real Sabbath". The word "Sabbath", which means "rest" in Hebrew, was replaced by "Sunday" in the New Testament, where God "rested", when salvation was implemented on the Cross, and when humanity, consequently, became triumphant over death through the Son's glorious resurrection at Sunday dawn. Therefore, you and I need to have a day of rest not for laziness and/or doing nothing, but a day to return to the bosom of our heavenly Father.

Envy: The Philistines' envy of Isaac (Gen.26) and Joseph's brothers' envy of him (Gen.37). Ultimately, it is God who protects His devout children from envy.

B. Ecclesiastical Concepts and Sacraments in the Book of Genesis

+ The ark of Noah is a symbol of baptism and renewal of life.
+ Jacob's ladder is a symbol of the church, which is the gate opening up unto heaven. It is where we enjoy Christ's plentifulness, whose doctrines and sacraments we enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Let there be peace to the church, the house of angels.
† The ark is a symbol of the church. As it was only by means of the ark that Noah survived death through flood; it is likewise through the church and its doctrines and sacraments that man would survive death through sin.

- † Changing man's name upon devotion to the service of God is a symbol of the brand new life. It happened when Abram's name changed into Abraham and Jacob's into Israel.
- † Dignifying the church [please read Gen.28&35]. "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel." [Gen. 35:2-3].

(C) Social Concepts Through a Christian Perspective as Seen in the Book of Genesis:

Choosing a wife:

[Please read Gen. 24] As it was God who chose Rebecca for Isaac, we, as well, should pray when it comes to choosing a life partner. It was Abraham's request to his chief servant to choose for his son Isaac a wife from his country, and from his kindred, not from the daughters of the Canaanites. Likewise, devout Christians ought to choose life partners who belong to the same religion, same faith, same traditions and same teachings.

Reactions:

Animals, which are now predatory, were not actually created as ferocious and ravenous beings when God made the world. Indeed, they became voracious animals by time, as they were reacting to the hunters' attempts to catch them, in order to slaughter them, and get their skin. Thus, these animals started to defend themselves, and have ultimately become untamed and carnivorous. By the same token, we got to watch reactions of all our words and behaviors towards others. Before we say even a word, we have to know and see the effect of that word.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

There are two lines in the Book of Genesis, being the first book in the Holy Bible and is, as such, the living introduction to the comprehension of the word of God:

The First Line:

This is where the Book of Genesis starts with the creation of man in the Garden of Eden. Here and then man is depicted as if he were leading an imperial lifestyle, enjoying the voice of the Lord walking up and down the garden. Man's entire being was so enthralled and wrapped in joy, basking in the company of his Creator, who made the whole world for him. However, following the fall, man was expelled out from paradise, and as a result, was detached from God. Furthermore, he ended up being hungry, and having to labor hard in order to feed himself. What

is even worse is that death, as wages of sin, made its way into both his spirit and body. It was because of that hunger that the children of Israel entered into the land of Egypt, where they were forced into drudgery and bitter enslavement.

The Second line:

This is where God declares His love for man and reveals His masterly plan for the delivery of man from the fist of Satan and thus, from death, which sneaked into man's life. It is here that God dresses man in shirt of leather, [symbolizing sacrifice and crucifixion] in lieu of fig leaves. It is this line that leads to the genuine living, and New Testament Tree of Life i.e. Jesus Christ, the giver of eternal life. For us, the believers in the divine sacrifice of the slain Lamb of God, the Old Testament's tree of life has become the New Testament's Savior, and Giver of life everlasting, the Lord Jesus Christ. All this would have in no way been obtainable and accessible without our Lord's self-sacrificial atonement on behalf of the entire humanity. So much so that man no more enjoys only a material paradise, like the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve used to live. Rather, now we are given the new land, and the new heaven, as declared to us in the Book of Revelation, where the only passport giving access to it, is man's salvation through The Holy Trinity working inside him/her. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

And while in the Book of Genesis the call was for Abraham's children to inherit the kingdom, that kingdom was declared in Abraham's children in the New Testament. This is so that we can say with Saint Augustine "It is only in the New Testament that the Old Testament is revealed, and it is only in the Old Testament that the New Testament is concealed."

Last but not least, it is in the Book of Genesis that we can see and trace the Person of our beloved Savior the Lord Jesus Christ declared, and revealed through clear prophecies and many symbols. So much so that He and He alone, remains forever the center point, and living fulcrum for all of the Holy Bible books. "He is the same yesterday, today, and forever." It was He who came to deliver us, the sinners, and prepare us through His Holy Spirit for His Second Coming, when we, His pure, chaste, and unblemished bride enter with Him into the Holy of the Holiest in Heavenly Jerusalem, to live together for ever and ever more.

JANUARY
FIRST SUNDAY

THE JOYS OF JANUARY

PLEASE READ John 1: 1-18, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
To show that a new year is a new start, a new gift and a new opportunity to move forward in our life. We also, will illustrate the joys of the two feasts, Christmas and Epiphany "the Joys of January".

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"For you did not receive the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'"*** Romans 8:15

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. INTRODUCTION

✞ There is no love more than this that God came to our world for us. He took what is our "flesh" and gave us what is His "becoming children of God". So in Christianity God is not far. Our relationship with God is not just based on information about Him. In Christianity we live with God as His children because of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, who came for us. There is a beautiful verse by St. John the Evangelist to express this relationship with God through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ "and this is eternal life that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

B. What Is The Right Basis For Starting The New Year?

One of the youth asked "How do I start the new year, when I don't even know what it is hiding for me? I feel that the beginning of the year is like the start of a new

journey. Or, as if I am starting a new project". The young man continued saying, "I tried a lot of new beginnings in the past years".

"In some years, I tried concentrating on one weakness and prayed for it. I found a little improvement, but only for a short while, and that was it. I remembered the words of the Lord when He said: 'No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do people put new wine into old wine skins or else the wine skins break" (Matt 9:16-17).

"In other years, I started by reviewing all my weaknesses and sins. I tried the aspect of total improvement through spiritual struggle and prayers. I felt very small and was shocked by my self-weakness and weak prayers. I felt like a sick person lying in bed, from whom you ask to get up and start running quickly to cover a long distance at once. I remembered the saying of St. Paul the apostle 'not to think of himself more highly than one ought to think, but to think soberly' (Romans 12:3)"

The youth then asked, "What is the right basis for starting the New Year?" I answered him and said, "The beginning of a new year starts at the end of the year before. Therefore, the most successful start of a new year is a start built on a review and correction of my main goals in life. I review these goals and concentrate on them, so that they may be clear before me. It's exactly like a person starting a new project. He doesn't know what's hiding for him.

First, you have to sit down and determine your goals so that they may be clear in your mind. Then you can pursue this project in great detail by reviewing these goals from time to time. My first goal in life, as the goal of many, is to live in continuous peace and true happiness, regardless of the surrounding circumstances. If this is your goal, dear friend, this happiness and true peace is in living with God alone. This type of happiness and peace is a gift from God 'My peace I leave to you'. A fruit from the work of the Holy Spirit living within you and me ... 'But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace ...' I am convinced of this goal and that the only way to achieve this goal is by living with God. This is the correct basis for starting the New Year.

The second goal in my life, even though it is truly my first goal, is that I may have a share in eternal life with Christ. Since anything beside eternal life is considered nil, even my life on earth. I said that my first goal is to gain eternal life. I am convinced and I realize that I am a stranger on this earth. I believe that I am not of this world and that the time of my departure is known to God alone. I believe that my life on earth is a short introduction to my eternal life immediately

after my departure from this world. Because of this, I am not ready to sell my share in the Kingdom of Heaven for whatever cheap reason concerning this world."

This is the straightening of my path in the New Year; through the review of my goals and correcting them and therefore, relying on Christ and His help in fulfilling these goals.

C. The Relationship Between The Feasts Of Christmas And Epiphany And Our Spiritual Lives

It is not meaningless that we celebrate Epiphany directly following Christmas, even thought the two events were separated by many years during the life of Christ in the flesh, on earth.

Due to the strong relationship between the two events, i.e. the birth of Christ and His Baptism, the fathers of the church mentioned that the two celebrations took place on Christmas day. The separation of the two feats took place at the end of the 4th century to distinguish the honor of each of them. To understand this strong relationship between the two feasts and our spiritual life as it was known by the early church and as the church lives it now, we explain these two feasts in the following manner:

During the birth of Christ, God the Word became flesh to be like us so that He maybe called the Son of Mankind and the Son of Man (Luke 5:24 & Luke 19:10). "That He might be the first born among many brethren" (Rom 8:29). Since the Word of God is the Son of God by nature and since He is the essence of Divinity, therefore we became sons of God through adoption (Rom 8:15,16). We have the right to call God our Father. But how is this fulfilled verily to us?

St. John the evangelist answered this question and said 'but as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' (John 1:12-15). When God the Word became the Son of Man and took our flesh, He gave us the power to be born of God, that this may be fulfilled for us now.

The sacrament of Baptism - as it is taken from the sayings of St. Athanasious the apostolic: Jesus Christ went inside the water with the body of our human nature, which He took from us and shared with us. That is Human Kind is what was baptized. What happened in the Jordan River didn't occur for the sake of the Son of God, the Word but for our sake. Since the Holy Spirit descended on Christ's body; it was mankind that needed it and we received this blessing. We became in Him through His name when we were baptized. Through Him and in

His Name we receive the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Chrismation instantly following Baptism; just like when the Holy Spirit descended on the Lord instantly following His coming out of the water.

Through the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, He unites our body of dust with Him; that it may be one with Him and that we may rise with Him to Heaven. By Christ's going into the Jordan River with this body to be baptized by St. John, he founded the way to our salvation as it happens now in baptism. Christ our God meets all those who go down to the water of baptism and He baptizes them, for this was said about the Christ in Matt 3:11 'and He baptizes you with the Holy Spirit and Fire'.

With this, the baptized person came out of the water and he became a new creation. 'today the Son gave us the Power to be born from above and to become sons of God the Father through the Spirit and the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (Romans 8:16).

By the descent of our Master and Lord Jesus Christ with the person to be baptized, he dies with Christ and enjoys the resurrection with Him. Through this He offered us the "down payment" of resurrection. "Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him." (Colossians 12:12)

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) We thank our Heavenly Father for giving us a new opportunity in the New Year. We must make sure that our goals (internal peace and progression towards eternal life) are very clear to us and through prayers and supplications we will be able to achieve our goals.

(2) As children of God we must realize that this is an obligation and privilege. It is an obligation because if we are true Christians we must behave like ones. It is a privilege because we do not deserve to be called children of God because of our weaknesses and sins.

(3) As God loved us so much and came for us, we must love Him back. Our love for God is manifested clearly when we love our brothers and sisters, our parents and everyone else.

JANUARY
SECOND SUNDAY

STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons on how to lead a peaceful life in this troubled world.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***I love you with an everlasting love …"*** Jeremiah 31:3

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. God's Purpose Towards You is: Peaceful Life

✞ God's love to you can neither be limited nor adequately expressed. "I loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you..." Jeremiah 31:3. As we say in the Holy Liturgy "Nothing utterable could limit Your love to mankind."

✞ Out of God's love to you, he wants you to live in total peace and enjoy a peaceful life on earth and in Heaven. It is clear from the Holy Bible that there is no other way for man to enjoy this deep heartly peace and true life, except through his unity with our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Incarnated Logos.

✞ St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

✞ St. John says, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

✞ St. John says also about the Lord Jesus, "... I have come that they may have life, and they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

✞ The question that arises now is: As God wants this sort of life for man and has sent his Only Begotten Son for this purpose, why do so many people live a different life, full of despair, misery, instability, and loss of peace? The specific answer is that those people were not unified with the Saviour in person, thus not experiencing life with God through Him, “Nor is there salvation in any other..." (Acts 4:12).

B. Our Problems is the separation from God by Sin

✞ God made man according to His own image. He wanted us to live a beautiful quiet life. In creating us He made us free to choose... God guides, but does not force any thing on us. He did not create us as tools in his hand, controlling what we do.

✞ Man chose, by his own free will, to disobey God and follow the devil. When we see sin, we still choose willfully to disobey God and follow the devil; the result is separation from God, the source of life.

✞ St. Paul the Apostle says, in his letter to the Romans "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...” (Romans 3:23).

✞ St. Paul also says "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

✞ Our trials without Christ have failed ... man tried, through many centuries, to close this gap between the sinner and God the Holy, the source of life, but he failed.

✞ Isaiah the prophet says "But your inequities have separated you from your God and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

- ✞ King Solomon says in Proverbs: "There is a way which seems right to a man but its end is the way of death ...” (Proverbs 14:12).

- ✞ Jeremiah the prophet says "Your sins have withheld good things from you" (Jeremiah 5:25). **All this did not lead the sinner to God**

C. God's treatment of the problem of man's separation from Him is the Cross.

- ✞ Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Logos, is the only solution to the problem of the separated sinner. He came to our world, took our body, united with us and blessed our nature. He was crucified for us on the Cross, the Just for the Unjust, paid the price of our sins, rose from the dead, conquering the pains of death, made us rise with Him, ascended to heaven and ascended us with Him, when He sat on the right hand side of God, He prepared for us a place with the Father.

- ✞ St. Paul the Apostle says in his first Epistle to his student Timothy "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men the Man Jesus Christ who gave himself a ransom for all ..." (Timothy 2:5-6).

- ✞ St. Peter says in his first Epistle "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

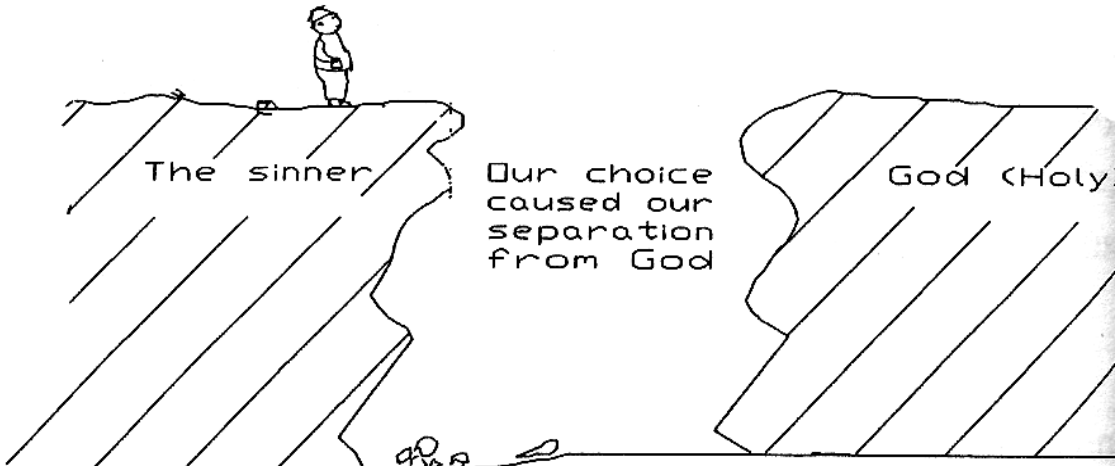
- ✞ St. Peter says in his Epistle to the Romans "But God demonstrated his own love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us ..." (Romans 5:8).

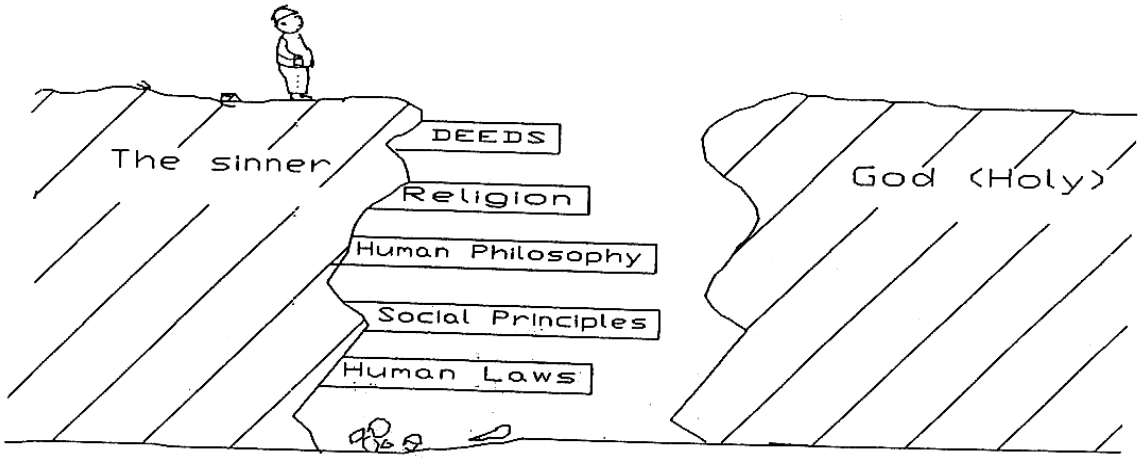
- ✞ The only way to reach God is the unity with Our Lord Jesus Christ <u>BUT</u> I have to choose this way out of my own free will.

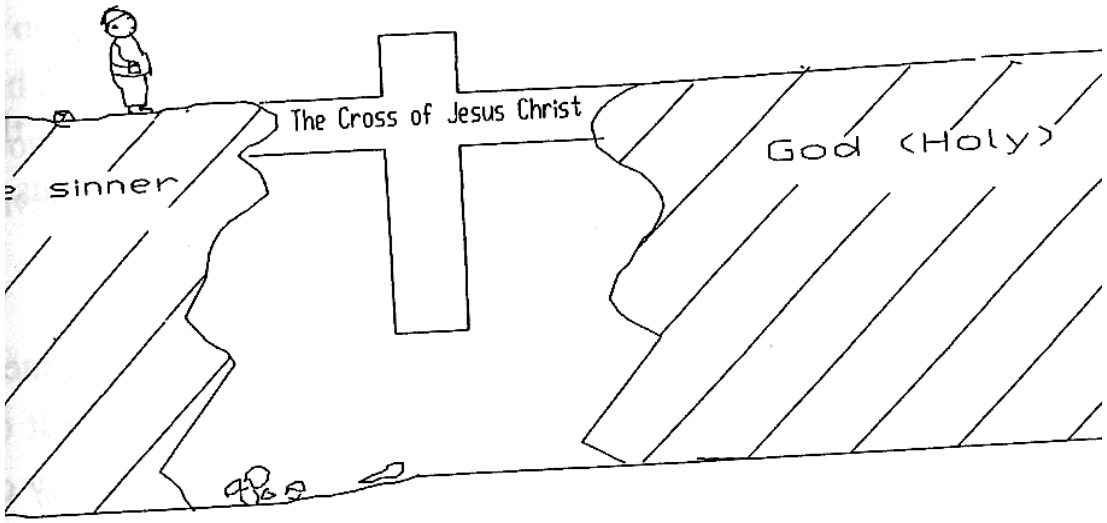
WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Only a Christian can talk and live in true inner peace because nothing can bridge the gap between man and God except the Cross.

(2) Sin causes separation from God. The separation from God, who is the source of life, is death.


The sinner
Our choice caused our separation from God
God (Holy)


The sinner
DEEDS
Religion
Human Philosophy
Social Principles
Human Laws
God (Holy)


sinner
The Cross of Jesus Christ
God (Holy)

JANUARY
THIRD SUNDAY

STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (II)

PLEASE READ the attached material entitled "Peace of the Heart", and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a two lesson series on how to lead a peaceful life in this troubled world.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson and discuss the various aspects with the students.

A. The Steps Required from me is the Unity with Christ

How could a weak sinner believe Christ as God and Saviour? How could he become one with Christ to receive through Him the salvation and go forth with him to the Father?

- ✞ St. Paul the Apostle says in his first Epistle to the people of Corinth" ... No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit".

- ✞ The Lord Jesus says "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of me" (John 15:26).

- ✞ So we say repeatedly, "In your light we see light" (Psalm 36:3). Accordingly, the work of the Holy Spirit of God within us is a must. This Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father with the worthiness of the Blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross. He is essential in his work within us in order to lead us to see, through him, the light of the Father and the Son.

B. How does the Holy Spirit work in us? In the Sacraments of the Church?

1. In the Sacrament of Baptism

The Holy Spirit provides us with spiritual enlightenment and so our inner sight is open to perceive our son-ship with God and our membership in the Body of Christ. We will come to know the secrets of God's Love and his preparation for our salvation.

✞ The Lord Jesus Christ announced that "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5). And He said to His Disciples after His resurrection, "All authority have been given to me in Heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and make Disciples of all the Nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:18-19) ... "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

Therefore we have to receive the New Spiritual birth and get rid of the bodily sin to come out of the baptism pure from sin.

2. In the Sacrament of the Chrismation

The Holy Spirit present Himself to us so that we take him inside us as a Holy Lamp constantly enlightening our inner sight, thus, notifying us daily of the truth about God, the world, the Human soul and heaven. He leads us from knowledge into knowledge and from light into light, not to provide us with mental joy but lead us to go forth living our new enlightened life.

✞ Our Lord Jesus Christ has designed this sacrament when He said "If any one thirsts, let come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

3. In the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession

In this Sacrament the sinner retreats from his wrong doing and confesses in front of the priest to receive and absolution through the power given to him from our Lord Jesus Christ. Doing this, he is renewed, and he sees the sign of his renewal. The Learned Turtilianos called it "the second port after drowning", and the Cartage meeting called it "the second baptism".

4. In the Sacrament of the Holy Communion

In this sacrament He present Himself to us as a Holy Meal, receiving it we become open with Him completely and become united with Him forever.

- ✞ "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on me will live because of me ..." (John 6:53-57)

But it is necessary to whosoever wants to receive Holy Communion, to be repentant, have confessed and proceeded humbly. "Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:27)

Accordingly, in order to enjoy happy peaceful life and to ensure a share in paradise, you have to fulfill the following prerequisites:

- ✞ Read your Bible every day in order to get to know the person or our Lord Jesus Christ more and more. You will learn and know how to get on in life from the Bible "your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path..."
- ✞ Speak to the Lord in your daily prayers and you can try praying continuously, "Men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).
- ✞ Present to the Lord your daily repentance ... fight sin and the evil one ... continue to confess and show obedience to the Father of Confession.
- ✞ Receive Holy communion in order to be one with Christ.
- ✞ After tasting the Lord Jesus ... go and serve the people and give help to the needy and poor ... Preach and say what God did to you.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Let us focus on prayers thanking God for all His blessing, confessing our sins and seeking help.

(2) Fasting and prayer are good methods to defeat the devil. We must be regular partakers of the Holy Communion with all what it requires of preparation.

PEACE OF THE HEART
By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Peace of the heart is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit dwells in one's heart, it gives peace to this heart, as the postle says, *"and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding... " (Phil 4:7)*

Peace was a gift from the Lord Jesus to the people, as He said, *"Peace I leave with you, peace 1 give to you. " (Jn 14:27)*

The one who is full of peace does not get troubled, or worried or disturbed, no matter how much pressure is on him from the outside.

His peace does not depend on the outer circumstances but on his confidence in God's protection and care and his faith in God's promises.

As long as the Lord exists, works and protects, there is no need to fear. For this reason the prophet David said, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me. Your rod and your staff they comfort me. " (Ps 23:4)*

His source of peace is his feeling that God is with him.

The Disciples were troubled when they were in the boat and they thought that the Lord was asleep, while the sea was high. They lost their peace. The prevailing factor was the outer circumstances and the feeling that God's work was not there. Therefore, the Lord arose and rebuked the wind and restored their peace to them.

Be firm inside, steadfast in your faith, then nothing from outside will shake you. Be like a house built on the rock, no wind or rain will affect it, as it is firm inside.

A good ship is never harmed by strong waves that hit it. But when does a ship get affected? When there is a hole that lets water inside it... Do you have a hole that would let water leak into yourself and drown it...

St Anthony was an example of peace of the heart. The Apostolic St Athanasius, said about him *"Anyone with a bitter soul, and disturbed thought, will have his heart filled with peace when he sees the face of St Anthony. "*

The one who is full of peace could flow over to others, granting them comfort...

Live then in peace, you will be comforted and live in confidence and calm, in good health, both spiritually and physically...

JANUARY
FOURTH SUNDAY

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (I)
TO HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUNDA III

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is lesson one in a series of two lessons on some questions by H.H. Pope Shenouda III. Please present the question first to the students for their attempts to answer.

1) THE CREATION OF ADAM AND EVE:

Q.: It is mentioned in the first Chapter of the Book of Genesis that the human being was created, both male and female. In the second chapter, we find the story about the creation of Adam and Eve. Is there a difference between the two stories?

A.: The story of the creation of the human being is one story about one person, but it was laid out in the first chapter in the form of a summary as a part of the whole story of creation. Then, in the second chapter it was mentioned in details, where there is description of Adam's creation from dust and Eve's creation from a bone from Adam's rib. Also in the second chapter, there is the naming of Adam and Eve; as well as Adam's feelings before and after the creation of Eve.

The two stories compliment each other. They do not differ. In the first chapter we find the given blessing and the food they were allowed to eat. In the second, we find the method of creation with the naming.

2) WOMEN DURING MENSTRUATION:

Q.: Is it permissible for a woman who is menstruating to receive Communion? And if not, then why, since it is a natural occurrence which is not her fault? If she stayed at home, is it alright if she prayed, read the Bible and carried on with the other parts of the service?

A.: In the house, she is allowed to serve God as she likes, but to take the Communion in church or outside it, that is not permissible at all.

It is not permissible that a person should receive Communion if he or she is bleeding, no matter if it is a woman or a man; likewise, anything that is flowing from the body. This is explained in the Bible. There are numerous phrases from the Bible and numerous rules of the Church, which justify this matter, and all have become a matter of course in the minds of the people.

Others might ask: "Why aren't men equally treated to women, when sometimes they could be having discharges in dreams at night and they still enter the church? Are they not forbidden by any kind of law? Is there no one who prevents them from entering, as the females are forbidden to? The maximum thing that a man, in this condition could do, is enter the church, but he is not allowed to take Communion; even so, he has to be cleaned before entering the church. There is a major difference between the man and a woman concerning fluid from the body; in the case of a man, it is instantaneous, but for a woman it takes days to clear.

Only in the following point equality does prevail: If the male has continuous flowing, he is forbidden to enter the church. There remains the question: What is the female's fault, for it is natural thing? There is no fault. But God would like us to remember the first sin; we feel the value of the sacrifice that was made for our sake.

Death is the payment of sinning. Although Christ died for our sake, He has left us a sign to remember Him by. This is that, man "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread and woman in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children". (Genesis 3:16-19).

During the pregnancy, the woman's cycle stops, and she remembers the first sin through the pains of pregnancy and childbirth. Outside the period of pregnancy, she is reminded of her sin during menstruation by her inability of participating in sacraments and of entering the church and receiving Communion.

3) CONCERNING ENTRANCE OF WOMEN TO THE ALTAR:

Q.: Why doesn't the female enter the altar, and what is the difference between her and the male concerning this matter?

A. Originally, entrance to the altar is available only to the people who serve the altar, and by that we mean priests, deacons and nobody else. Those who are

not priests or deacons should not enter the altar, no matter whether it is a man or a woman. Thus we find in the old churches, a window from a partition in the altar, where the believers taking Communion stand outside the altar.

Because of that, the altar rises 3 steps, from the ground of the church as symbol of the 3 levels of priesthood, through the servers of the altar. Since females do not belong to the priesthood, they cannot enter the altar. Therefore, there is distinguishing factors between male and female, but one rule that befalls both upon entering the altar.

Some might ask: "There are men who are not deacons; and yet, they enter the altar and receive Communion...What is the reason for that?"

As a matter of fact, it was only permissible to an Orthodox King who was anointed with the Holy Chrism considering that he was chosen for the Lord. The rest who enter, they could have other reasons, such as: many of the men may have been ordained in one of the levels of deaconship service, but they didn't happen to have their deacons' attire, and so they entered the altar with civilian clothes. Other men who imitated these persons, may also enter the altar, but it is a mistake that the church is trying to remedy, preventing all from entering the altar, even the ones who are ordained as readers, who do not serve on the same day they receive Communion.

There is another error that we notice which is forced on the church by some professional circumstances. Men, like construction workers, engineers, or designers enter the altar outside the service hours. Also some of the T.V. and radio men and photographers enter the altar.

4) US OR THE LORD:

Q.: Why do we limit divorce and encompass it within adultery and change of religion? Is this not a limitation or narrowing on people's family problems?

A.: We, as Christians, do not have a say in the prohibition of divorce, but it is God who prohibits it. It is God who ordered, in His sermon on the mountain saying: "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of fornication, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matthew 5:32). And He mentioned this issue again in His discussion with the Pharisees and said: "and I say to you whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another commits adultery" (Mat 19:9). He repeated these words in the Gospel of St.

Mark (10:11) and the Gospel of St. Luke (16:18). The command of limiting divorce to adultery has been repeated four times in the Gospels unlike any other command or commandment.

Concerning the subject of changing religions, it is mentioned in 1 Corinthian 7:15 and we cannot elaborate any further, since it is phrased very clearly. We do not have the means to produce legislation against the teachings of the Bible. The Apostle says: "... but even though we have preached to you, let him be accused." (Galantines 1:8). "If anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of this book, God will take away his share in the tree of life." (Revelation 22:18).

5) BECAUSE OF THE HARDNESS OF YOUR HEART:

Q.: Isn't it understood, from the following verse, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives", that hardness of the heart would be a good reason to divorce?

A.: This was permitted in the Old Testament, where numerous wives were allowed, but are we going back to that again? Even so, the Lord Jesus has answered this with two items: First: this was not from the beginning of time. Second: the Lord Jesus said "and I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication and marries another commits adultery" (Mat. 19:9)

6) IS THERE LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS

Q.: Scientist take great interest in the questions "Is there life on other planets?" So, what is Christ's point of view in this matter? If scientists, later on, prove that there is life, will this have an effect on religion?

A. Religion has left this matter, and the answer is neither yes or no. Whether it is proven, that either there is life on other planets or not, it does not have any effect on religion.

The Holy Bible was not meant to be either a book of astronomy nor a science book. It is a missionary book for salvation. It tells the story of salvation and its association with history, commandments and divinity.

As for the other planets, there is no association between them and our salvation. It is enough that they are lit for us at night, as a blessing for us from the Lord. The Lord has compared his saints, as they gather, to these planets.

There is nothing in the bible that objects to the finding: If it is proven that there is life on other planets or not.

7. GOD'S WILL AND PERMISSION:

Q.: If everything is completed by God's will, and nothing happens on the face of this earth without God's permission, why doesn't God prevent evil from happening?

A. Before answering, there are some mistakes in this question: It is wrong to say that nothing happens on the face of this earth except with God's permission. On earth, there is sin, wickedness, crimes and unjust actions. Are all these done by His permission? Far be it from you to say that. On earth, there is murder, adultery, theft, corruption and lies. Of course these things are not done by the permission of God. Does God want that to happen? Of course not.

Therefore, the sentence, "Everything is completed by God's will" is wrong theologically. The word "everything" includes wickedness too. It is impossible that wickedness will be completed by the will of God. He does not want wickedness. God wants goodness "wants salvation of everyone, and the knowledge of righteousness and its acceptance.

All the goodness that is done on earth is for the people or from the people, and it is done by the will of God. But this is not so with regard to wickedness. Thus, what is the point of view of wickedness, in respect of God's willingness? God has given the free will and permitted him to do what he wants, either good or evil. If there were not so, man would be fully ruled (i.e. has not free will).

Therefore, goodness is done by God's will and the wickedness that is done is allowed by God, and not God's will. There is a difference between the will of God and being allowed by God. God's will is all goodness. On the other hand, man's free will is what God has allowed to some of His creatures.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the students
in the class

FEBRUARY
FIRST SUNDAY

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (II)
TO HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUNDA III

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is lesson two in a series of two lessons on some questions of interest to youth and the answers by his Holiness Pope Shenouda III.

8) FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE:

Q.: Faith is connected to knowledge. There are some people whose mind does not allow them to understand faith or knowledge. What is the fate of these people?

A.: The Bible says: "who knows more, will be asked for more". On the capacity of a person's knowledge, and on the capacity of their thinking ability and intelligence, God will judge them. There is no one judgment for all. There are simple people with faith that is very deep. On the other hand, there are persons whose minds are very alert, but their faith is very weak. The sharpness of their thinking could lead them to doubt, and they hope to have the simplicity of the other people and their faith, but they cannot find it. Therefore, intelligence, logic and knowledge are not everything in faith.

Faith could be a gift from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9), and it could be from the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22). And therefore, faith is more attached to the spirit than the mind. The spirit is gifted to all, even to the weak, intelligent, the children and the simple-minded. Our Lord Jesus had said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and hast revealed them to babes". (Matthew 11:25).

9) DONATIONS AND TO WHOM DO WE GIVE?

Q.: Is it possible that we give from our donations, to our poor and needy relatives, or is it all for the poor strangers?

A.: It is alright that you give some of your donations to your poor relatives, since they are actually in need. The Bible says, "But if any one does not provide for his own and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (Timothy 5:8). However, do not give all donations to your relatives, but also to others. These donations are not only for the poor, but also for the church, the service and its necessities.

10) THE THOUGHT OF SUICIDE:

Q.: What is the punishment that a father of confession may bring upon a person who is thinking of suicide?

A.: Whoever thinks of committing suicide is more in need of treatment than of punishment. He should know that suicide is equal to a crime of killing. And killing oneself is like killing someone else, hence making a crime of killing. Also, a killer has a chance to repent, but whoever kills himself dies without being forgiven. Therefore, the Church does not pray on a person who commits suicide because he is a killer without repentance.

Suicide also sustains lack of faith and lack of hope because a person has lost all hope in turning to God to mend the problem which he will commit suicide for. This hopelessness was Judas' mistake which caused his death. The person commits suicide, thinks that death will relieve him from his problems, and does not believe in life after death. This is regarded as lack of faith.

If one who commits suicide believed that there is life after death, he will enter into it as a sinner, who is not forgiven and that he will be subjected to its sufferings, which are much greater than that on earth because this suffering is eternal. If he believes in this, then he already knows that death will not take away his troubles.

The priest's (father of confession's) duty is to help that person solve his problem, dissolve his hopelessness and open before him the doors of faith and hope. Also making him feel that for every problem there is solution; and the case is in need of patience until God takes action. During this time the priest should give him love and compassion, and not punish him and increase his troubles and pains which is not wise.

11) IN THE ABSENCE OF THE FATHER OF CONFESSION:

Q.: To whom do I go for confession in the absence of my father of confession it he or I traveled for a long while, say for few years?

A.: In this case, it is permissible to confess to another father. This is not considered changing fathers of confession, because you cannot stay without confession for a lengthy period of several years; it is an urgent matter.

This is also applicable in the case where the father of confession becomes ill for an extremely long period which prevents him from receiving confessions.

12) CANDLES IN THE CHURCH:

Q.: Why are candles used in the church, when there is electricity?

A.: Obviously, candles are used for illumination. They were used in former times because of their low intensity, which inspires humility and awe more than bright lights. We find that the churches that are only lit by candles are full of trembling.

Candles are now used even with the availability of electricity, on special occasions, in which the people pay special attention to the light.

They are used during the reading of the Gospel because we are enlightened by them. The Bible says: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to path" (Psalm 19), and also, "the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19). Candles are also placed facing icons of the saints, indicating that this saint was a light in the world, shining as a candle for others.

The candles are made of oil, in order to burn. The oil resembles the Holy Spirit. The candle light implies that the saint was the light in the world not on his own but with the Holy Spirit working in him. We also light candles as a sign of the angels being present since angels are lights and an "inflaming light." Two candles are placed on the altar symbolizing the two angels in the Lord's resurrection. Candles are illuminated at certain instances in the service, particularly during the sanctification of the sacraments. This is a sign of the presence of God Himself, in which He is "the true light, who is the light for who ever comes into the world".

The deacons hold candles, signifying that those who are in service to the church, carry light to the world, they are also full of light as the angels of God in heaven.

Candles in general, symbolizes the light of the righteous life which our Lord Jesus wants us to lead. The Bible represents goodness with light, and evil with darkness. The Lord said: "Walk in the light, so as darkness will not fall upon you."

Light also refers to the transfiguration of the righteous as happened to Moses and Elijah and as we will rise in the eternity with enlightened souls.

When the deacons hold candles around the priest, they remind us of the fire of the wise virgins who carried their lanterns, symbolizing readiness.

14) POVERTY AND BLESSING:

Q.: Is a lack of materialism a kind of lack of blessings?

A.: Of course not. There are many saints that lived in poverty. The Virgin Mary herself and Joseph the Carpenter were poor. The humbled Lazarus was poor. The Lord said "How difficult it is for rich people to enter the Kingdom of Heaven".

There is the poverty by choice, like the life of a monk and many of the saints who refused to be satisfied with the goodness of earth.

This does not mean that there were not others who were rich, for example, Job the righteous, Abraham the father of fathers and Joseph of Arimatheat. In the Old Testament, God blessed the righteous and rich as He promised "Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body and the fruit of thy grounds and the fruit of thy beasts, the increase of thy cattle, and the young of your flocks. Blessed shall be the basket and thy kneading-trough." (Deuteronomy 28:4-5).

However, those who were not given wealth by God, were given content and subsidized with the goodness of His Kingdom.

Wealth and Poverty are not the measure of God's gratification and blessing, especially in the New Testament, in which spiritual gifts are important and God blesses the little and makes it plenty.

FEBRUARY
SECOND SUNDAY

PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT: JOEL - (I)
SIN CORRUPTS THE BODY AND SOUL

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about Joel the prophet. The focus here is on the effect of sin on the human body and soul.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

INTRODUCTION:
It is written in the Coptic Orthodox Synaxarion, in the reading from the twenty first day of the blessed month of Papah, that 'on this day the great prophet Joel son of Pethuel from the tribe of Reuben passed away. He had prophesized at the time of Asa son of Abiam son of Roboam son of Solomon ...", and that is all we know about the history of his life or the time of his appearance.

The word Joel, in Hebrew, means "Jehovah is God", and it is a popular name throughout the Holy Bible. In other words, there are many people with that name.

As for his prophetic epistle, it can be summarized as follows:

✞ The occurrence of the famine to the Jews ... (Joel 1:10-12,16,17,18-20).

✞ The disappearance of the sacrifices from the Jewish temple ... (Joel 1:9,13-2:14).

✞ The incarnation of The Word of God " the Logos", the coming of The Holy Spirit, Christ's second coming, and the glory of the church ...(Joel 2)

We also learn from his epistle the following important points:

✞ The necessity of fasting (Joel 1:14)

- ✞ The necessity of repentance and weeping over sin (Joel 1:13,2:13,2:17).

- ✞ The mercy of God and His Kindness. (Joel 2:13,17).

- ✞ The justice of God. (Joel 1:15,3:1-8,12,13).

Let us now study and contemplate a few topics from the book of Joel.

The occurrence of famine to the Jews, the hordes of locust and the various chastisements. (Joel 1:1-4,2:25).
The prophet Joel starts off his epistle with a word of warning about God's chastisements using the weakest creation, the locust, in all the stages of its growth to achieve through it a great strength. St. John Chrysostom comments saying: "the strength of God is more evident when He uses the very weak creatures to carry out immense powers".
That is what the Holy Bible says, "my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9)

A) "The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: Hear this, you aged men, give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. "(Joel 1:1-4).

In this section the prophet asks them to tell their children of the matter, which is the voice of God and His dealings so that they can pass on the experience of life to the next generation. Similarly every generation passes on what they receive.

This is the tradition that in its essence is the dealings of God with mankind. Thus, St. Paul says "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do." (Philippians 4:9)

The cutting locust is that which has just come out of its egg, unable to move. The swarming locust is that which has started to crawl and walk. The hopping locust is that which developed small wings. The destroying locust is that which has become capable of flying.

From those four sentences (the cutting, swarming, hopping, and destroying locust), the following can be gathered:

First: We Know that the number 4 indicates the world with its cardinal points: north, south, east and west. It also points to the body that is taken from the earth, or in other words - from the world. These raids depict the battle of the love of the world against the believer and the attacks of the temptations of the body against the spirit. If someone was to fall under sin, God allows that he be disciplined via his sin, and so he is disciplined by the same sin which he committed. This is what God is always proving to us. What befalls us from disciplines is but a normal fruit of an act we have committed. For, He says "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself' (Jeremiah 2:17), "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart". (Jeremiah 4:18)

Example: Judas who loved the world, not God, and the temptations of the body, not the spirit. That is why his end was ghastly.

Second: God, in His disciplines, takes us gradually so that we may awaken from our sins. He begins by allowing the tiny cutting locust to attack us and if we do not come back to Him, He allows the swarming locust, and if we still do not repent, the hopping locust follows, and then the destroying locust.

Third: These stages of locust (the cutting, swarming, hopping, and destroying), point to the war of sin against the person and its conquering of the heart. It starts with the very small cutting locust which sneaks into the heart or the mind or the senses, furtively like "the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards". (song 2:15). These that a person underestimates reign and corrupt the heart. When the cutting locust carries out its subtle role, the door opens to the swarming locust where other sins crawl to us and so one sin delivers us to the bigger sin.

Fourth: St. Jerome says that Joel the prophet speaks to us of the land of the twelve tribes of Israel that was devastated by virtue of the raids of locust. However, he prophesizes that after the devastation of this nation because of their sin, the Holy Spirit of God comes upon the servants of God. (Joel 2:29). This is the same Spirit that came upon the one hundred and twenty souls in the upper room of Zion. (Acts 1:13,15)

B) "I will restore to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you." (Joel 2:25).

First: St. Jerome says "Let us concentrate on the very little things. I do not speak of the elephant or the lion or the different animals, but speak of the little insects. If God made all these things for the service of mankind then why did He create the little insects? The answer, very briefly, is to demonstrate the weakness of mankind and how humans can get scared of a little insect."

Second: We see here God's compassion on His nation. What God allowed of torment for His people was due to His jealousy over His holy land and His compassion towards His nation who are dearly loved to Him. As, while He is disciplining, He also asks His children to look upon Him not as a revenging judge but as a loving father who is anxious to be happy with His children and pleased with them.

1. Joel laments the corruption of the temple as a symbol of the corruption of the soul. (Joel 1:8-13).

1) St. Ambrose the bishop of Milan says "truly that God has said to Joel the prophet, "Lament [my land] like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth." (Joel 1:8). He cries because of the soul that has lost the Godly grace due to sin." This means if a person thinks that when he commits a sin he is satisfying his deprived soul's hunger and quenching his body's thirst with pleasures, he is actually putting them in a state of widowhood.

2) "Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholding from the hours of your God." (Joel 1:13)

The drink offering points to the life of happiness that the Holy Spirit pours abundantly in the midst of the Church's pains because it is the sacrifice of God that is united with Christ, the sacrifice. As is the cessation of the drink offering is a removal of the everlasting spiritual happiness from the people so that depression may come to replace it. This is the natural fruit of sin.

How can a person rid himself of the destructive corruption brought about by sin? The prophet Joel speaks to us of fasting and repentance as a remedy for this corruption.

C. The prophet Joel teaches us about the accepted fasting. (Joel 1:14, 2:12-13)

1) "Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord." (Joel 1:14)

This means that during fasting, a person has to strive to stop his evil works like anger and the love of the pleasures in the world.

2) "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify the fast, call a solemn assembly." (Joel 2:15)

Pope Athanasius the apostolic says: "Pay attention to Joel the prophet blowing the trumpet and afterwards pay attention to the announcement and the warning that the fasting be holy".

D. The prophet Joel teaches us about the accepted repentance. (Joel 2:12-17)

As God revealed His disciplines to the person who leads life that harms the soul, body and spirit, He also clearly revealed the door that is open to everyone, which is the door of repentance. This prevents a person from falling into hopelessness. For God says on the tongue of Joel the prophet: "Yet even now', says the Lord, 'Return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments'. Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil. Who knows whether He will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him, a cereal offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priest, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, 'Spare thy people, O Lord, and make not Thy heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?" (Joel 2:12-17).

E. From this call to repentance, we notice the following:

1) Repentance is accepted during a person's life on Earth as he can return to God like the return of a child to his father. However, after he departs from this world, there is no longer a chance for repentance. Thus, it is imperative that a person does not lose the chance of repentance as it is evident in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, (Luke 16:19-31) where the rich man lost his only chance of repentance which was during his life on the Earth.

2) Repentance is the return to God. This is clear in the saying "Return to Me" because sin is against God and farness from God like the farness of the prodigal son from his father.

3) Repentance is the return "with all your heart", which means that the sinner repents from committing sin entirely, returns to God, and purifies his heart entirely, "A pure heart create within me O God".

4) Repentance is the return to God wholeheartedly aided and supported by "fasting, weeping, and mourning."

5) Repentance at its core is built on the love of God to the person and that "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love". This is the encouraging issue, that our God is a loving God beyond man's imagination.

6) Repentance is required from everyone and that is clear from the phrase "gather the people", and from the phrase, "let the priests ... weep."

7) The meaning of "repents of evil" on the part of God is that God shows His love, kindness, forgiveness and acceptance of the sinner. It is like the father who disciplines his child strictly pretending that he is cruel so that his child may return to him.

8) The meaning of "whether he will not turn and repent" on the part of God does not mean a lack of certainty but is a sign of the standing before God with humility and contriteness beseeching His mercy, because God asks for humbleness in our repentance as "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalms 51:17).

Let us summarize what we have said so far:
The disciplines of God to the person who is living in sin are due to the love of God for him. Also, the corruption of the person from the inside is caused by sin but

opening the door to repentance and returning to God aided by fasting and humility. As for the radical repair, it is God's act of deliverance implemented through the Holy Spirit inside man.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) If someone was to fall under sin, God allows that he be disciplined via his sin, and so he is disciplined by the same sin which he committed.

(2) Sin corrupts the body and soul.

(3) Fasting, prayers and repentance are the solutions.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

FEBRUARY
THIRD SUNDAY

PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT: JOEL – (II)
THE NEED FOR THE SAVIOUR

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a series of two lessons about Joel the prophet. In this lesson the focus is on the need for the Saviour.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
Start by reviewing the previous lesson then continue on with the following points.

A. The need for the Saviour. The incarnation of the word of God "the Logos".

"And the Lord soars from Zion, and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge to His people, a stronghold to the people of Israel." (Joel 3:16).

That is why the prophet Joel articulated the incarnation of the Word of God and His appearance in Judea and the region of Jerusalem. He also articulated that the Saviour, in His coming will be a "refuge to His people, a stronghold" and that He will come in strength - "roars". That is how Christ came, in the company of great heavenly powers. St. Ephraim the Syrian and martyr speaks to us about God as a refuge to us saying: "Let God be your refuge. If His care does not abandon you, nothing can harm you.

Do not fear the enemies who viciously attack you. God will protect your soul and turn your detriments into gains. As for the sign of triumph through God, it is when we seek refuge in Him as a stronghold for our souls. For He will reveal Himself in us and will not allow a stranger to reign in Jerusalem (i.e. our hearts), and strangers

will not pass through her." "So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who dwell in Zion, My holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy and strangers shall never again pass through her." (Joel 3:17).

B. The church in the age of grace.

"And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the valley of Shittim." (Joel 3:18).

The mountains, the hills, the stream beds, and the house of the Lord are nothing but the corners of the church that God dwells in. Granting triumph, He makes of her children holy mountains that drip sweet wine that quenches the reachers, inexhaustible stream beds that everyone seeks refuge in and a house of the Lord that delights the heavenly. The mountains also point to the Lord's vinegrowers's effectiveness through the strength of Christ. As well, his talk about the "fountain that shall come forth from the house of the Lord" points to the baptism that Ezekiel the prophet saw "issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east and the water flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar". (Ezekiel 47:1-5). Likewise, Christ said "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water." (John 7:37-38).

C. The Virgin Mary the mother of God.

1) "... and a fountain shall come forth out of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim." (Joel 3:18). St. Jerome say "The virgin Mary is a garden locked ... a fountain sealed" (Song 4:12) and by this the virgin Mary is a fountain for blessings and intercessions for all the members of the church "For you are an able, compassionate, supportive mother, who gave birth to the fountain of life, my king and my God Jesus Chrsit my hoe" as we pray in the Agpeya.

2) "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things." (Joel 2:21). Therefore, Joel the prophet describes the virgin as the holy land and that God works in strongly and glorifies His work within it. Here we compare the angel's good news to the virgin "Do not be afraid, Mary" and the saying of the virgin "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ..." (Luke 1).

D. The salvation.

"And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls." (Joel 2:32) Compare this to what was said in the book of Acts. "And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord leads to salvation but only the genuine call from the heart because that is what Christ said "Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21). Thus, calling the Lord from the heart coupled with the belief in Him as well as the acts that agree with His commandments leads to the salvation of the soul. "for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.: (Luke 6:45).

E. The work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out My spirit." (Joel 2:28-29). Here God does not hold back anything from His people, but He grants them Himself and infuses His Holy Spirit inside them so that a fundamental change happens within them. It is the greatest gift that God bestowed upon mankind after He prepared for it by giving the sacrifice of salvation on the cross. This is the gift that the church enjoyed on the Pentecost day as St. Peter the Apostle announced (Acts 2:14-21) and that is to be given to any person who approaches God. It is the gift of God to sons and daughters with no gender discrimination. It is a free endowment for all those who accept it, it is also the gift of God to the elderly so He renews their youth, and to the servants so He frees them.

St. Cyril the Jerusalemite comments on this phrase "pour out My Spirit..." which means that the gift of the Holy Spirit is given abundantly and strongly.

St. Ambroseous comments on the same phrase "pour out My Spirit..." saying "He did not say "pour out the spirit" but "My Spirit" because we cannot accept the Holy Spirit in its entirely but we accept what we can take from Him according to His will.

Hence, the Holy Spirit is no longer like The Old Testament, given to kings, prophets and priests for a specific purpose and for a specific time. Now the grace

of the Holy Spirit is poured in the Christian hearts for everyone and He bears good fruit in the church (Joel 2:21-29). The Holy Spirit is He who works in the sacraments and He who works in the church. He is the director, the comforter, and the leader in prayer.

F. The Last Days

"The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes." (Joel 2:31).

We notice here the consistency between the prophecy of Joel the prophet and the word of our good savior on the signs of the end of the world and His second coming that is fearful and full of glory. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven," (Matthew 24:29-30).

G. The great day of the Lord.

"The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: And the Lord shall utter his voice before His army: for His camp is very great: for He is strong that executeth His word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" (Joel 2:10-11).

St. Yosabios the Caesarian says: "Now is the end of all this passing life." As the apostle says "The exterior form of this world will pass so that a new world will follow it. Instead of the visible planets, Christ Himself will shine as He is in the sun of the new creation and her king. Great is the strength of this new sun and great is her splendor so that the sun that shines now, the moon and the other planets will be darkened in front of this great light".

The quaking earth is the body that weakens and wanes in front of the defilements that a person commits for the enjoyment of his body and comfort. While he thinks that he is comforting his body, he is shaking it unknowingly. As for the heaven, it points to the soul that was supposed to be a center for the kingdom of God and seat of his residence. The soul loses its safety and its peace during sin and it quakes. The heavenly lights flicker and vanish as a sign of losing spiritual insight and the entry into a state of spiritual aimlessness.

H. The general condemnation.

"For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land." (Joel 3:12-)

Then he resumes saying: "Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about." (Joel 3:12).

† The prophet Joel points to the great day of the Lord that, in it, God will be glorified by breaking the pride of the gentiles and exalting His children, who responded to the fatherly discipline, granting them everlasting endowments.

† The judgment occurs at the valley of Jehoshaphat which in Hebrew means "the valley of Jehovah who judges" because Jehovah Himself is the one who judges. God is the condemner because He is the examiner of all hearts.

† Let us depart for the valley of Jehoshaphat to see God judge for us against the devil and his temptations and threats. Let us feel what the prophet previously announced "For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion" (Isaiah 34:8).

I. A summary of the book of Joel.

The book of Joel distinguished itself from the rest of the prophetic books by not mentioning the time of the writer's prophecy. It did not mention the names of the kings of Judah or Israel contemporary to Joel because his prophecy focused on the "day of the Lord". As if the Divine revelation wanted to announce that this was the prophecy for all the generations. Let every person attend to the day of the Lord for it is very close. Let us prepare for it by fasting, repentance and by the work of the Holy Spirit who lives inside us so that we may condemn ourselves rather than being condemned by others. Let us accept the rebuke of the Holy Spirit here, so that we may enjoy the glory in that day. It is very joyful for every soul attached to Christ and struggles by the arm of her beloved.

NOTES

FEBRUARY
FOURTH SUNDAY

GOD'S LOVE AND HIS BALANCED COMMANDMENTS – (I) IN THE LIFE OF THE YOUTH

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about God's balanced commandments in the life of the youth. Following these commandments would result in a youth victorious over all the temptations of the world.

MEMORY VERSE:

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" 1 John 4:4

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Bible has talked to us a lot about the strength of the Christian youth. The Bible states that the secret behind this strength lies in the Christian youth's strong belief in God and His strength over satan. As an example Saint John said, "I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 John 2:14). In addition St. John also said, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

But how can the youth believe in God while they are in the midst of all these changing currents of thought, earthly delights and the evil one's devilish schemes? The only way for them is to believe:

1. In God's love for the human beings in general and His specific interest in

and care for the youth.

2. That God knows our nature very well. So, His commandments are balanced, good and suitable for the human being. They would guarantee a happy, quiet life for the youth "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word" (Psalm 119:9).
3. That Satan's love is false. Satan is the human being's enemy and the enemy of all good.
4. That due to Satan's false 'love', he would present certain commandments and thoughts to human beings. If followed by man they would lead to his doom, "The spirit clearly says that in latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). So what would the consequence of following the teachings of Satan be? Doom! As St. Paul said, "And in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

The purpose of this lesson is to clarify that our loving God's commandment, God who knows our nature, is a balanced commandment that can supply the youth with complete happiness and eternal life. But the commandment of Satan, who hates human beings, would break us, as it leads to our doom on earth and prevents us from entering the heavenly kingdom.

To clarify the above we will talk in this lesson about the following:

A) God's true love and Satan's tricks through false love.
B) God's love for the youth in particular.
C) The role of God's balanced commandments in the practical life of the youth compared with Satan's phony ways.

A. God's true love and Satan's tricks through false love:

1. The first clue to God's love for us:

The clue that proves God's love for us is that we are here today, "God is Love" (1 John 4:8). As St. John - he was called the beloved because he felt God's deep love in his heart - said "God is Love". But how can God love when there is no creature that can return His love?

It was God's will to create creatures that He would love and that would love Him back, that He would talk to and that would talk to Him. God created them to be happy with and they would be happy with Him.

That is the reason why God created us, all the other creatures including angels and all the powerful heavenly creatures.

"Then God said, "let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1:26).

Therefore we feel God's love that is shown by His creating us and by the fact that we are here today.

2. A small commandment to learn as proof of God's love for us:

God wanted us to share this love with Him. Therefore, He gave us a small commandment to learn. He said: "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15).

What was this commandment? "But of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden", God hath said, "You shall not eat of it - neither shall you touch it, lest you die." Were Adam and Eve able to remember this little commandment? No! They didn't remember and they ate from the tree.

Satan came to Eve via a serpent ..... and as we say in the liturgy, "through the words of the serpent", and as the Holy bible says, Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die'". "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:1-5).

3. The false love that Satan offers:

Satan offered a type of love called "lying love" why? Because it's a lie! The promises he offered are not true; after Adam and Eve ate from the tree they died

just as God told them. This is the lying love that Satan and the world offer us..... That lying love breaks us because it is not true love.

Satan knew very well what God had said to them. But he tricked them with words that destroy. He made them disbelieve in what God had told them. He made Eve see that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes. It was a tree to be desired as it made one wise.

Eve took of the fruit and ate from it, and gave also unto her husband with her, who also ate, as the Holy Bible tells us. Hence they did not obey God's true words and fell as they were deceived by false love.

4. God's love is the true love:

The love of our Lord Jesus Christ is the true love; it is a love unlike any love in the world. This love is true because:

A. Jesus Christ is our Creator and the Source of all love; with Him we love one another.
B. As we say in the Holy Liturgy, "For you have not left us but entrusted us with your holy disciples." This is another hint through which God showed us His love. So that even though we disobeyed Him and we didn't follow His commandments He would still love us and prepare for our salvation. Hence when the time came he came to us on earth to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ. "There is no love stronger than that where a human dies for the life of another". Our loving Jesus Christ is telling us, "No ..... I love you very much and I will die for you."
C. God's love for us is a true love and His promises are true promises and everything He tells us is true. For example, God's promise to Abraham that he would bless him is true for God blessed him and his generation. Hence we say God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

5. Every human needs to love and be loved truly.

Every human needs love in his life ... and the source of the love that is in each of us is from God Himself. That's why this love can truly attract a lot of people to the church. I have met a lot of people who have loved and lived with our church because they have felt the love in the church's congregation, that love which cannot be found in the world.

There is a story that our Pope Shenouda III always recites about a man named 'Habib Girgis' ... He was his teacher and he loved the Pope a lot. One day while the Pope was leaving his home (after meeting with Habib Girgis) he kept on thinking saying to himself, "If there is this much love in a human, then how much is God's love?" That's why we need to feel God's love in our lives since it's a love that has attracted many people and is still attracting many more. Consider the case of the prostitute who was sentenced by the people to be stoned. Instead she had the chance to meet with the Lord Jesus Christ and he said to those who were about to stone her, "Who of you is without sin shall cast the first stone."

Amazingly enough they all backed out and didn't cast the stones. So Jesus said to her, "Has anyone condemned you ... nor do I condemn you ... go in peace."

I wonder, what that woman's feelings were after that meeting. What changed in her life? Surely she felt that there is something different about the Lord Jesus Christ; that He is not like anyone else she has met.

It is love that doesn't condemn and doesn't judge, love that has changed her life into doing good ... We hope that we would get a chance to experience our Lord Jesus Christ's love in our lives so that we would love just as our Savior and God Jesus Christ loved.

I imagine that woman after her life had been changed by Christ's love. Instead of spending nights in sin she would spend her nights in prayer and in love with God ... What a change!

6. Lessons to be learnt from the false love that Satan and the world offer:

There are many people in the world who have experienced this false love since this is what the world offers. For example, if a friend invites you to a dance party involving drinking beer, does this person really love you and care for you and your life?

The truth is that this love will not only hurt you, but will also destroy your life completely and you will drift away from the path leading to life.

As for those friends, it's according to their interests and ways that they would show love. However, the truth is that they do not understand true love, the love that builds and not destroys a human.

Another example would be when someone takes a certain habit like smoking or drinking gradually, he or she gets addicted. Soon enough he or she ends up trying

to get rid of that habit but in vain. Thus, many people get entangled and are now very miserable.

Such a path is the false love that is offered to God's children by the world. Hence what we should do is to recognize it and stay away from it before it harms our lives.

7. Is it true, when God doesn't respond to some of our requests in certain cases that this conflicts with God's love for us?

Because God loves us, He has given us the commandments. If followed, we would feel the meaning of His love for us, live a better life and be successful in everything.

However, the world could offer us certain temptations that can conflict with God's commandments. We might not recognize that and end up asking for them.

Therefore, God would not fulfill our request until we can understand that if he had fulfilled it, it would have led us to our doom. It is due to God's love and mercy that He has not granted these things so that we don't fall into sin.

God loves us but it might not be the appropriate time to fulfill my request or that request is not the best for me. We should be able to believe and have faith in God's love and that He is the one with the power and strength over everything.

8. How can I feel God's love in me?

Through the faith that God loves me and that He is the source of all good in my life. I pray to God He gives me all I need according to His love and His will. Thus I can earn God's love.

The idea of punishment doesn't exist in Christianity. Why? Because we say that God loves us and not punishes us. Instead, we should say that God instructs us. God instructs us if we do wrong because of His love for us. If God instructs us, it is because we are children and it is for our good.

Finally, we need to experience God's love in our life by believing and trusting in His deep true love. If we follow his commandments and words and believe in Him, we will live in happiness and joy and there would be no problem that couldn't be solved with God.

B. God's love to the youth in particular.
Why do we want to concentrate on the love of God for the youth?

1. We want to discover God's love for the youth through His care of their personal affairs.
2. Our Lord Jesus Christ showed much kindness toward the youth.

The first example is the beloved St-John, who was one of the twelve Disciples and the youngest of them. He was a youth and was called the beloved St-John. He was the one who laid his head on our Lord Jesus Christ's chest and followed him to the Cross. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave him much care, love and kindness because he was the youngest disciple.

Another example is the young rich man who came asking the Lord "What can I do to have a place in Heaven?" The Bible says that God looked at him and He loved him. That expression is very important as it shows that the Lord Christ has a lot of affection for the youth. The third point is because it is the youth age that is affected most by the environment. What is going to make up your personality when you are 30 years old? Some factors are the genetics you are born with. Other factors are the new ideas that come along. That is why the Lord Christ gave a lot of attention to the youth. He knew that if He wins them during their youth years, then He has won them forever. It is then that they are most affected by all ideas that come around them.

In the Old Testament we read the verse "Remember Your Lord in the Days of Your Youth." It is a call for love. He is calling all the youth not because He wants to give them orders but it is a call for love. He is saying, "I love you. Come, I love you and I like to be with you."

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) God who created us He knows what is best for the youth and for everyone else. He gave us His commandments out of His love and not to exercise authority over us. Following God's commandments will make us victorious over the world.

(2) Satan, on the other hand, has hatred towards mankind, but pretends to have love. Following the false love of Satan would lead to man's destruction. For example, Satan may try to convince the youth about smoking. Satan does this because he hates everyone and knows that smoking will be appealing but then the person will become addicted to it and this will cause severe health problems later on.

(3) We need to focus on God's love and His blessing in our lives. This will help us to exchange love with God. Thus we benefit.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

MARCH
FIRST SUNDAY

GOD'S LOVE AND HIS BALANCED COMMANDMENTS – (II) IN THE LIFE OF THE YOUTH

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a series of two lessons about God's balanced commandments in the life of the youth. Following these commandments will result in a youth who is victorious over all the temptations of the world.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"*** 1 John 4:4

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
Start by reviewing the previous lesson with the students and then proceed.

C. The role of God's balanced commandments in the practical life of youth in comparison to Satan's phony ways.

Let us now examine Christ's love as manifested in youth issues:

Interpersonal Issues and Personal Issues:

<u>I. Interpersonal Issues.</u>
1) Family
2) Marriage
3) Sexuality
4) Friendships

<u>II. Personal Issues.</u>
1) Church and Faith

2) Materialistic Things
3) Personal Attributes
4) Eternal Life

We will try to figure out Christ's love and consider what His balanced, practical, and workable rules say about these things. The world's set of rules are not actually right because the world did not make us but Christ did. He made us. He created us and gave us the proper tools. We are going to discover that fine line between the Bible and the world.

I. Interpersonal Issues.

1) Family

Out of His great love, God gave us parents to take care of us. He gave them the commandment "Ye fathers, provoke not your children", and gave the children the commandment "Children obey your parents in the Lord." It is a sign of love, respect, care and warmth on the parents' part yet cooperation and obedience on the children's.

This relation would give the children a spiritual and healthy environment to grow up in. They will have faith and spirit to give glory to the name of God. Examples of Christian families :

* The family of St. Mark the Evangelist
* The family of Aquila and Priscilla
* The family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus
* The family of Abraham the father of fathers, Sarah and their son Isaac.

In contrast, the families of this world do not enjoy this family tie. The son or daughter may need their parents' care, yet are obliged to leave the family home to live on their own. Also disobedience is the common sign between the sons of this world. The children want to be completely independent of their parents to mix and mingle with the world.

2) Marriage.

Jesus Christ had blessed marriage when He attended the wedding of Cana. When the Pharisees asked Him whether or not a man can divorce his wife for any reason, His answer was "Have ye not read, that He who made them at the beginning made

them male and female, and He said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. They say unto Him, why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, whosever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, and who so marrith her which is put away doth commit adultery", Matthew 19:4-9.

Christ our Lord has put the foundation for a steady undivorced relation between man and wife until they die except in the case of adultery. Yet the deep meaning is that this relation is not between man and woman only; it is a three way relation where Christ connects both human sides together. Then the wife sees in her husband's personality and behavior the characteristics of Christ who is ready to sacrifice even himself in place of every person in the church. The same applies to the husband who sees in his wife the characteristics of Christ's love and His meekness and humility; thus the husband loves his wife increasingly. The difference is huge between Christian marriage and that of other religions. Christian marriage is an opportunity for both sides to live as a living example of the characteristics of Christ, and to have a strengthened spiritual life. It also gives each side the partnership since men need an example to follow to grow in spirituality.

My beloved youth, when it is time for you to get married, be careful to have your marriage in your Coptic Orthodox church, leaning to the Christian basis and the characteristics of Christ. The same applies to you young ladies, when the time comes for your marriage.

What about the marriage of the sons of this world? I find no need to write much about it since the reader knows well that the rate of divorce is over 50% in the western society.

3) Sexuality.

The sexual need is not unclean in itself, because God did not create an unclean sense in human beings. Everything created by God is to be used in the proper situation. An example is the mind or the energy. Man has to use the thinking ability to think about what is worth thinking. When there is not any matter worth thinking about, man can rest his mind. The same applies to the sexual drive. The

drive is planned to be exercised in marriage with the purpose of reproduction. It also needs to be exercised through holy love that ties man and wife through the work of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of marriage. Then the sexual drive should not be fulfilled outside the sacrament of marriage, but should be saved in holiness to be used at the proper time.

When it is misused outside the plan of God, which is for the good of man, then, it is considered a sin since man disobeyed the commandment of God to not commit adultery.

As for the sons of this world, they practice sex in every way, without fulfillment. "Whoever drinketh from this water shall thirst again" and even be plagued with physical, psychological, and spiritual diseases as a result of the evil comradeship. Such a man will have problems throughout his work and study.

4) Friendships.

In Christian life the youth care for their life with God and at the same time they build a relationship with the saints. They study their biography, follow their example and ask for their intercession during afflictions. The Christian youth also build spiritual friendships inside the church. Does a Christian person need many friends? No! The Bible says: "a man of many friends ruins himself". Proverbs 18:24. In the multitude of friendships a person cannot find enough time for prayers, calmness and deep spirituality. A profound Christian has no need for a lot of friends especially intimate ones.

II. <u>Personal Issues.</u>

1) Church and Faith.

We give thanks to God for giving us the Coptic Orthodox Holy Catholic and Apostolic church which hands us the strong faith from generation to generation. It also hands us the Holy Bible without any alterations. The church also teaches us the seven sacraments through which the Holy Spirit fulfills all our spiritual needs. The church hands us a holy liturgy with its beautiful tunes and meaningful traditions. We see in church vivid examples of martyrs and saints for spiritual guidance. This would set the perfect environment to give man spiritual warmth and inner peace to guarantee a share in the paradise of joy. The church provides for a true Christian to live within the love of Christ fighting against sin.

Does the world give peace? The world gives sensual pleasures i.e. pleasures for the eyes, ears, and all the senses. Yet, it cannot provide inner peace that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The man of this world lives worried and sad, unable to sleep soundly and unable to live in peace of mind.

2) Materialistic Things.

We live in a materialistic world. Yet we are surrounded by angels "the angel of the Lord encompeth round about them that fear Him." We are also surrounded by the evil powers.

In this materialistic world, one needs to work to be able to live. Whoever does not work does not eat as well. The idea of work in Christianity is for legal earnings and for the benefit of the society and individuals, and also to provide for the needs of men. But man cannot worship money since the love of money is against the love of God. Man is in control of money and not the contrary. Therefore, we see heroes of giving, like St. Abraam the Bishop of Fayoum and Giza and teacher Ibrahim El Gohary and many others. People use part of their money to spend on their own personal needs and the rest goes to the needy and to the church. In this world, the dollar is the master of everything. Many personal disputes are caused by money issues. In many cases people change their principles for money. They even destroy their psychological health for money.

3) Personal Attributes

In a Christian person, you see the qualities of Christ. He has a smiling face even during the most critical situations because he believes that everything works for the best for those who love God. A Christian person is always in peace as he is a peacemaker. It has been known that during the first centuries in Egypt, when a non-believer was found smiling, then he must have met a Christian earlier that day. The peace and even the smile of a Christian are reflected on others.

Meekness and kindness are qualities of the Christians along with calmness of speech and acts. In fact you can see the different behavior and features of a true Christian. Sons of this world tend to be more angry, tense, aggressive and jealous. They have less peace.

4) Eternal Life.

Eternal life or one's share in heaven is the center of a Christian's life and is also his aim. His treasure is in heaven. Men of this world try to make more money on earth, while a Christian may decrease earthly money to build a treasure in heaven. St. Antony understood this rule and sold 300 acres to dedicate himself for prayers and for the pleasures of living in intimacy with God.

Thus, our church presents for us the largest number of martyrs around the world. She has also constructed monasteries where monks and nuns impose self determined poverty seeking eternal life.

As for the people of this world, there is no value for eternal life. They have no belief in life after death, but they say let us drink, and play, for tomorrow we shall die.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) We thank our Heavenly Father because He has given to us His appropriate commandments. He created us and He knows about our needs and the prevailing condition around us. Let us all abide by His commandments.

(2) The love of the world is untrue. The Lord's words are a lamp to my steps. So Lord open my ears to hear Your voice and allow me to have a relationship of love with You instead of with the world.

MARCH
SECOND SUNDAY

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY WITH THE AGPEYA? – (I)
BECAUSE WE SHOULD PRAY WITH PSALMS

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about the necessity of praying with the Agpeya. In this lesson we will illustrate that praying with the Agpeya means that we are using the same wording and ideas inspired by the Holy Spirit to be an effective prayer.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***" ... If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us"*** 1 John 5:14

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. Introduction

✞ **A discussion with a young girl:**

An 18 year old girl complained to a priest saying: "I am going through a stage of weakness in my spiritual life. What is the reason and how can I overcome it?"

The priest answered, "This state of weakness in the spiritual life and the distancing from God is caused by inefficient prayers and relationship with God because, "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." James 1:17

The girl answered saying, "I pray several times each day but I do not feel any effect."

The priest asked: "Do you pray with the Agpeya?"

She answered, "No. Is there a verse in the Holy Bible that indicates the necessity of praying with Agpeya?

The priest said: "There is no verse in the Holy Bible saying you should pray with the Agpeya, but when you use it in prayers, it accords totally with (1) the Holy Bible, (2) the Holy Traditions and (3) The Ecumenical Councils.

The girl asked, "What is the Agpeya?"

The priest said, "The Agpeya is a prayer book that contains seven prayers - as is written in the Holy bible "Seven times a day I praise you" Pssalm 119:164. In each of these prayers there is a number of Psalms.

"Is it necessary to pray with the Agpeya? and why?", asked the girl.

The priest answered, "It is necessary to pray with the Agpeya in order to obtain a deep spiritual relationship with God, otherwise your prayers will be weak and will consequently affect your spiritual life. In order to progress in your spiritual life, praying from the Agpeya book helps an individual because:

1. It is necessary to pray with Psalms.
2. It is necessary to remember, enjoy salvation and the gifts of the Holy Spirit - which are clear in the Agpeya
3. It is necessary to concentrate on Heaven.
4. It is necessary to preserve the faith and the Coptic doctrine.
5. To be protected against the temptation of Satan.

In these two lessons we will discuss the importance of praying with the Agpeya book, by discussing the following points:

1. The meaning of an accepted prayer
2. Praying with Psalms
3. Using the Prayers of the Psalms as indicated in the Bible
4. The sayings of our fathers concerning prayers using the Psalms
5. The subjects mentioned in the Psalms and their effect on the spiritual growth
6. The use of Psalms in the holy services of the church
7. A Prayer

1. The meaning of an Accepted Prayer

In order to have our prayers accepted by God, they have to be according to His will, as was said by St. John, "... If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." 1 John 5:14.

What is the prayer according to God's will? It is the prayer that accords with God's wisdom and love.

How could I, the limited weak human know God's wisdom and love? Certainly, I will not be able to know. Therefore, I cannot pray on my own an accepted prayer. As written in the Holy Bible, "We do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes the intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26).

Therefore, the Spirit of God Who dwells in us, Himself directs us to pray. Without Him we would not know how to pray an accepted prayer and in turn we would not have the power to admit the Godliness of the Lord Jesus, "...No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Finally, because the individual alone is unable to say an acceptable prayer, therefore the Disciples asked our Lord Jesus Christ "Lord teach us to pray," (Luke 11:1). The Lord taught them "Our Father ..." and thus this prayer became very important.

2. Praying with Psalms

Although the Psalms were written by David, they are also the Lord's words inspired to David by the Holy Spirit. Our Lord Jesus said, "David said in the Spirit" ... Therefore, when we say the Psalms in our prayers we speak to God in His own words - according to His will and His love. The book of Psalms, which is considered to be an important part in the Holy Bible, is inspired by God Himself, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," (2 Timothy 3:16). St. Peter also says in his epistle, "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

Therefore praying with the Psalms is very useful because it is according to God's will and is with the guidance of His Holy Spirit. Every one of us could use these Psalms as his or her own personal prayers through which he or she speaks to God.

Praying with Psalms from a pure heart will definitely be accepted because it is from the Holy Spirit and therefore it will elevate the person above his limited abilities in prayer in order to join the heavenly powers in their praising and singing to God. Ultimately, the person will reach an intimate and joyful relationship with God. There should also be personal prayers accompanying the prayers with the Psalms, which would express the person's own feelings towards God.

3. Using the Prayers of the Psalms as Indicated in the Bible.

The Book of Psalms is one of the poetic books in the Old Testament. The meaning of the word Psalms comes from the word 'rejoice" in Hebrew and from the word "Psalmo" in Greek. In Arabic, it is related to the flute which is a musical instrument "Mizmar".

Therefore, it is a book of chanting and the singing of hymns to God. It reflects the faith in the hearts and the influence of the Coptic doctrine in the minds and spirits. This indicates songs of praise and intimate prayers binding the human soul to her creator.

David the Prophet was the first to collect the Psalms and segregated a certain group to sing them in front of the Tabernacle inside the meeting tent. It became a part of the worship rituals that Moses received without the musical instruments.

After returning from bondage, the writer Ezra collected all the books of the Holy Bible and the Book of Psalms to reinstate the altar worship in Jerusalem.

David planned for 24 groups to take turns in the holy singing inside the meeting tent. Every group consisted of 12 persons led by "The Chief Musician." We read about these groups in 1 Chronicles 25:1-31.

The church of the New Testament continued using Psalms as an important aspect in prayers. For example: "Whenever you come together, each of you has a Psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and nourishing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

The Book of Psalms was used to strengthen the Disciples as we see in several occasions in the Book of Acts. For example:

a) When Matthias was chosen instead of Judas, "For it is written in the book of Psalms: 'Let his habitation be desolate and let no one live in it, and let another take his office" (Acts 1:20).
b) When the Disciples were preaching the resurrection of Our Lord, "God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the Second Psalm "You are My son, today I have begotten You" (Acts 13:33).

4. The Sayings of Our Fathers About Prayers with Psalms

⇨ Pope Shenouda III: "Keep the Psalms and the Psalms will keep you."

⇨ St. Isaac: "May you have an endless love to pray with Psalms because it is food for the soul."

⇨ Pope Athanasious the Apostolic: "Praying with Psalms is a treatment and a healing to the soul."

⇨ St. John of the Golden Mouth: "We make an effort to read the books of the Old Testament once every year. The Gospels of Our Lord and Saviour, with all their teachings and miracles are read once or twice a week in the church, as well as those of our teacher St. Paul. As for the Book of the blessed David, I do not know how with the blessing of the Holy Spirit it is arranged to be used day and night in praying. Everyone uses it as an invaluable balsam in his mouth. In church or in meetings, David is in the beginning, in the middle and in the end... It is a truly honourable and blessed guitar because it brings together all the souls of the world as its strings and then echoes into their ears glorification and praises to the Lord."

5. The Different Types of Psalms and their Effect on the Spiritual Growth

5.1. Psalms praising, singing and rejoicing to God.

Aspect of joy, praise and glorifying God is very important to the spiritual life. The person who possesses it will always be rejoicing to God, mixing his prayers with songs and his songs with prayers: "For the Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Romans 14:17.

When a person praises the Lord he goes beyond the materialistic problems and joins the angels in their work which is continual praising God. St. Basil the Great says, "What is more joyous for a person than for him to join the angels in singing hymns of glory. He starts his day with prayers glorifying the great creator with songs of praise."

"The aspect of praising and glorifying God is not new. It was mentioned in the Holy Bible both in the New and Old Testament. The people practiced it as individuals and in groups. For example:

(I) From the Old Testament:

(a) The song of Miriam, the sister of Aaron: "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, "sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea" (Exodus 15:21).

(b) The song of Deborah: "I will sing to the Lord, I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel, when you went out from Sir, when you marched from the field of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens poured, the clouds also poured water, the mountains gushed before the Lord, this Sinai, before the Lord God of Israel" (Judges 5:4-5).

(c) The song of the Seraphim, "Above it stood Seraphim each one had six wings, with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet and with two he flew and one cried to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:2-3).

(d) The song of Hannah the prophet (1 Samuel 2)

(e) The song of Jonah the prophet (Jonah 2)

(f) The song of the three youths in the fire (Daniel 3)

(g) There are also the book of Psalms and the book of the Songs of Solomon which concentrate mainly on praising the Lord.

(II) The New Testament:

The aspect of praising the Lord is also greatly present in the New Testament:

After the Lord Jesus established the foundation of the sacrament of the Eucharist in the Last Supper with His Disciples, St. Mark says in his Gospel: "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Mark 14:26).
Therefore, Our Lord taught His Disciples prayers and songs.

In the darkness of the prison the Apostles were singing and praising the Lord: "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25).

The Disciples were in the upper room after receiving the Holy Spirit: "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47).

However the most beautiful song in the Holy Bible is the song of the Virgin Mary when she visited Elizabeth: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy. As He spoke to our Fathers, to Abraham and his seed forever" (Luke 1:46-55).

Singing Hymns is the language of the heavenly powers. In the Book of Revelation we notice it clearly. For example: the song of the twenty - four elders: "The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things and by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:10-11).

There is also the song of the four living creatures; "And the four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come" (Revelation 4:8).

In addition to this, is the new song of the heavenly powers which rejoices in the salvation that the Lord Jesus has fulfilled, "Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints, and they sang a new song saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God, and we shall reign on the earth." Then I looked and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures and the elders and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing." And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard them saying, "Blessing and honour and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, forever and ever." Revelation 5:8-15.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) To have an acceptable prayer before God it has to be in agreement with his wisdom and love. Only the Holy Spirit (who is the Spirit of God) can inspire and lead us to an effective prayer to God. When we pray, using the Psalms (which are inspired by the Holy Spirit) we are indeed on track for an acceptable prayer. Therefore praying with the Psalms is praying under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(2) An individual praying with the Psalms (in Agpeya) must use these Psalms as his or her personal prayer coming from a pure heart.

(3) An individual praying with the Agpeya must also add their own wording to express any additional feelings.

MARCH
THIRD SUNDAY

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY WITH THE AGPEYA? – (II)
BECAUSE WE SHOULD PRAY WITH PSALMS

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a series of two lessons about praying with the Agpeya. In this lesson we will illustrate the depth, diversity and enrichment of the Psalms, which would then lead to a complete and effective prayer.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"Praise the Lord, O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever ....*** Psalm 106:1

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
Start by reviewing the previous lesson with the students and then proceed.

Let us now concentrate on some of the Psalms that are based on the aspect of praising and rejoicing in God.

1. There are seven Psalms that start with the word "Alleluia" which means "praise the Lord" and end with the same word.

Psalm 106: "Praise the Lord" Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever... Blessed be the Lord God of Israel! From everlasting to everlasting, and let all the people say "Amen" Praise the Lord."

Psalm 113: "Praise the Lord, Praise, O servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. From the rising of the sun to its

going down. The Lord's name is to be praised ... He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children. Praise the Lord."

Psalm 135: "Praise the Lord; praise the name of the Lord; praise Him, O you servants of the Lord. You who stand in the house of the Lord. In the courts of the house of our God. Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant. Blessed be the Lord out of Zion, who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the Lord."

Psalm 146: "Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live I will praise the Lord ... The Lord shall reign forever ... Your God O Zion to all generations. Praise the Lord."

Psalm 148: "Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise Him in the heights. Praise Him, all His angels. Praise Him, all His hosts, Praise Him, sun and moon ... And He has exalted the horn of His people. The praise of all His saints of the children of Israel, A people near to Him. Praise the Lord."

Psalm 149: "Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song. And His praise in the congregation of saints let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name with the dance. Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp. Praise the Lord."

Psalm 150: "Praise the Lord. Praise God in His sanctuary. Praise Him in His mighty firmament... Praise Him with high sounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. "

2. There are more Psalms that praise and rejoice in the Lord, for example:

Psalm 147: "Praise the Lord. For it is good to sing praises to our God. For it is pleasant and praise is beautiful ... Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem. Praise Your God, O Zion .. He causes His wind to blow, and the waters to flow ... He has not dealt thus with any nation, and as for His judgments, they have not known them. Praise the Lord."

Psalm 8: "O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth. You who set Your glory above the heavens ... when I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers. The moon and the stars, which You have ordained. ... O Lord, Our Lord How excellent is Your name in all the earth."

Psalm 19: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament show His handywork ... Let the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

Psalm 33: "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, for praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the Lord with the harp, make melody to Him with an instrument for ten strings. Sing to Him a new song ... Let Your mercy O Lord be upon us, just as we hope in You."

Psalm 65: "Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion, and to You the vow shall be performed... The valleys also are covered with grain. They shout for joy, they also sing."

Psalm 100: "Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands. Serve the Lord with gladness ... For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations."

Psalm 103: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all His benefits. Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul."

Psalm 104: "Bless the Lord O my soul, O Lord my God, You are very great, You are clothed with honor and majesty. Who covers Yourself with light as with a garment. Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain ... Bless the Lord O my soul, Praise the Lord."

It is evident that most of these Psalms start with a phrase of praise, then is followed by a description of the cause of this praise towards the glory of God describing His great love and supernatural wisdom. Finally at the end of the Psalm King David goes back to praising the Lord.

5.2 Psalms of Sadness and Crying:

There is a number of Psalms that contain the aspect of sadness and pleading made by the spirit directed toward the Lord. These Psalms are used in individual prayers and also in group prayers. What causes the person to cry and plead to the Lord in his prayers? It could be the sadness caused by the sins committed and the many struggles with the devil. It could be the war and the news of war. It could be caused by sickness and the pains that accompany the diseases. It could also be caused by persecution and maltreatment ... etc. On the group level, the church could be going through troubles, famine, epidemics and problems with the ruling power or the evil powers. The group moans to its Saviour to intercede to release it from its difficulties. For example, at the time of the Babylonian invasion the people were crying in pain, pleading to God to lift His anger and help them return to their country triumphantly.

⇨ Some of the Psalms that contain the aspect of an individual crying:

"Lord, how they have increased who trouble me. Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, 'there is no help for him in God. "Arise O Lord ... Salvation belongs to the Lord Your blessings is upon Your people" (Psalm 3).

"How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? But I have trusted in Your mercy. My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt gracefully with me" (Psalm 13).

From the above, the aspect of hope and faith in God is very clear. The spirit moans pleading for help believing that the prayers are going to be heard and that God will intervene and solve all the problems. For this reason the Psalms end with joy.

⇨ Some Psalms that contain the aspect of group crying:

"O God why have You cast us forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture? Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old, the tribe of Your inheritance which you have redeemed ... Arise, O God, plead Your own cause. Do not forget the voice of Your enemies ..." (Psalm 74).

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there - those

who carried us away captive required of us a song, and those who plundered us required of us mirth saying "sing us one of the songs of Zion" (Psalm 137).

5.3 Psalms of Thanksgiving:

Some Psalms contain the aspect of thanksgiving from the depth of the heart to the loving Father for all His gifts both on the individual level and the group level. It is hard to differentiate between the Psalms of thanksgiving and those of praise because the latter contains a lot of thanks and the former contains a cordial praises and glory to God.

⇨ **Some thanksgiving Psalms on the individual level:**

"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad. The Lord redeems the souls of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned" (Psalm 34).

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His Holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103).

5.4 Psalm of Repentance:

When we sin and want to repent we find many Psalms reminding us and teaching us how to do so, for example:

"O Lord do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Have mercy on me O Lord, for I am weak. O Lord heal me, for my bones are troubled, my soul also is greatly troubled..." (Psalm 6).

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute inequity and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psalm 32).

"O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath ...” (Psalm 38).

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness, according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin for I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me ..." (Psalm 51).

"Out of the depths I have cried to You O Lord, Lord hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, Lord should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You maybe feared" (Psalm 130).

5.5 Psalm of Wisdom and Divine Commandment:

In a number of Psalms we find that David was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write on divine commandments and spiritual wisdom, which are quite beneficial to those who use them in prayers, for example:

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful" Psalm 1.

"Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity. I have also trusted in the Lord, I shall not slip. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me, try my mind and my heart ..." (Psalm 26).

"Who is the man who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil ..." (Psalm 34:12).

"Praise the Lord, blessed is the man who fears the Lord who delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth... A good man deals graciously and lends ..." (Psalm 112).

5.6 Psalms for All Occasions:

St. Athanasius the Apostolic said, "We will find in the Psalms not only a reflection of our spiritual state but also the right words with which we should praise the Lord in every occasion in our lives:

"Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the Land of the living" (Psalm 116:7-9).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) One of the key elements in worshipping the Lord is praising and rejoicing for His Holy name. Many of the Psalms (as cited above) illustrate the reasons behind praising the name of God (i.e. His love and greatness).

(2) In times of crying or repentance there are many Psalms (as cited above) that would help us to remember the love of God and we can move towards Him further and be comforted.

(3) There are many Psalms that remind us to thank the Lord. These Psalms bring before us many of God's blessings so that we remember these blessings and thank the Lord.

NOTES

MARCH
FOURTH SUNDAY

FORGIVENESS – (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about Forgiveness. In this lesson the focus is on the meaning of forgiveness.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. What is the meaning of forgiveness?

St. Paul says in the Ephesians, "Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another ... do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil ... let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification ... let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice and be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you. Therefore be followers of God as dear children" (Ephesians 4:25-5:1).

It is clear from the above-mentioned passage, that our feelings towards each other should be loving and gentle without any bitterness, wrath, anger ... We should forgive one another as God has forgiven us in Jesus Christ.

The meaning of forgiving one another is that if a person did wrong against his friend, and his deed was true with evidence; this friend should not feel bitter and anger nor should he punish his friend but to prepare himself to forgive him.

B. Let us give a simple example of forgiveness:

Peter visited his friend John and he started to play with the ball inside the house. John told him nicely that they should not play with the ball inside the house and that they could go out and play together. But Peter ignored him and continued playing recklessly. In a glance the ball hit one of the expensive candlesticks and it

was broken. John gave him a quick sad look and did not want to hurt his feelings. He continued having him over without any complaints and did not ask him to mend the candlestick. John did not have any ill feelings for his friend and he agreed to buy another candlestick from his own pocket money. John and Peter went on with their friendship and they considered that incident a mistake from which Peter learned a lesson and John experienced the true Christian forgiveness. John was a real son of Jesus Christ. From this simple story we conclude that Christian forgiveness excludes the feeling of bitterness, wrath, anger, and punishment of others. To be able to forgive, a person has to consider 3 points:

1) To minimize other people's mistakes towards us;
2) Avoid negative or ill feelings towards them;
3) Not to punish those who did wrong and take responsibility for their mistakes.

C. Let us be more elaborate:

1. Consider the mistakes that were done by others as an incident of the past whatever we do will not change anything. In this way we could reduce the size of the mistake and try not to make a big deal out of it. Perhaps we could give the matter some thought and find that we might have done the same thing had we looked at these mistakes and try to get a lesson for the future.

2. Avoid all ill feelings towards those mistakes. Avoid anger, hatred and how to apply punishment.

✞ But how could this be achieved? Is it by suppressing those feelings inside us and avoid talking about them?

No, because in this way these feelings will give way to disturbing thoughts and ill feelings towards others. At a certain point they could go out of control and cause a lot of trouble.

✞ Could these feelings be overcome by being expressed immediately and the mistake pointed out to whoever caused it?

No, we should have control over our feelings and avoid aggression towards others.

Then what is the solution?

Suppressing the negative feelings against others is not the solution; nor is the aggression and violent expression of those feelings is the solution. The right thing to do is not to concentrate on the mistakes that others do and let go. Also instead of magnifying matters it is better to diminish them. St. Paul expressed that by saying "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking be put away, instead be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another ..." (Ephesians 4:31-31). The expression be put away means to be excluded completely.

3. What about the results of mistakes committed against us? Who will take responsibility for them? Why shouldn't we punish them? Why don't they try to undo the wrong they did? Should we forgive them?

   With the help of God, I have the ability to bear the results of other people's mistakes and mend the damages. In this way I behave like the child of God, because in His forgiveness toward us He took care of our sins in the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ the son of God who was crucified for us.

Let us mention our true example of forgiveness:

God in The Person of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His forgiveness to us is the greatest example of what is needed from us to forgive others. When Adam and Eve sinned, their sin was going against God. Out of His deep love for man, God forgave him. He did not forgive us by letting us bear the result of this sin because it was a grave mistake against God so the punishment had to be equally serious. Our Merciful Lord forgave us and paid our debts by Himself. He did not allow the weak human being to pay the debt of the serious sin (this is His love and mercy) but through Jesus Christ on the Cross God's mercy and justice were accomplished. Isaiah the prophet says "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we were healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

Therefore, God forgave man ... paid for his sins ... His love for man did not change. He did not feel bad towards him, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Not only that, but God showed His forgiveness through His Son and reconciled with us through our unity with Jesus Christ, God appearing in the body.

"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled we shall be saved by His life. And not only that but we also rejoice in God through Our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Romans 5:10-11).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Forgiveness is the complete rejection of hatred, revenge and danger towards others.

(2) Suppression of the negative feelings against others is not the solution; nor is the aggression and violent expression of those feelings is the solution. The right thing to do is not to concentrate on the mistakes that others do and let go.

APRIL
FIRST SUNDAY

FORGIVENESS – (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is the second lesson in a two-lesson series on forgiveness. In this lesson we learn why we should forgive?

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
Start by reviewing the previous lesson.

WHY SHOULD WE FORGIVE OTHERS?

A. We are created according to God's image, who is forgiving.

When we look at the great love of God and His forgiveness, we should take His heed and adopt His characteristics because He created us according to His image. In the book of Exodus we see a true image of a Loving and Forgiving God "And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed; The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious; longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6-7).

Therefore, man who is created according to the image of God should behave according to that level, i.e. the level of forgiveness.

B. God demands us to forgive:

Our Lord Jesus says "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25).

From the Gospel according to St. Luke, "If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a

day, and seven times in a day returns to you saying, "I repent", you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4). Moreover, regarding repentance St. Peter asked Our Lord Jesus Christ, “Lord how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22).

C. We cannot receive forgiveness from God unless we forgive our own brethren:

Our Lord Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount: "For if you forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). Accordingly, we cannot separate our relationship with others from our relationship with God. If our heart becomes hard and full of hatred towards others; this same heart cannot be filled with love towards God because, it is sick and cannot be sick and well at the same time. St. John says, "If someone says "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him; that he who loves God must love his brothers also" (1 John 4:20-21). In the Lord's Prayer, our Lord teaches us, "and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Mathew 6:12).

D. When we do not forgive others, we harm ourselves.

What happens when we are filled with hatred towards others? What happens when we feel enraged towards others and feel like punishing them for what they did against us? We harm ourselves because we will be filled with evil and darkness will prevail in our hearts thus infecting our souls and bodies with sickness. The stomach ulcer, for example, is due to psychological torment, anger and nervousness. Isaiah the prophet said about the heart of an evil person "But the wicked are like the troubled sea; when it cannot rest whose waters cast up mire and dirt." “There is no peace" says my God "for the wicked" (Isaiah 57:20-21).

E. We harm others when we do not forgive.

St. Paul the Apostle says in Hebrews 12:14-15, "Pursue peace with all men, and holiness without which no one will see the Lord; looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

The book of Proverbs explains how our words have the power of goodness to be of benefit to others or the power of evil to cause destruction and harm to others; "There is one who speaks like the piercing of a sword but the tongue of the wise promotes health."

F. We reflect a bad image of Christ when we do not forgive.

When we do not forgive we give a bad image of Christians and of Christ within us. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us ..." (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

How can we be ambassadors of Christ when He said about those who crucified Him "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34); and if we do not forgive others, the world would see in us the spirit of revenge, bitterness and anger in place of the spirit of love and forgiveness by which Christ is known? If Christ is truly in the heart how is it that we are not the pure incense of Christ?

G. We should forgive because we are not supposed to avenge for ourselves.

If we do not forgive we should avenge for ourselves. However, the Holy Bible does not give us the spirit of revenge. In the book of Leviticus, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." Leviticus 19:17-18.

St. Paul says in his epistle to the Romans 12:17-18, "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay' says the Lord. Therefore vengeance should be God's work because He knows the inside of matters and everything is clear to Him. He rewards each one according to his deeds. Why should I avenge for myself? God knows, sees, and hears everything, so all should be left in His hands.

Examples of Forgiveness:

1. David forgave King Saul, who was chasing him and wanted to kill him. David did not want to avenge for himself, even though he had the chance to kill Saul when he was asleep in the tent and his sword beside him.

Moreover, after Saul's death, David looked for anyone left from the house of Saul to make good to him. He found the crippled Maphesbosheth and he took him to his palace and he used to eat at his table.

2. St. Stephen forgave those who stoned him and asked for their forgiveness as did his good Master Jesus Christ. In the book of Acts it is said that St. Stephen while being stoned said, "Lord do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60).

3. St. Moses the Black, who after his repentance became a father to many monks, met 3 thieves who came to rob him. He carried them, for he was very strong, and instead of attacking them he took them to the church and threw them on the floor and told them that the God he loved did not leave any place in his heart for hatred and revenge. He left them there. They repented because of this merciful and forgiving scene.

There is a lot of stories of forgiveness in the lives of the Saints because a true Christian has Christ lodged in his heart so the source of his action is Christ living in the heart. Our Lord Jesus is very forgiving, very loving, and very gentle. The sign of a Christian is forgiveness.

A True Story:

One morning a wife called the priest and told him that she is packing and leaving the apartment because her husband warned her that he did not want to find her when he returns from his work. This was a result of a long dispute all night and the husband physically abused his wife and insulted her badly.

The priest asked her not to leave but to stay in the apartment until he comes to her. She waited and when the priest came, she went over what happened in detail and told him that she had to leave because her husband didn't want to find her when he gets home, he also asked her to leave the key in the mail-box. The priest told her not to leave and not to give much weight to the words and acts of anger of her husband, instead he told her to prepare him his favorite meal and on this day she should pray that God would enlighten things for her husband. On this day she should forgive from the heart. The wife was obedient and did what the priest told her. He left and she went on doing what she was told. What happened when her husband came? First of all, he did not find the key in the mail-box, he went up thinking how to punish this person who did not leave the key as he asked her. At the door, the Lord spoke in his heart and he heard a hymn on tape saying "The love

of Jesus our Saviour bewilder the mind ..." He smelled his favorite meal, which his wife was preparing. He knocked on the door; his body was shaking, as he said. When the wife opened the door, the husband cried and kissed her hands and feet and told her that she was a better person than him and that she was the daughter of Jesus Christ because she forgave him and did not leave the apartment. That was a new fruitful start for them and the husband was attracted to the church and started serving too.

What was the starting point in all this? The wife's forgiveness and her obedience to the priest.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Forgiveness is to reject hatred, revenge and anger towards others. It happens with the Power of Christ living in the heart through thinking of other people's mistakes against him as an action of the past, which will not come again. To leave all emotions towards these mistakes so that they do not sink in our hearts and not feel disturbed by them. He should take it upon himself to pay for those mistakes. Forgiveness is a sign of a true Christian. Without it a person cannot enjoy God's forgiveness of his own mistakes.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

APRIL
SECOND SUNDAY

PALM SUNDAY - IS MY HEART THE ALTAR OF GOD?

PLEASE READ Matt. 23:1-17, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:29-48 and John 12:12-19. Also the attached article entitled, "Working with God", and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

To illustrate that the main characteristics of the kingdom of Christ have been declared on Palm Sunday. The question becomes: Am I a member of the kingdom of Christ? Is my heart an altar for God? Or am I Christian? These questions have the same meaning.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwells in you?"*** 1Cor. 3:16

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) INTRODUCTION: Hosanna

† "Hosanna" is our praise of God today. It is also our request to God saying, "save us.....save us". Today is a day of salvation. In the morning of that day the Lord entered Zechariah's house and said to him, "today salvation has come to this house". Today also Partimous the blind cried out saying, "have mercy on me, son of David" and the Lord opened his eyes.

† So today we should be repeating the name of salvation, the Lord Jesus and experience the power and strength of salvation.

(B) "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord":

† The Lord has told us in advance, "you will not see Me until the time comes when you say blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord". This statement means our acceptance for the kingdom of Christ and our welcome to Him to reign over our hearts. We hope to say this expression, "blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" many times so that we see Him dwelling in our hearts.

† Before the reading of the holy gospel in every liturgy we say, "blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord", thus we are welcoming God in our hearts because whoever accepts the word of God is accepting Christ in the heart. Remember that Christ is the incarnated Word of God.

(C) Main characteristics of the kingdom of Christ as manifested on Palm Sunday:

† The King of Peace:

The first thing that is very clear in the kingdom of Christ is the inner peace. From the very beginning of His birth, the angels praised with the beautiful song, "glory to God in the highest and peace on earth towards men....." Today the multitude is praising the Lord saying the same thing, "peace in heaven and glory to the highest".

So peace is the first sign of the presence of Christ in our hearts "peace I leave with you". So if we do not have inner peace in our hearts and do not rejoice praising God we are actually not enjoying Christ the King inside our hearts.

† The King of victory:

Christ came to defeat Satan and all his works. Our faith in Christ is to overcome the world, death and worldly love. Christ raised Lazarus from the dead and He gave us victory over the fear of death. Therefore, today the multitude rejoiced when they received Him because they heard that He did this miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

Whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ should not lead a defeated life. Whoever accepts Christ to reign over his or her heart should not be a slave to sin or

Satan anymore. When Christ reigned over us and we became members of His kingdom, He gave us the freedom of the children of God.

† **The King of tears:**
The one who defeated death cried at the tomb of Lazarus. When He cleaned up the altar He cried on Jerusalem. Christ today is the King who is in tears because of the many people around us who are defeated by the lusts of the world and Satan. And they didn't know the time of their salvation. Christ among us today is crying over the people who are dead in sin and who refused to be protected by His Cross and His love. We hope that today we realize the tears of the Lord Jesus if we fall in sin ourselves. We must enter into communion of love with Him.

† **The King of meekness:**
Christ does not reign over people with the sword or with human strength. And the kingdom of Christ does not grow through war or through materialistic authority. Christ is a meek King, humble at heart and He reigns over our hearts without any aggressiveness. Whoever accepts the kingdom of Christ will learn how to be like the Master Jesus Christ (who did not cry loudly, nobody heard His voice on the streets and He did not fight with anyone).

Every time we lose our meekness and humbleness, we change from being Christ-like. So, if God is truly in our hearts, we should be Christ-like.

† **The King over the children:**
One of the key characteristics of the kingdom of Christ is, "childhood". For this reason , the Lord said, "If you do not come back and become like children you will not go into the Kingdom of Heaven." The Lord Christ also said, "I thank You Father because You hide it from the wise people and You declared it to the young children".

Today, the children are praising like angels, without ceasing. We need today to go back to our childhood (i.e. in faith, love, clarity and no pride). As we get closer to our early childhood we can realize the kingdom of Christ.

† **The King of love:**
Christ today entered Jerusalem to be crucified and this was the goal. The Cross with respect to Christ is His ultimate love through which He reigned over our hearts because He showed us that He died instead of us.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Let us repeat praising the Lord, saying "Hosanna" i.e. save us. Let us reject anything reigning over our hearts and feelings except the Lord Christ. Let us all welcome Him saying, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord".

(2) We must stay away from the sinful life, otherwise our hearts are not anymore the altars of God.

(3) If the individual is truly in communion with the Holy Spirit he or she will stay away from any sinful actions because there is no mix between light and darkness.

(4) Is my heart the altar of God? Am I a Christian? If I have the main characteristics of the kingdom of God in my life (i.e. peace, victory, meekness, love), then I am truly a Christian and I am a member of the kingdom of God.

WORKING WITH GOD
By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

The Lord Jesus said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (Jn 5:17). Let us concentrate on the last phrase...

St. Paul said about himself and his companion Apollo's, "For we are God's fellow workers " (1 Cor 3:9).

God can do everything on his own, but he wants you to work with Him, not only to work, but to toil and strive, "And each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour " (I Cor 3:8).

The fact that God works does not mean than Man becomes slack...

God, in Revelation, blessed the Angel of the church in Ephesus for labouring and toiling, saying, "I know, your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil, and you have persevered and have patience and have laboured for my name's sake and have not become weary" (Rev 2:2-3).

Work for the spiritual person, is an association with God and the Holy Spirit It is a partnership with the Divine Nature in work... It is the readiness of one's will, not only to associate with God but to become actually a partner...

Therefore we say to God in the Liturgy of the travelers, "Share in the work of your servants. "Depending on God does not mean idleness or carelessens but it is an association with God; relying on God's strength.

Through work, God tests the extent of our love and obedience to Him. And as St. John the Apostle said, "Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18). In spite of David's faith that, "the war is for God" and his confidence that God is going to work with him, he took his sling and stones and progressed to the front to face Goliath...

Therefore you must work and ask God to be with you in what you are doing. But beware of idleness, as God does not like the sluggard...
You have to plant and water then God will make the plant grow...

Truly, you could humbly say, "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor 3:7).

NOTES

APRIL
THIRD SUNDAY

GOOD FRIDAY
CHRIST, OUR PASSOVER WAS SACRIFICED FOR US

PLEASE READ: The attached article, entitled "Everything for your Spirituality", and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
To show the meaning of Christian Passover versus the Jewish Passover. Our Christian Passover is a daily move towards God. The Holy Week is a glorious occasion to take advantage of and move forward towards God.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us"*** 1Cor. 5:7

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) INTRODUCTION: The Holy Week is the most holy week of the year

- ☩ The events of the Holy Week (is also called the Pascal Week) are not subject of talks but its events are eternal and it's a subject of our praise of the Lord.
- ☩ If we say the holy forty days of Lent are a holy period of time then the Pascal week is the most holy week of the year and the most spiritual. It is a week filled with holy events as the most important part of our salvation.
- ☩ Our faith in the Coptic Orthodox Church practiced this week in full respect, honor, asceticism, and dedicated the week for worship only.

- ☩ Living on earth attending the Pascal Week is an opportunity given to us from God to enjoy the spiritual depth in these eternal events and move forward towards God.

(B) The Passover feast of the Jews:

- ☩ We read in the book of Exodus 12:1-14 about the Passover of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, and their exodus to freedom.

- ☩ The word "Passover" in English corresponds to the word "Pascha" in Coptic and in Greek. It means moving forward from one status to a better one.

- ☩ When the Israelites had the blood of the lamb on their doors they were able to get out of Egypt. The angel of the Lord hit all the homes of the people in Egypt except those homes which had the sign of the blood of the lamb (i.e. which belonged to the homes of the Israelites). The angel killed the first born of every home which belonged to the Egyptians. But he passed over the Israelites' homes leaving them alone, and then they were able to start going out of Egypt.

- ☩ Therefore the blood was the start of the Passover of the Jews. The Passover feast is the largest feast for the Jews until now. As they always remember what God did with them to get them out of the slavery in Egypt to freedom through the blood.

(C) The Passover feast of the Christians:

1. The suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ

- ☩ The Lord Christ since His birth endured a tremendous amount of suffering. Even when He was born there was no place for him in any house, but He was born in a manger. Afterwards, He had to flee away to Egypt from Herod the king who wanted to kill Him. After He came to Galilee He was an individual who was rejected by the Jewish community. They insulted Him many times despite the fact that He was kind to everyone: healing the sick, feeding the multitudes, and teaching all people His heavenly teachings. But His sufferings were concentrated in the last week of His life on earth. After they received Him in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as the King of Peace, greeting Him with the word "Hosanna" they turned against Him and said, "crucify

Him.....crucify Him". All the sufferings of the Lord Christ were known to Him in advance and He accepted these sufferings. He told His Disciples in advance, "we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and they will whip Him, crucify Him and on the third day He will rise again." When Judas Iscariot came to betray Him the Lord Christ said in advance, "the hour is near and the person who is going to deliver Me is very near" (Matt 26). "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him went forward and said to them, 'whom are you seeking?' they answered Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth' Jesus said to them 'I am He'. And Judas who betrayed Him also stood with them. Now when He said to them 'I am He', they drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:4-6).

2. The shedding of the blood of Christ on the Cross

- ✞ God manifested His greatest love for us on the Cross. He came to our world and paid the price for our sins. Instead of us who deserved to die because of our sins, Christ died for us. This way He died so that we may live so His death is a Passover for us from death to life. Through the shedding of His blood on the Cross, He satisfied the justice of God on one hand and tied up the devil so that He would have no authority on us. So we are not slaves to Satan anymore. When we are baptized we get rid of the slavery of Satan and we become children of God. Yet the devil can still fight us but not with the same authority as before. Baptism to us is a Passover from the old life of slavery to a new glorified life of the children of God.

- ✞ When we partake of the Holy Communion we wash our sins with the blood of the Lord Christ and we move forward from a sinful life to a pure life without the stain of sin. So the Holy Communion is a Passover for us. Through the Holy Communion we move forward towards heaven and towards God. We gain this new life in baptism and the Holy Communion because of the value of the precious blood of the Lord Christ on the Cross.

- ✞ When we celebrate the events of the Holy Week, each one of them is supposed to bring us forward towards God (i.e. Passover). For example, when we live through the occasion of Palm Sunday in which the Lord Christ entered Jerusalem declaring His kingdom, I should concentrate on my prayers, saying to Him, 'Lord come into my heart,

Lord reign over my life, Lord clean me totally and Lord save me (hosanna)'. When I live through the occasion in which He raised Lazarus from the dead I also pray asking Him to raise me from my sinful life. When I live through the event when He visited Mary, Martha and their brother in Bethany, I should also pray to the Lord, asking Him to have a place in my house. All these events must be 'Passover events' for me that will draw me closer to God.

- ✞ The Saints of the church enjoyed this Passover from a dark life to a pure life through the blood of the Lord Christ. Remember St. Moses the Black who led a very sinful life before he became Christian. After he became Christian and was baptized, participated in the Divine Liturgy and took the Holy Communion, he came into the new life. He had a Passover from a dark life to the new life.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) It is a golden opportunity every time we attend the Holy Week. We must never lose a minute of it. We must live through the events of the Holy Week so that every event is a Passover for us.

(2) All the sacrifices of the Old Testament were symbols of the true sacrifice of the Lord Christ. Believers of the Lord Christ are moved from death to life. So Christ is the true Passover.

(3) We must be ready before we partake of the Holy Communion. For us the Holy Communion is enabling us to celebrate Passover.

EVERYTHING FOR YOUR SPIRITUALITY

By Pope Shenouda III

God created everything for your spirituality...

Heaven and earth are not for your materialistic benefit. They are also for your spiritual benefit, if you are able to extract the spiritual lessons they offer you. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps 19:1).

The Bible is not only for religious knowledge. It is also for your spiritual growth, "... The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (Jn 6:63). There is a big difference in reading the Bible for study and reading it for a spiriitual benefit.

Service, also, is not just education. Education is merely a means to lead to the spiritualities. Therefore there is a difference between one type of education and another.

There is an education that addresses your mind and another education that fills your heart. One education turns you into a learned man and the other turns you into a worshipper...

The education that you undertake is not only for the spirituality of others but also for your own spirituality.

You benefit as much as your listeners benefit. If you do not benefit with them, they surely would not benefit from what you said since the talk will have lost its spiritual effect.

Hymns and chants at church are not just music and tunes. They are prayers directed to God. They have their depth and effect on your heart and your spirituality...

Therefore, there is a difference between the one who just sings and the one who chants hymns.

The same applies to all the spiritual means...

Even all the incidents you experience are permitted by God so you can gain a spiritual benefit from them...

There are those who become nervously, psychologically or mentally affected by incidents. Other are affected spiritually by whatever events they experience; everything that happens to them makes them closer to God...

Also, people that you meet, are sent by God. Passing your way, they are for your own spiritual benefit, if you know how to benefit from them.

The righteous present you with an example and a blessing, while you benefit endurance, patience and forgiveness for others from evil.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

APRIL
FOURTH SUNDAY

RESURRECTION - OUR NEW LIFE

PLEASE READ: 1Cor. 15, Revelation 20:1-6, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
To show that the resurrection of Christ is the corner stone of Christianity; without which there is no meaning to Christianity. Our new nature appeared with its tremendous abilities through our resurrected life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain."*** 1Cor. 15:14

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. INTRODUCTION:

We live in the age of advanced science and civilization ... Yes ... Human nature is advancing on the scientific level, but this does not solve the problems of destiny of the human being. It does not explain to us the secrets of God ... Academic knowledge does not explain to us the work of the Holy Spirit inside the human being in every place and at all times. It does not explain what is after death and this life, nor does it give an answer to all these important matters. BUT ...the Resurrection of Christ from the death answers all these questions.

✞ "And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain" (Corinthians 15:14).

- ✞ The Resurrection of Christ became the most glittering pearl in the crown of Christianity.

- ✞ The Resurrection of Christ became the center of the preaching of the Apostles and disciples.

- ✞ In the Resurrection of Christ the new human nature appeared with new great abilities. A human nature that enjoys the love of God and exchanges this love ... It enjoys internal peace and sin has no control over it ... A human nature that lives and experiences the Resurrection in the life of the living Christ at heart.

- ✞ Therefore, the Resurrection of Christ is a new aspect introduced by Christ in the lives of humans, which was not there before that; fulfilled by Christ in the fullness of time so that the prophecies would come true "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

To explain this new aspect in the human life, let us answer 3 questions:

1. Was there ever any resurrection before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?

2. What about the raising from death during the days of our Lord Jesus Christ?

3. What is new in the Resurrection of Christ in comparison with all previous thoughts and deeds of resurrection?

Was there ever any resurrection before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?

- ✞ There are 3 incidents of resurrections that God made through His prophets:

- The incident of the raising of the son of the widow in the village of Zarephath, by the hands of Elijah the prophet. (1 Kings 17:17-24)

- The incident of the raising of the son of the Shunammite widow by Elisha the prophet (2 Kings 4:18-21, and 2 Kings 4:32-37).

- The raising of the man whose body touched the bones of Elisha the prophet when he was buried in the tomb of the prophet (2 Kings 13:20-21).

- In addition to these incidents of rising from death in the Old Testament; there are some parts in the Old Testament that indicate the raising from the death.

- ✞ In Job 19:25-27, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the Earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another how my heart forms within me."

- ✞ Hosea 13:14 "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from Death. O Death, I will be your plagues O Grave, I will be your destruction; pity is hidden from my eyes."

- ✞ Daniel 12:13 tells us of the promise of the raising of Daniel and prophesizes the expected resurrection and judgment, (Daniel 12:2). "But you, go your way till the end, for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days." "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt."

Moreover, some did not even go through death. Enoch was taken alive to heaven "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire, "Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 King 2:11).

Therefore, it appears that the belief of the resurrection was established before the coming of Christ and it was confirmed in His days too.

What about the raising from death during the days of our Lord Jesus Christ?

When our Lord Jesus asked his Disciples, "who do people say I am? They answered, John the Baptist, other said Elijah and others said one of the prophets" (Mark 8:27-28). This was what King Herod thought (Mark 6:14).

Our Lord Jesus Christ raised Lazarus after 4 days in the tomb... He raised Yairous's daughter and the son of the widow of Nain. These were not the only cases where our Lord raised people with His own power. St. John the evangelist says: "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be

written" (John 21:25). St. Luke the evangelist also said in (Luke 7:19-23), "And John, calling two of his Disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, 'Are you the coming one, or do we look for another?', when the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying" Are you the coming one, or do we look for another?' And that very hour He cured many people of their infirmities, afflictions and evil spirits; and to many who were blind He gave sight. Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard; that the blind saw, the lame walked, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them and blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

+ Martha, Lazarus' sister showed her faith in the resurrection by answering the Lord Jesus Christ saying, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the Last Day" (John 11:24).

If God, in the old times, had raised the death through His prophets, and if our Lord Christ in His own power as Son of God or God himself appearing in the flesh, has raised a lot from the dead and called death just sleep "Our friend Lazarus sleeps", yet the resurrection of Christ has another meaning. Its effect and results are more different than all that was said before about the resurrections before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and during His days on earth.

D. What is new in the resurrection of Christ in comparison with all previous thoughts and deeds of the resurrection before and during His days on earth?

- Christ's Resurrection with His own power is a unique incident in the history of human nature, along the centuries and to the end of time. Christ conquered death with His own power. As St. Peter says, "having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it" (Acts 2:24). The Resurrection of Christ proved His unlimited power because He died of His own will on the Cross and when death tried to get hold of Him, it was terrified and stricken by the power of the Divinity which is united with the body of Christ in the tomb and the soul going down to hell accordingly.

1) He was able, while on the Cross, to raise many bodies of Saints who had fallen asleep" (Matthew 27:52). Those who could not appear to people before the announcement of the resurrection of Christ, so they did not come out of their graves till Sunday though they were raised on Friday (Matthew 27:53)

2) On the third day, the date that the Lord decided for His resurrection, and while the guards were watching, He was able to raise Himself and the stone was still closing the entrance of the tomb. So, with the Resurrection of His body from the tomb, He defied death and enlightened life and eternity when He raised so many dead bodies of Saints. This is what we summarize in the song of the resurrection in 2 parts "With His death He stepped on death/ and those who were in the graves He gave them eternal life."

But how could the act of the Resurrection of Christ apply to me so as to be defiant over death? And would say, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (I Corinthians 15:55). I say with the worshippers, "not death to your servants, but transmission" He will give me eternal life.

The Holy Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, talks about the Resurrection of our Saviour and its impact on our lives. These are some of the parts where it is mentioned:

✞ In Hosea 3, the Resurrection of our Lord was announced about 800 years in advance when he said "Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us, He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third days He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning. He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth" (Hosea 31:3).

The prophecy here is about the glorified resurrection of Christ and its fruits in our lives:

Life:	After 2 days He will revive us
Healing:	He was torn to heal us.
Knowledge:	Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.
Enlightenment:	His going forth is dawned upon us.
Spiritual fruitfulness:	The rain of the resurrection will water us to bring forth within us the fruits of God's Spirit.

In Revelations it was mentioned that those who had the blessing of the resurrection, experienced a power within themselves that death could not have control over them. "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelations 20:6).

The first death	is	the death of the body.
The second death	is	death of eternal torment
The first resurrection	is	now, triumphant life over sin by repentance
The second resurrection	is	the general resurrection on the Last Day

St. Paul the Apostle wrote a whole famous Chapter about the resurrection and its fruits and glories in our lives (I Corinthians 15) and what will happen to our bodies after death and then on the resurrection. He says: "it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." He speaks about 2 bodies, one of which will be changed exactly as our Lord's body after the Resurrection. It is the same body that He died with but He raised it in new spiritual and heavenly image like light.

Then St. Paul talks about the eternal life we obtained after the resurrection of Christ; "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written "Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is you sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (I Corinthians 15:53-55).

E. How did we obtain all these blessings of the Resurrection? How was the new human nature created by the Resurrection of Christ?

This takes place with the work of the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments of the Church:

Baptism, I get the blessing of the resurrection in a new life, "We were buried with Him to death so that as Christ has risen from the dead so do we rise also into new life. This I enjoy when receiving the Sacrament of Eucharist through which the body and blood of God are unified. This slain body which has resurrected brings its power into my flesh, bones and soul and gives me the power to defy death. "Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last Day. For My Flesh is food indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:54-56).

So the Resurrection of Christ was on our behalf and it made me and every Christian united with Christ ... humans and new creations. "If someone is united with Jesus Christ then he is a new creation." This new creation is with Christ in His pains and His Resurrection too "That I know Him and the power of His

Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

✞ Accordingly, the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of human nature are the counter actions of the death of Adam and the death of human nature together, "because as in Adam all die so in Christ all live." When Adam the first man sinned he had to get the punishment of death because, "For the wages of sin is death", "The soul that sins dies" (Exodus 18:20).

Death entered human nature by heredity as it extended into the blood of all humans from our father and mother, Adam and Eve. Adam and his offsprings were exiled from Paradise and went down to Hades no matter how righteous they were because it is not possible that "corruption inherit incorruption" (I Corinthians 15:50).

But death throughout the long history of mankind was cancelled by the Resurrection of Christ.

✞ This is why saints loved death and did not fear it. It is the new Humanity. On the Contrary, they asked for it in love in order to acquire the eternal share and the Holy love. They longed for it like St. Paul, "having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." They loved it and left the world with all its false desires to live a heavenly life now and enjoy eternity and its joys.

✞ Outside the circle of Christianity ... Life on earth is full of bitterness, suffering, death and a dark ending. But, inside the circle of Christianity life with it on earth is sweet, joyful and death is a beautiful bridge to a better life, more joyful without any comparison ... All this resulted from the light of the Resurrection of Christ.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) We must thank God for the new resurrected nature that He has given to us to enjoy life and not to suffer death.

(2) We must be regular in our reading of the Holy Bible and in partaking of the holy communion.

(3) Resurrection must be the corner stone in our preaching and missionary work as it was with the Apostles.

NOTES

MAY
FIRST SUNDAY

MY COPTIC CHURCH HAS TAUGHT ME REGARDING THE CENSER AND INCENSE

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
In this lesson we will focus on the spirituality of the censer and incense in our Coptic Orthodox church.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"In every place incense shall be offered in My name"*** Malachi 1:11

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. Introduction

The church is not a social institution, but it represents "life in Christ" or "communion with the Father in the Son by the Holy Spirit", or enjoyment of the grace of God. Therefore, our faith in God is not just believing in Him as the Supreme Being who rules the universe but it is a daily experience of our close relationship with Him.

In Christianity, prayers are not duties or routine actions. They are actual communication with God in which we taste the true heavenly life.

Every time we enter our church, we find it as a part of heaven. The Lord helps us to benefit from all the details of our church and have a true heart-felt worship. "How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord" (Psalm 84:1-2).

B. Censer:

In our church the priest raises incense in the evening during Vespers, in the morning during Matins and during the Liturgy.

The Censer (which is called in the Coptic Language "Tichouri") is usually made of brass or silver in the shape of a cup. In the old times it used to be made of gold.

The cup of the censer is suspended on three chains from which it can be swung during incensing. These three chains remind us of the Holy Trinity. The three chains are connected together as the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity are in One Divine Essence.

On each chain there is a ball hanging from it. This ball causes a sound while the priest is incensing. This sound reminds the congregation to do good deeds and to pray.

Inside the censer, the deacon puts a lit charcoal, and then the priest put incense on the charcoal.

The censer with the coal burning with fire represents St. Mary carrying our Lord Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Son of God.

The Bishops or the priests are the only ones who can put Incense in the Censer.

C. The Incense:

(1) The Importance of Incense:

Incense used to be offered as an independent offering in the Old Testament on the "golden altar" prepared especially for it. This shows a great importance for the raising of incense.

Only Priests used to raise incense in golden censers (please review Numbers 16) , and incense used to intercede on behalf of the people (Numbers 16:44-48).

St. Paul mentioned that incense used to be offered in golden censers (Heb 9:4, Rev. 5:8).

In the book of Malachi, it is indicated clearly about the continuation of the raising of incense in the New Testament (Malachi 1:11).

Raising of incense is clearly indicated in the New Testament as well as in the book of Revelation (Rev. 5:8 and Rev. 8:3-4).

The gifts of the wise men to the Lord Jesus when He was born included frankincense. This is what we use today when the priest raises incense. This gift meant that our Lord Jesus is the High Priest from whom proceeds the priesthood in the New Testament.

(2) The History of Using Incense:

From the beginning we read that Noah built an altar for the Lord ... and the Lord smelled a soothing aroma (Gen. 8:21).

God provided Moses with the rites of using the incense in the Tabernacle of meeting. This continued also in the Temple which was built by Solomon. The Angel came to Zachariah while he was raising incense (Luke 1:8-11).

Incense was offered by the wise men as a gift to the Lord Jesus when He was born as mentioned here before. (Matt 2:11)

St. John the Evangelist in the book of Revelation talked about the praises that arecontinuous in heaven "Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, a golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the Saints" (Rev. 5:8). Please read also Rev. 8:3-4.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) The raising of incense gives us the firm feeling of the presence of God among us in the church "while the King is at his table My spikenard sends forth its fragrance" (Song of Songs 1:12).
(2) Occupy all the senses with the spiritual work. In the church the eyes look at the icons, the ears hear the beautiful hymns and the nose smell the beautiful smell of incense.
(3) Incense in the church expresses the meaning of prayers; "Let my prayer be sent before You as incense" (Psalm 141:2).
(4) The incense to give its beautiful smell has to melt in the censer. Similarly a Christian to become as "the fragrance of Christ" (2Cor. 2:15), he or she has to work very hard for his or her spiritual life and in preaching to others.
(5) The incense also when it goes up it forms a shape of a cloud. In the Holy Bible the presence of the cloud is an indication of the coming of God (as happened in the Tabernacle of meeting, the Transfiguration, the meeting of God with Moses and the coming of the Lord with Holy Family to Egypt).

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

MAY
SECOND SUNDAY

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ICONS OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
To learn about the importance of the icons in the Coptic Orthodox Church. Icons are not in the church for decoration but they are source of spiritual growth.

MEMORY VERSE:

"Hail to the church the house of Angels" Doxology of the Morning Prayer

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. INTRODUCTION:

Upon entering a Coptic Orthodox Church, one is struck by the vivid presence of all the icons within it. The icons in the church play an important role in many areas of the Orthodox Christian's life, and as such, have a specific role within the faith and doctrine.

The study of Iconography is a very deep and extensive field. I would like to briefly cover the four main aspects of iconography as related to the Coptic Orthodox Church:

* Icons - are we breaking the commandment of God in our religion?
* Iconostasis
* Icons of the Lord Christ
* Icons of the saints & heavenly powers

B. ICONS - are we breaking the commandments of God in our religion?

The Coptic Orthodox Church adheres to all the commandments of the Old and New Testaments. With the issue of iconography, the question always arises in regards to worshiping the icons and their role in the church - are we breaking the commandment of God, when we use the icons in our homes and churches as we worship God, as mentioned in Exodus 20:4-5.

> *You shall not make for yourself a carved image - any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shalt not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.*

We firmly believe that icons are not used for decoration inside our home or churches; they are not pieces of artwork to reflect certain cultures or to express the spiritual feelings of an artist. Rather the icons in our church give a Biblical message for educational purposes, and they have a deep effect in the life of the church and the depth of the people's spirituality.

The colour, shape, and events depicted in the icon reflect a message from the Holy Bible that explains the teaching of the church: its doctrine, faith, and tradition. The verse in Exodus (quoted above) was given to the Jews to prevent them from imitating the Gentiles who were living around them. For example, King Solomon fell into the worship of strange gods when he married a Gentile woman. This verse was also given to the Jews at the time to prevent them from mixing up the worship of God with the worship of idols.

Our church is committed to keeping the spirit of the commandments alive. We do not take it literally, because literal explanations kilt, but spiritual explanations give life. As such, the church adheres to this commandment not through canceling the use of icons, but through refusing the abuse of using the icons. We do not worship the icons - we only worship God. But we honour the saint who is drawn in the icon, remembering his or her life, learning from it, and applying it in our own spiritual life. In this manner Christians can use icons as they have the spiritual understanding not to get mixed up between the worship of God and the honouring of an icon.

Even in the Old Testament, icons were used in the tabernacle and later on in the temple. These icons were totally designed by God Himself and icons were meant to exhibit heaven. (Hebrews 8:5, *"who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."* And Exodus 25:40 *"And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain."*)

These icons described included such items as the two statues of the Cherubim in the tabernacle, the "Ark of Testament", and the statue of the bronze serpent - all showing that in the Old Testament, they were not prevented from the use of icons in an absolute way God limited the use of icons to Him and did not leave it to the choice of people. God Himself designs the icon and determined the dimensions, materials, and names of the people to construct the icons.

In the case of the bronze serpent, God ordered Moses to construct it (in a manner similar to the Cross) to become a source of healing to whomever looks at it (Numbers 21:8-10, *"And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.")*

But when people abused the use of the serpent statue, and wanted to worship it - offering oblations to it - the prophet Hezekiah destroyed it. (2 Kings 18:4 *"He remove the high places, and break the images, and cut down the groves, and break in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushian*").

According to the Coptic rites, veneration may only be given to consecrated church icons. These icons receive consecration by a Bishop and are anointed with the same Chrisma oil that is used in baptism. Thus, upon accepting some power of the Holy Spirit, they are qualified to receive incense, be kissed, or receive other forms of veneration. They are no longer memorial frames, but - as consecrated icons - have become God's possession and bear effective spiritual power that is capable of attracting the hearts to heaven and have a positive contribution to the church's life.

C. ICONOSTASIS

The iconostasis is one of the key elements of the architectural design of Coptic Orthodox Churches. The iconostasis is the screen made of wood or marble between the altar and the nave of the church. It contains the icons of the Lord Christ, His angels and His saints.

The writings of the early fathers of the Church referred many times to the iconostasis. However, they refused to call it a veil or a divider similar to the one that was used in Solomon's altar, because the veil was torn apart when the Lord Christ was crucified for us, fulfilling the reconciliation between God and man. As such, our church refuses to name it a veil or a divider but rather an iconostasis or icon holder.

The presence of an iconostasis gives special respect and honour to the altar from the rest of the church. Only the priests and deacons in this sacred area are supposed to cross the iconostasis. It does not, however, take away from the participation of the rest of the congregation in the mass. On the contrary, our church believes that the liturgy is the work of the whole church together: priest, deacon, and general public.

Also, the iconostasis reminds the worshipers of the Lord Christ, the heavenly powers, and the saints. It helps to create a heavenly and spiritual atmosphere within the church and within the worshipper. It also reminds us that the saints who departed from our world are still alive in Paradise and that they are not far from us. Indeed, they are part of our world, are still alive in Paradise and that they are not far from us. Indeed, they are part of our family, and they are connected to us through a firm love. They know what we go through and intercede on our behalf. We ask for their prayers and follow their footsteps.

The icons are positioned on the iconostasis in a specific way to give a message of the church and not simply randomly or for decoration. Facing the center of the Iconostasis, to your right hand side you first see the icon of the Lord Christ, followed by the icon of St. John the Baptist as he was baptizing the Lord, and then next to that the icon of the patron saint of the church.

On the other side are the icons of St. Mary (Theotokos) carrying baby Jesus followed by the annunciation icon, and the icon of Archangel Michael or St. Mark or the other patron saint of the church (if any).

Before every icon a candle is hung to remind us that the light of this saint come from the Lord Christ, who is the light of the world. This same reason is why we do not hang candles on the icons of the Lord Christ Himself.

D. ICONS OF THE LORD CHRIST

The center of Christian faith is that "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). One of the benefits of the incarnation of God was to enable us to have a picture of God. Without the incarnation we cannot visualize the divinity - which is unlimited and cannot be seen. But when God came over to our world through His incarnation, He manifested the picture of God. Upon looking at the icon of the Lord Christ, it is not difficult to see that the love and merciful face of our Lord Jesus Christ is the subject of most of the icons.

There are many historical stories about the source of the icon of the Lord Christ, some of which is related to St. Veronica, who used her handkerchief to wipe Christ's face on His way to Golgotha. The Lord rewarded her by copying his face miraculously on the cloth.

As well, there are also some icons of St. Mary carrying the Child Jesus that are said to be directly drawn by St. Luke the evangelist, who was a doctor as well as a painter.

As for the main features of Christ's face, it focuses on the love and kindness of the Lord, so that whoever looks at it will feel the love in it and the tremendous respect that is commanded by it. Nonetheless, at the same time it depicts a firm look - indicating the seriousness of the spiritual and heavenly life.

The face is young, filled with energy and life. The letters Alpha and Omega are sometimes written on His picture as is mentioned in the book of Revelations - that God is the beginning (Alpha) and the end (Omega) of everything. The look of His eyes reveals His patience, calmness, simplicity, and wisdom.

E. ICONS OF THE SAINTS AND THE HEAVENLY POWERS

As we have an icon for the Lord Christ, we have dedicated icons for his army of beloved ones. They participated in carrying the cross with Him and they are to be glorified with Him as well. Their lives show us that the commandments of God are practical for humans and that they are people like us who fulfilled the commandment of God with great love.

Around the head of the saints in the icons there is a halo or glory or light to signify their nature as lights of the world. This halo is circular, similar to their faces, which are usually drawn circular to signify their love for the entire world.

In the picture of the Virgin Mary carrying the child Jesus we always put her at His right hand to signify the Psalm that said, "the queen has sat at the right hand of the king". The clothes that St. Mary is wearing within the icon are often depicted as having stars on them in order to signify that she is the second heaven and that the Lord Christ within her womb is God - who is incarnated by the Holy Spirit through her.

In the picture of St. George with the devil, the devil occupies only a very small portion of the picture to signify that he has no authority or power, as the Lord promised us that He would give us victory over the devil.

You always see the picture of joy on the faces of all the saints as a result of their Christianity and their life with God. You will not find the picture of a saint who looks gloomy or depressed.

Physically the proportions of the saints within the icons differ. The size of the head appears to be too big with respect to the rest of the body - to express that his strength is in his wisdom and spirit. The eyes are usually big as well with respect to the face as if the Coptic artist does not want to represent the bodily features, but rather to represent the inner strength of the spirit. As such we see that the head is enlarged as a symbol of God, as He is our heavenly head, and the eyes are wide as a sign of our inner sight. The same applies for the ears, which are drawn larger since the saint spends most of the time listening to the Word of the Lord. As for their hands, many times the Coptic artist will show the hands of the saint as raised for prayer to declare that prayer is the essence of their holiness.

The saints are shown in the icons with two wide eyes facing outwards towards the viewer to represent their inner depth. The wicked people, similar to Judas Iscariot, are depicted usually on one side, as if they only have one eye on the world and its pleasure and are missing the more important eye towards Heaven. As well, such a person is unable to make eye contact with us, preventing us from dwelling on the evilness - but instead focusing on the holiness of the saint.

In addition to the main picture of the saint, many times you will find smaller pictures in the same icon to show some of the highlights of his or her life. Again, it gives the teaching about the saint and his or her life in a very simple way, even to people who cannot read or write. All of this is done for the spiritual growth and to glorify the name of God.

In the icon of the saints, the artist tries to depict the age at the end of the life of the saint. Ex: St. Abanoub was martyred at the young age of 12, and he is shown this way. St. George, the prince of martyrs, was martyred in his mid-20s and he is shown this way. St. Mark, who established the church in Egypt, was martyred in mid-life, and again, he is shown this way. Saint Joseph the Carpenter, who was betrothed to St. Mary the virgin, the Mother of God, when he was an old man (over 85 years old) and is depicted this way. They are shown this way within the icon because this is what matters - the end of life, not the beginning. The Bible says, "Look at the end of their life, and follow their footsteps."

Many of the icons also depict the heavenly powers. The church is filled with angels - in the Doxology of the Morning Prayer we say, "Hail to the Church, the house of angels". When we pray to God, He is not separated from the heavenly powers that He created. The concept of opening heaven on earth brings the church members closer to God. Christians are able to differentiate between worshipping God and paying respect and veneration to the angels. So it is no wonder that we find angels within the pictures of the Lord Jesus, the saints, and the martyrs as they carry the crown of martyrdom and sainthood. We also find specific icons for some of the key heavenly powers, especially those whose names are mentioned in the Holy Bible, for example, Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.

Although the artistic style of iconography varies a little from one culture to another, all Orthodox icons have the same meaning, usage and symbolism (this includes the Eastern Orthodox Churches: Greek, Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian, etc, as well as the Oriental Orthodox Churches: Coptic, Armenian, Syrian, Ethiopan, etc.).

The use of consecrated icons within the Coptic Orthodox Church adds to the spiritual growth of the people by depicting the glory of the Lord Christ, the heavenly powers, and the examples of the lives of the saints and martyrs. The use of icons serves to enrich and bless the church and those within it.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Let us look carefully at icons and try to discover the spiritual lessons in them.

(2) Let us seek the intercession of the Saint as we look at the icon that we may get what we need if it is according to our benefit and God's will.

(3) We are very thankful to God for our precious Coptic Orthodox church that we are members of. We also thank God for our beautiful church.

NOTES

MAY
THIRD SUNDAY

PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT – (I)
AMOS THE PROPHET - CANDLE IN HIS DARK WORLD

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about Amos the Prophet. In this lesson the focus is on our duty and honors to be candle in the darkness of the world.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. INTRODUCTION:

Amos the prophet was born at Tekoa, which lies about ten miles south of Jerusalem. He lived as a herdsman, as per his words, "I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit" (Amos 7:14) - in an unknown and poor family.

Amos is considered one of the writing prophets. He recorded his prophecy affected by the environment surrounding him. Therefore, we find in his writing images of the farmers and villagers' lifestyles on one hand and life in the wilderness on the other.

Amos was not a member of the school of prophets and neither was his father. That is why he says in humbleness, "I was no prophet, nor was a son of a prophet, but I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit."

Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me 'Go prophesy to My people Israel' (Amos 7:14-15). Amos prophesied for almost 50 years according to his own words, "The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah King of Judah (791-739 B.C.) and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, King of Israel (793-753 B.C.) two years before the earthquake" (Amos 1:1). The earthquake is the one Zechariah the prophet also mentioned in his words, "Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you

shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah King of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with you" (Zechariah 14:5).

Amos is a Hebrew word that means, "the burden bearer" or "burden". Perhaps, his name suits the book as he unveils the sin, which God does not tolerate, and which is also a burden for sinners.

B. The circumstances encompassing Amos' service:

(1) Although Amos was brought up at Tekoa in the Kingdom of Judah, he went to Bethel-the whereabouts of the main altar of the Kingdom of Israel, "the north kingdom", where he talked about the destruction of this kingdom because of its sins. What a very great courage! That a herdsman who had not attended the school of prophets undertakes this mission; however, divine aid and the support of the Holy Spirit backed him. Hence, Amos' prophecy was very strong, very truthful and in one language, but still using resemblance from the real life he led such as crops, birds, beasts ... etc.

(2) Politically speaking, Amos the prophet was Jeroboam's contemporary. Jeroboam was known for fierceness and rigidity. Hence, his kingdom expanded and flourished. At the same time, Uzziah, King of Judah, was a successful and strong man. So, strength and stability also characterized the kingdom of Judah.

The political side was supported by Aram (Syria)'s engagement in war with Assyria which exhausted Aram's power and enabled Israel to retrieve a lot of his possessions which Aram usurped from him. As well, Assyria in Amos' era became clement towards Egypt and, as such, ceased to launch raids on Egypt, passing through Israel.

This political stability, and the prosperity of Israel and Judah, resulted in the prosperity of foreign trade, which extended to Damascus. This, in turn, elevated the economic standard of both kingdoms.

This is what Amos means by his saying, "Who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall; who chant to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph" (Amos 6:4-6).

However, the plentifulness of money and excessive affluence led to the appearance of two classes - a very rich class of businessmen leading an extra luxurious life and a very poor class of farmers suffering from the cruelty of the rich class.

This is what Amos means by his words, "Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them" (Amos 5:11).

Consequently, Amos' prophecy and service were very important for the social problem existing at that time, class distinction and the rich's oppression of the poor.

That is why Amos addressed the rich saying in Amos 6:3-7, "Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near; who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who chant to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David, who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." He was frank concerning the non-existence of justice through his words in (Amos 5:15) "Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph."

This social and economic distinction led to bitter immorality as the prophecy reveal the appearance of the ugly practice of adultery, fraud, bribery and lying etc.

In the meantime, the plentifulenss of money in the hands of the rich made them consider worship as merely giving money to the altar, and offerings and sacrifices to God, as if they were purchasing Him with their offerings. This resulted in the existence of a rift between rite and spirit hereby worshipping life became far and away from the practical spiritual conduct and sacrifices lost their divine and spiritual concept for them.

On the other hand, the rich felt that Jehovah is a God of their own favoring them at the expense of the Gentiles regardless of their evil.

That is why the prophet Amos states in full stress and clarification that God is the God of all and does not tolerate sin no matter who commits it, whether Jews or Gentiles. As He presents salvation, He calls His name on all nations, "That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does this thing" (Amos 9:12).

God punishes the sinner whosoever even if he were a priest. That is why He said to Amaziah the priest "Therefore thus says the Lord: your wife shall be a harlot in the city, your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword, your land shall be divided by survey line; you shall die in a defiled land; and Israel shall surely be led away captive from his own land." [Amos 7:17].

C. Worshipping corruption as described by Amos the prophet:

Spiritual worship deteriorated very much in Israel at that time as Amos says "Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt saying: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities"" (Amos 3:1-2).

Therefore, Amos talks about the evils the people used to succumb to at Bethel and at Gilgal "Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, proclaim and announce the free will offerings; for this you love, you children of Israel!' says the Lord God" (Amos 4:4-5). It is as if Amos the prophet says to the children of Israel; you commit all evils and iniquities and still go to the holy places and fill them- as if they were a people characterized by religiousness and spirituality going to the house of God rather than God Himself. Hence, he says to them "Transgress .... Multiply transgression" And if your frequent visits to the sanctuaries are a cover up to your hidden evils, you are only increasing the sinfulness of your evils.

And what does he mean by his words to them, "Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days?" The Jews used to commit themselves to offering annual sacrifices as has been said about Elkanah "This man went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of hosts in Sheloh" (1 Sam. 1:3).

As well, "And the man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and his vow (1 Sam. 1:21).

The Jews also commit themselves to giving accounts for their tithes every three years as articulated in "At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates" (Deut. 14:28) and also in (Deut.26.12) "When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year, which is the year of tithing, and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that these may eat within your gates and be filled."

Therefore, Amos the prophet says to the children of Israel; if the unjust offers a daily sacrifice in lieu of the yearly one and if he gives his tithes every three days instead of three years, then this is not acceptable to God, for God is not to be bribed with money. Rather, He asks for the essence of the offering- in other words- the internal fruit of the heart not the offering per se. That is why St. Paul says "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 corin. 13:3).

What does Amos mean by his words, “Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, proclaim and announce the freewill offerings; for this you love, you children of Israel! Says the Lord?”

He says to them that if you come to My house with sacrifices and tithes then you love to enrage the Lord- because you offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven and the freewill offering to My house whereas the ecclesiastical law prohibited the offering of leaven. "No grain offering which you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to the Lord made by fire" (Lev.2: 11); leaven used to indicate evil which spreads like leaven amidst dough.

Then Amos the prophet speaks to them about their feasts, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty river." (Amos 5:21-24) He refuses the external worship detached from the internal

love. He ascribed all worship to them not to him. That is why he says "Your feasts ... your offerings ..."

We notice that in the Book of Leviticus when the Lord speaks to Moses about the acceptable feasts. He says "The feasts of the Lord" (Lev. 23:1), for worship to be acceptable, He says "let justice (Judicature) run down like water and righteousness (benefaction) like a mighty river" (Amos 5:24).

That is to say, let your life be associated with justice and philanthropy rather than injustice and cruelty.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) We must be humble as Amos the prophet was in order to be able to receive the grace and mercy of God.

(2) We must be merciful to the poor people. We must be right to the world that we live-in by our honesty, love and service.

MAY
FOURTH SUNDAY

PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT – (II)
AMOS THE PROPHET - HIS PROPHECIES

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a series of two lessons about Amos the prophet. In this lesson the focus in on prophecies in the book of Amos.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
Start by reviewing the previous lesson and discuss the various aspect with the students.

✞ **The prophecies Amos the prophet pronounced**

(1) Incarnation:

"But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah" (Amos 1:12). St. Cyril the Jerusalemite explains that this Teman is the one about which Habakkuk said, "God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran" (Habakkuk 3:3). This Teman lies south of Jerusalem. Likewise, Bethlehem, where Christ was born, does not lie to the north or east or west of Jerusalem- rather to the south of it. And when this divine fire i.e. Christ incarnate comes, it shall burn the palaces of Bozrah. The word (Bozrah) means in Hebrew "fortress" or "shed". That is to say, Christ, through His incarnation, burns the Devil's evil and arrogance.

Note:- That Teman is a tribe named after Eliphaz Ben Esau's first born son and the territories where this tribe lived [Gen.36: 11,15 and 42]. Jeremiah the prophet prophesied about the destruction of Bozrah saying, '"For I have sworn by Myself', says the Lord, 'that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse. And all its cities shall be perpetual wastes'" (Jer. 49:13).

(2) Declaration of the advent of Christ:
"Therefore, thus will I do to you, O Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel' For behold, he who forms mountains, and

creates the wind, who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, who treads the high places of the earth, The Lord God of hosts is His name" (Amos 4:12-13).

Here, Amos the prophet diverts Israel's mentality from the cruel plagues that failed to return them to God, rather, uncovered their weakness and the work of sin in them, to the delivering Messiah as declared by the Father to man who, through the Holy Spirit, accepts Him as redeemer and savior.

The text in the Septuagint translation is reported like this, "Who forms thunder and creates the spirit declares to man His Messiah" (Amos 4:13).
Many fathers, such as St. Augustine, believe that this text cherishes a clear prophecy of the Messianic Age. As the new Israel gets ready to meet his God, through the Father's declaration of His Messiah to man, the latter accepts the former as a sacrament of reconciliation between the Father and man.

Some heretics have tried to use this text to claim that the Holy Spirit is a creature-as it reads "Creates the spirit". Many of the fathers retorted back, including St. Gregory, the Bishop off Yansas saying, "We should realize that the prophet is talking about the creation of another spirit in forming thunder-not the creation of the Holy Spirit."

This is the mystery of the new Israel's meeting. It is that God forms thunder i.e. sends us the missionary word that claps in the spirit and creates in us the spiritual nature in place of the corporeal life by declaring Christ the Lord of glory inside us.

(3) Vision of the Lord in His justice (holding a plumb line):

"Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. And the Lord said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A plumb line.' Then the Lord said: Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel, I will not pass by them anymore. The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid to waste. I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam" (Amos 7:7-9).

The plumb line is a measure to tell the straightness of a wall. Using the plumb line may mean that He delivers his divine plagues with a very accurate measure to the extent of our tolerance and to the extent of our need for setup albeit this is preceded by destruction of corruption. The plumb line, being a solid object void of any leniency, may represent Christ's approach in His justice and appreciation of the

situation.

Likewise, it has been said about Christ "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" (Math 21:42, and Isa. 28:16-17). What is this stone? This stone, which was very well known for its steel-like rigidity, has become a symbol for Christ whom the children of Israel have rejected, but who has become the chief cornerstone-that is-the most important element for the spiritual structure and eternity (Lk 20:18). "Whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

In the same manner Amos likens the plumb line used in building in order to measure wall straightness to Christ, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people" (Amos 7:8). The prophet continues his talk, "The high places of Israel shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid to waste. I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam" (Amos 7:9). By this he means that if they seek protection in high places and think that sanctuaries and their current king fortify them, then their high places become desolate, their sanctuaries will be ruined, and their king, Jeroboam, together with his entire household, will be slain.

(4) Prophecy about the spread of the gospel:

(Amos 5:24), "But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream." St. Cyril comments on this saying "the mission and spread of the gospel started at a limited scale, but then they circulated vehemently like a strong flowing river-nothing can resist it." This is what Amos said i.e. justice and righteousness, being the nature of the words of God, spread strongly like water.

(Amos 8:9), "'And it shall come to pass in that day,' says the Lord God, 'That I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight.'" This is identical to the gospel according to St. Matthew (27:45), about the darkness that was over the land at the time of Christ's crucifixion "Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land, "The sixth hour is equivalent to noon as per the Hebrew timing."

In the same context, St. Cyril the Alexandrian comments on St. Luke the Evangelist's words "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour" (Luke 23:44), saying that the Jews delivered the life-giving master to death and crucified the Lord of Glory. When they hung Him on the cross, the sun and its daylight went down at noon and there was severe darkness as Amos the prophet says (Amos 8:9), '" And it shall come to pass in that

day', says the Lord God 'that I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight.'"

And also in (Amos 8:10), "I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation, I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son; and its end like a bitter day."

Many saints interpret what Amos the prophet said that at the time of Christ's crucifixion, the Jews were celebrating Passover days. This turned into grief lamentation and the elements of nature were in turmoil: the sun went down, and on earthquake occurred and also the veil of the temple was torn as reported in (Matthew 27:51-52), "And behold; the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked; and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised." So, the feast turned into lamentation, wailing and disturbance. Even the Disciples themselves were in the attic at that time, frightened and scared.

These words hold true to this day as natural fruit of evil, when life turns into darkness, and lacks stability, when feasts turn into lamentation, weeping and wailing and when there is no room for spiritual joy.

(5) Christ's resurrection and our resurrection:

Amos the prophet says in (Amos 9:11), "On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages, I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old."

Here, Amos the prophet brightens the people with the light of Christ's time and His glorious resurrection. This is what many of the Old Testament prophets do as God delivers through them a message of hope on they waited for Christ, the savior of the spirit and its deliverer from the death of sin and the fist of Satan.

Christ is risen from the dead to raise us up with Him and build us with His Holy Spirit. St. Methodius sees in this statement of Amos a confirmation of the resurrection of the body saying, "The expression of resurrection does not apply to the infallible, rather, to what falls only to rise again as per the prophet's saying 'I will raise up the tabernacle of David.'"

It is about this resurrection that Christ Himself said in (Jn 2:19), "Jesus answered and said to them 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'"

(6) Ascension of Christ:

Amos the prophet says in (Amos 9:6), "He who builds His layers in the sky, and has founded His strata on the earth; who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth-the Lord is His name."

Amos' words of "He who builds His layers in the sky" are a prophecy about the ascension of Jesus Christ and His gift to us- that is-the possibility of us ascending with Him to Heaven. This is a door of great hope for us that we, the earthy human beings, have a place in Heaven through our life latent in Christ.

Also, Amos' words "And has founded His strata in the earth" [i.e. a group assembled with Him] is an indication that His sons and daughters living in faith are His own people, under His own guard and are working for the kingdom of Heaven. As well Amos' words "who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth" are an indication to the work of the Holy Spirit- the rain that turns our dehydrated bodies into a spiritual paradise for the Lord.

(7) The Gentiles' conversion to believe in Christ:

In (Amos 9:11-12), Amos the prophet says "'On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, Which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of the old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,' says the Lord who does this thing." And this was what our masters, the apostle fathers, understood as per what is mentioned in (Acts 15:13-17), "And after they had become silent, James answered, saying 'Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.'" This is in conformity to the prophets' words as it is written " ' On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name.' Says the Lord who does this thing."

(8) There will be a time of famine for the word of God:

Amos the prophet says in (Amos 8:11), "'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord God, ‘that I will send a famine on the land not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.'"

The fruit of sin is overall devastation. Even Spiritually, man loses his/her spiritual food. This is what Amos the prophet says here and this is what God warns the sinners about i.e. they will experience famine and thirst not of food or water, but of the Lord's life-giving words. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." What a dreadful famine! The spirit seeks spiritual satiation but does not find it, not because God has deprived it, but because the spirit, with its increasing sins, and unwillingness to repent, loses appreciation for God's words being the bread of life. Therefore, let us always apply ourselves to the word of the Lord about which the master Himself says "The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life" (Jn 6:63).

St. John Chrysostom says, "The word of God is food, finery and guarantee for the spirit. Not lending our ears to the word of God results in deprivation."

(9) The great day of the Lord:

Amos the prophet says in (Amos 5:18-20), "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the Lord darkness and not light? Is it not very dark, with no light in it."

And in the book of Joel, it is said about this day of the Lord "For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible, who can endure it?" [Joel 2:11]

If God is light from light and His day is also light in itself, this light becomes darkness for the person who is spiritually blind and is unable to witness the light. By the same token, St. Basil the Great says, "The day of the Lord is darkness for those who deserve darkness. "The same thing applies to the inconsistent Jews, for whom the day of the Lord turned into a day of condemnation and bitterness (and no one can escape from condemnation), because of their many sins and iniquities which are without repentance.

For whoever flees from the day of the Lord would be like a person fleeing from a lion only to meet a ferocious bear or a person who wants to seek refuge at his/her own, those by leaning his hand on the wall only to be bitten by a serpent.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) One of the key evidences that our Christianity is right is the prophecies that were mentioned hundreds of years before Christ and were fulfilled exactly as they were mentioned.

(2) God is love. God is also perfectly fair. We never should lose hope. Christ our savior has given to us a new victorious nature.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the students
in the class

JUNE
FIRST SUNDAY

PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT – (III)
ABIGAIL: HUMILITY AND SUCCESS

PLEASE READ 1 Samuel 16, 1 Samuel 25, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
To show that success always comes with humbleness.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
(1) We all need heavenly wisdom. This we can obtain through our prayers seeking it.
(2) Humbleness is the key to the success because the Holy Spirit only works within the humble heart.
(3) We have to be flexible and ready to change our opinions or actions if you hear a better advice.

A. After the Lord had chosen David from among his brothers to rule over Israel in lieu of King Saul, He sent Samuel the prophet to anoint Him king "And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint Him; for this is the one!' Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:12-13). Saul, however, remained in power and chased David so that the latter became a nomad, moving from one place to another and recruited 600 men around him. As for Samuel the prophet, he did serve the Lord and His people in full honesty till he attained the age of ninety. "Then Samuel died; and the Israelites gathered and lamented for him, and buried him at his home in Ramah" (1 Sam. 25:1). Thus, all the Israelites loved Samuel and lamented him as they had lamented Moses the prophet "And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab..." Deut. 34:8. Likewise, after the demise of Stephen, they "made great lamentation over him" (Acts 8:2). No sooner had the funeral ceremonies come to an end than David went down to the wilderness of Paran, (1 Sam. 25:1). So Paran is a wilderness - that is to

say - spacious and almost uninhabited and is in the vicinity of Carmel, the whereabouts of a very rich man named Nabal who had a lot of sheep.

It came pass then that David, together with his 600 men, guarded Nabal's possessions against any attacks by the philistines or even ferocious animals. This was what Nabal's shepherds expressed when they said "But the men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields. They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep" (1 Sam. 25:15-16).

David and his men needed food. It goes without saying that "The Labourer deserves his pay." It was Nabal's shepherds and belongings that they were taking care of and it was Nabal who was expected to feed them for their work. What description did the Bible give of Nabal's wife? "The woman was smart and beautiful" (1 Sam. 25:3).

B. How did the Bible describe Nabal? "But the man was harsh and evil in his doings. And he was of the house of Caleb" (1 Sam. 25:3). Regrettably, the Bible describes this man as harsh and evil, though he was a descendant of Caleb who used to inhabit Hebron and its vicinity. "Now to Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave portion among the children of Judah, according to the commandment of the Lord to Joshua, namely, Kirjath Arba, which is Hebron (Arba was the father of Anak)" (Joshua 15:13). So this man, Nabal, was posterity of a noble origin and had a great wife. However, all this had no impact on him. Rather, he was described as harsh and evil. Even nowadays, a person may be of a noble origin and may have an excellent wife. Yet, all this does not influence him. Rather, he is more affected by other currents that mold his identity. Likewise, Pilate, the ruler during Jesus Christ's age, received a message from his wife saying "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him" (Mat. 27:19).

However, Pilate failed to benefit from this, the protopriests, and the elders' voices over powered him thereby leading him to deliver Jesus to them and release Barabas. We should always benefit from the situations we experience and also lend our ears to our kinsmen's pieces of advice checking them thoroughly before we act and react. "When David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep, (1 Sam. 25:4). This was the time for feasting, merriment and generous offering. Therefore, David sent a

message with ten of his men. "David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, 'go up to Carmel, go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. And thus you shall say to him who lives in prosperity, peace be to you, peace to your house, and peace to all that you have. Now I have heard that you have shearers. Your shepherds were with us, and we did not hurt them, nor was there anything missing from them all the while they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, they will tell you. Therefore, let my young men find favour in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever comes to your hand to your servants and to your son David" (1 Sam. 25-5-8).

What a complete message where David asked in full decency and politeness. Before presenting his request, David professed profound courtesy and sentimentality. He expressed his best wishes that Nabal's life be preserved. He wished peace for him, for his household and all his properties. David also explained that he deserved aid because he was in need and because he took care of Nabal's shepherds and guarded his possessions. David did not want to get hold of anything without permission from Nabal. David even asked Nabal to check with his shepherds concerning his service as well as that of his men - to them.

David, therefore, adequately addressed all aspects relevant to the issue for which he sent his message: - good introduction, noble sentiments, full awareness of Nabal's riches, and a reminder of his food. The objective was clear, the means as well was polished, correct and gentle. Sometimes, our objectives are correct but the means is unacceptable or unsuitable. Was it a proper means how Moses defended his fellow Hebrew brother when he killed the Egyptian? Was Peter's means proper in defending Jesus Christ (although Jesus does not need any human defence) when he unsheathed his sword and severed the protopriest's serf's ear. Definitely not. In all our actions, let both the objective and the means be correct. Nabal returned this decency with obduracy and offense when he ignored the reason for which David was living like an outcast and interpreted David's approach in a very harsh way "Who is David and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have Killed for my shearers and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?" (1 Sam. 25:10-11).

C. Nabal's method of speech revealed his arrogance and greediness as well as the cruelty and lack of wisdom that dwelled in his heart. "The person speaks

his heart." Nabal's word also showed that he underestimated the service David and his men rendered to him. Moreover, Nabal's statements proved that he was deprived of the deep insight to make him think of David's behaviour should what he said be reported back to him. Indeed, Nabal's answer back was so scornful to David and unjust to him and his men alike.

"So David's young men turned on their heels and went back, and they came and told him all these words" (1 Sam. 25:12). David failed to stand and answer like this. This humble David, anointed by God to become king in place of Saul, could not bear what Nabal said. He even thought about taking the law in his hand and shedding blood had it not been for God's interference and prevention. "Then David said to his men, "Every man gird on his sword." So every man girded on his sword and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went with David, and two hundred stayed with the supplies" (1 Sam. 25:13).

D. Here God intervenes to preclude us from succumbing to weakness and committing a gross sin. Here God transforms evil into good by employing Abigail, Nabal's wife, to compensate for her husband's foolishness and make up for David's intolerance. Here we see a woman saving not only two men, but so many others whom David and his men were determined to kill. Abigail is a Hebrew word derived from two words that mean "the father or source of joy." So it is as if wisdom is the source of authentic joy not only for the wise person but also for his or her family and those around him or her as well. King Solomon says "A wise son makes a glad father, but foolish son is the grief of his mother" (Prov. 10:1).

Likewise, St. James quotes, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But, if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthy, sensual, and demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:13-18).

The men knew that Abigail was a wise person

> "Now one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, 'look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master; and he reviled them. But the men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields. They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore, know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his household. For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him" (1 Sam. 25:14-17).

How very straight this man's speech was. It disclosed the man's confidence in his master's woman and his respect for the role performed by David as well as the difficulty of dealing with Nabal. How nice this man's expression was in describing David and his men as "walls to us both by night and day", for God is a wall to us. Having heard the man's speech, Abigail did not admonish or consult her husband, nor did she rebuke the man because he called her man a scoundrel. Time was so terribly short and there was a desperate need for quick, albeit wise, action. So Abigail prepared huge quantities of food and wine for David and his men and placed them on donkeys asking her men to pass ahead of her.

Abigail met David and his men "Now David had said, "Surely in vain I have protected all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belongs to him. And he has repaid me evil for good. May God do so, and more also the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all who belong to him by morning light'" (1 Sam. 25:21-22).

E. Thus far was David furious, exasperated and insistent on punishing Nabal.

> "Now when Abigail saw David, hastened (1) to dismount from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down (2) to the ground. So she fell at his feet and said: 'On me (3), my Lord, on me let this iniquity be. And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant. Please, let not my lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I, your maidservant (4), did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord gives and as your soul lives, since the Lord has held you back (5) from coming to bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand, now then, let your enemies and those who seek harm for my lord be as Nabal. And now this present (6) which your maidservant has brought to my lord, let it be given to the young men who follow my lord. Please forgive the trespass of your maidservant. For the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord

fights the battles of the Lord (7), and evil is not found in you throughout your days. Yet a man (8) has risen to pursue you and seek your life, but the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God; and the lives of your enemies He shall sling out, as from the pocket of sling. And it shall come to pass, when the Lord has done for my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you ruler over Israel (9), that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself. But when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your maidservant'" (10) (1 Sam. 25:23-31).

F. The following are some comments on the underlined words mentioned in Abigail's message above:

1) Hastened: so that she might dampen David's fury quickly.

2) Bowed down: of humbleness and so that she might solicit David's goodwill.

3) On me: because she did not want to attach the iniquity to another person. Rather, she focused on solving the problem.

4) Maidservant: full humility.

5) The Lord has held you back: that is to say - it was the Lord - not a human being, who stepped in. This, of course, was a touch of kindness from the Lord towards David. The Lord interfered in this manner to save David who was undergoing a moment of weakness.

6) This present: a refined mode of expression implying that the present was not a gift or reward from them but a blessing from God to David.

7) Fights the battles of the Lord: that is, the Lord-sponsored battles such as the battle from the Philistine who scoffed at the living God's lines.

8) A man: meaning Saul

9) Has appointed you ruler: she was reminding David that he would be king and consequently, it would be inappropriate that such incidence be in his history.

10) Remember your maidservant: humbleness and love.

Indeed, "A soft answer turns away wrath" (Prov. 15:1). And, indeed, humility is followed by a great deed. Thus, Abigail was successful in her mission. What impact did this situation have on David? David felt that what Abigail had done was a divine message filled with wisdom. Therefore, he said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand. For indeed, as the Lord God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hastened and come to me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal. So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and said to her; "'Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your voice and respected your person'" (1 Sam. 25:32-35).

Here is David's response to God's voice pronounced through Abigail's words. David renounced his previous intention and welcomed Abigail's suggestion in full meekness. Truly, stubbornness is a mighty enemy to man. But God himself teaches us that He passes a sentence, yet, He is willing to reverse it - just as what happened with the people of Nineveh. He was determined to overthrow the city but, "relented from the disaster that he had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." Jonah 3:10. That is to say, God abstained from punishing the people of Nineveh because they repented upon Jonah's call upon them. Likewise, we should consult our father of confession, seek the advice of our elders and be willing to give-up self-conceit and obstinacy.

Ten days after these events, Nabal died and David heard about it, and thanked the Lord for he realized the significant role the Lord had performed toward him "Blessed be the Lord, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept His servant from evil! For the Lord has returned the wickedness of Nabal on his own head" (1 Sam. 25:39). Then the Lord guided David to propose to Abigail to take her as his wife. She accepted without arguing and in humbleness saying, "Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord" (1 Sam. 25:41). Abigail accepted David when he was amidst distress and was not king of Israel yet.

We may liken David's marriage to Abigail to Jesus Christ's marriage to the human spirit of the church in its entirety. It was inevitable for Abigail to get rid of Nabal who represented the pagan worship. Throughout ages, for the spirit to unite with Jesus Christ, it is mandatory for it to dismantle corrupt worship and move up to the

glorious freedom of sons of God. There is no chance whatsoever that light can exist side by side with darkness. Our Lord compensated Abigail's patience by this husband, David, in replacement of her former husband. So it is for whosoever persists in his or her struggle in spiritual life; let him or her stick to Jesus Christ, the greatest gift, and savour life's genuine favor to make up for the hard times spent under Satan's domination.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) We all need the heavenly wisdom. We can obtain this through our prayers seeking it.

(2) Humbleness is key to the success because the Holy Spirit only works within the humble hearts.

(3) We have to be flexible and ready to change our opinions or actions if we hear a better advice.

JUNE
SECOND SUNDAY

THE HOLY SPIRIT THE PARACLETE
(ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN)

Please read John 15:26-16:15 and also the attached article entitled "The Abandonment Of Grace", and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
To learn that the Holy Spirit inside us is the most precious gift that God gave us as the result of the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross and paying the price of our sins ...

MEMORY VERSE:

And I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever. John 14:16

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. Introduction:
Let us review first the event of the Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21) and then proceed.

B. New Birth from the Holy Spirit:

✞ "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become Children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

✞ "... but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:33-34).

✞ "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see The kingdom of God'. Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of The water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God'. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:3-8).

C. The Holy Spirit is the "Gift of God" to the Humble:

✞ "Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? 'For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, 'if you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you give Me a drink', you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:9-10).

✞ "Jesus answered and said to her, Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14).

✞ "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24).

✞ "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for that Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39).

D. The Needs of the Human Spirit:

✞ "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

✞ "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God" (John 8:48).

✞ "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread, which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:48-51).

E. The Actions of the Holy Spirit on the Human Spirit:

✞ "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:16-18).

✞ "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26).

✞ "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me" (John 15:26).

✞ "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." (John 16-7-11)

✞ "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak of His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:12-14).

F. SOME ADDITIONAL BIBLICAL REFERENCES ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit Is the Spirit of God

- "But Peter said 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3-4).

The Promise of the Lord about the Dwelling of the Holy Spirit in all People:

- "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28).

One Full Chapter about the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and One Chapter about Speaking in Tongues:

- Gifts of the Holy Spirit: (1 Cor. 12)
- Speaking in Tongues: (1 Cor. 14)

The Dwelling of the Holy Spirit inside Us:

- "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16).

The Communion of the Holy Spirit:

- "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen" (2 Cor. 13:14).
- "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1) Let us always pray from our heart saying "O Heavenly King, the comforter, the Spirit of truth ... the life giver, graciously come and dwell in us and purify us..." The third hour Litany in the Agpeya book.

2) Let us remove all the obstacles that would hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in us e.g. pride.

3) If we are truly children of God, we must be lead by the Holy Spirit in all our actions. (Romans 8:14)

THE ABANDONMENT OF GRACE

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Success or failure in one's spiritual life depends on the work of grace and the extent of one’s acceptance or refusal of it.

Grace always helps man, assists him in leading a spiritual path, warns and lifts him up if he falls.

The divine grace does not force man to do good. His free will is still in power, sharing in the work with grace or not; resisting the work of grace until he falls or continues in his fall.

Therefore, one sometimes abandons sharing in the work of grace. Sometimes grace abandons him. But it is a kind of partial abandonment. Complete abandonment would definitely lead to one's destruction.

What are the reasons for this abandonment? What is the wisdom behind it?

The reason for the abandonment could be negligence on the side of the faithful and continual rejection of the work of grace. Therefore, grace abandons him until he feels the need for it.

This abandonment leads to greater depth in one's prayers and fasting, repentance and attachment to God.

Pride could be the reason for this abandonment, or it could be one's superiority over those who have fallen. Grace would then leave him for a little while so he would fall, realize his weakness and stop his arrogance. He would also feel the heaviness of war against those who fall and have sympathy on them instead of judging them with secrecy or in the open.

Grace might forsake one for a while to experience spiritual combats and realize its depth and the faithful need for the divine support, as one would never win by relying on a human hand without grace.

Grace might also forsake a person to get him accustomed to cautiousness and scrutiny, patience and victory of the Lord. During all that, the Lord says to the human soul, *"For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you." (Is. 54:7).*

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

JUNE
THIRD SUNDAY

AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY OF MISSION (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of four lessons on the theology of mission. In this lesson the focus is on the importance of missionary work in the life of all Christians.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"*** Mark 16:15

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) The Evangelistic Commandments

While going through the verses of the Holy Bible, do you recall coming across the evangelistic commandments in both the Old and New Testaments? Go, I send you, Evangelize, Be Missionaries, Be Witnesses for Me in...The Remotest Parts of the Earth! You probably came across these without pausing and without reflecting. Perhaps it did not occur to you that these commandments were directed to you personally. As you believed that you have served adequately, within your ability and your means, you felt spiritually comfortable and satisfied so far...

When it comes to going to the remotest part of the world, you may feel that this is not for you. It seems more suitable for people like apostles, evangelists, or others who are specifically called for this. Perhaps it is for Christians from other denominations who seem to have the expertise, knowledge and training for this type of service. Perhaps you think it is for those people who have courage, strength, special personal or financial capacities, and who speak several languages. Then you turn to yourself saying, "As for me, it is enough for me to serve within

Jerusalem or Judea - at the most, in Samaria - but not to serve in the farthest parts of the earth."

(B) GO THEREFORE!

Many Orthodox Christian believers may not be aware that the commandment exists, straight from the mouth of the Lord. It addresses both individuals and groups imploring, "Go therefore!" This commandment includes necessary sacrifice, hard work, insecurity as a result of leaving behind a dwelling or a place of comfort and luxury. This may involve separation from motherland, familiar environment, culture, family, friends, your childhood church, your language- Jerusalem and Judea only.

Perhaps this non-awareness is due to our inadequate knowledge of the divine commandments contained in the holy gospel. For example, in Sunday school and youth classes, our teachers, in preparing us as servants, focused on those commandments that dealt with our relationship with God, and with developing this relationship. They emphasized those commandments that dealt with our relationship with family, relatives, neighbours and people in general, whether they were enemies or friends.

They spoke also about the commandments that led to salvation through the means of grace, repentance, renewal and sanctification of the heart, mind, body and soul.

Perhaps the majority of ministers and teachers agreed not to deal with the commandment regarding the missionary:

Go! Evangelize! Become Witnesses! Go Out And Beyond! Be Missionaries! Send You, Proclaim!

Go Therefore! - To the Village!

If a minister or preacher is modern, courageous and daring in his evangelistic thinking, he will urge his servants to move from one settled service to another settled service.

FROM MODALITY TO ANOTHER MODALITY

Moving to the outer village is then considered a courageous leap. The minister of one modality has moved to another, which is again another pastoral modality. It is,

however, less stable and comfortable than the original modality, which falls within the frame of the stable pastoral ministry.

Go Therefore! To Lands of Emigration

The need arose for the church to serve immigrants, who settled in many countries. It was necessary to send priests and shepherds to these parishes. The church leadership took a daring step: they selected ordained ministers and gave them the authority and the commandment to "Therefore go!" But to where?? To the West, to far off lands where the standard of living is high, and technologically advanced. There were very few obstacles (minor and major) in the face of this type of ministry, while there are many attractive and encouraging aspects.

Numerous ministers obeyed this commandment with zeal out of desire's love. They moved to a stable ministry within the same modality. The only difference was that the motherland - "Jerusalem" - was now located in a foreign land. Churches, which were replicas of the original mother church, were established, with priests and various other people who were ecclesiastically and evangelically within the structure of the pastoral work.

Go To The Field of Mission In The Farthest Part Of The Earth!

*'**Go Therefore** and make Disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' Teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19.)*

'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mk. 16:15).

Through these two commandments, and many more, the Lord Jesus commanded us to go to a deeper and more noble sodality. This is for the sacred purpose of winning over new souls, adding more Disciples to His disciples, and expanding the church to include new nations, nationalities, and diverse ethnicities. The Lord assures us that this evangelism will influence all of creation. Once a person has been reborn, the mind and attitude are changed; the person's approach to God's creation also changes; the person becomes more gentle, protective and nurturing to plants, animals and the environment. The Bible says: “A righteous person regards the life of his beast” (Prov. 12:10).

This study will lead us to a vast quantum of evangelical teaching varying in special situations, purposes and spirituality. These commandments have been emphasized

and reiterated; they have the loftiest and noblest status in all the church's spiritual work.

(C) Signs of Life In The Church

The living church works, struggles and grows in faith and numbers. It expands and gives birth to new members through two means:

BIOLOGICAL GROWTH
Biological growth falls within the settled model - **MODALITY**.

EVANGELICAL GROWTH
Evangelical growth falls within the world of evangelism - **SODALITY**.

This is the spiritual militancy which brought us the message of the gospel. Through it: the first baptism took place, the first bishops, priests, and deacons were ordained, the first churches and cathedrals were founded, many souls repented and joined the footpath of faith. When they had grown spiritually strong in the faith, the establishment of the church began.

ACROSS THE CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

Although many think of St. Mark as an Egyptian, more aptly he emerges as an African. The Apostolic Fathers were of entirely different nationalities from those of their mission and evangelism. They all moved across boundaries of their motherland, culture, language, their cultural customs and kinship.

Evangelism does not constitute a part of the spiritual responsibility within the church; rather it is its pillar; it is its backbone, and its foundation. Not all those who serve within the church may be called evangelists, missionaries or apostles, but it is possible to re-direct the church from the broad ways to the narrow ways; from the settled modality, to the mobile sodality, which goes out to evangelizing.

St. John Chrysosotum demonstrates the importance of evangelism as follows: the pastoral bishop says that his diocese is his world; the evangelist says the world is his diocese.

As head of the church, the bishop performs three tasks (or rather, one with three sides to it):

* Sacramental priesthood

* Pastoral priesthood
* Evangelistic priesthood

These were the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, St. John adds further:

* We have a full Christ for our salvation.
* We have a whole (Bible) for our teaching.
* We have a whole church for our fellowship.
* We have a whole world for our mission (our diocese).

⇨ Do not say that you are unable to influence others. For as long as you are a Christian, you are able to influence others, because this is the essence of Christianity.

⇨ It is contradiction to say that you are a Christian but you are unable to do anything for others; this is like saying the sun is unable to give light.

⇨ If yeast is incapable of leavening the dough, is it possible to call it "leavening"?

⇨ How can the perfume be fragrant if its aroma does not permeate the surrounding air?

⇨ By the same token, a Christian who does not work for the salvation of others, is he/she a Christian?

⇨ Thus, Christianity and serving others are inseparable, like the sun which cannot be called a sun if it does not radiate light, Christianity cannot exist without love for the salvation of the human race.

⇨ We have one ultimate goal which is above all goals: to save those at risk. We do not mean the type of risk felt by our senses. This is not a risk at all. We mean the risk of true danger inflicted by Satan on the human race.

⇨ If you saw a blind person who was about to fall into a pit, would you not rush to extend a helping hand? How can we then help watching our brethren fall into similar dangers without reaching out, with a healing hand, when they are about to fall into the eternal pit?

- ⇨ Treat the souls of your brethren who are suffering from sin and who are laden with the shackles of paganism the same way you seek treatment for yourself, knowing that our transient life is only brief. If we do not win over these souls, there will be no salvation for our own souls.

We are committed, my brethren, to struggle for the salvation of our brethren, so that on judgment day we can meet Christ with joyful faces, offering our generous and unsurpassed gifts: the souls of the sinners, the pagans and the non-believers whom we restored to Him through our evangelism and preaching.

There are many nations and millions of souls across the universe, who lives in spiritual famine: in the darkness of ignorance and paganism. If we embrace the evangelistic thought, we shall be able to reach the whole world and to look at all these people with eyes of love, concern and responsibility. We will be able to offer them all that was handed to us by our Lord Jesus Christ and apostles, and share with them one communion'... in one hope of your calling; one LORD, one faith, one baptism' (Eph. 4:5).

Through St. Paul, the Holy Spirit poses the following questions for us:

- ⇨ How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?
- ⇨ How shall they believe in whom they have not heard?
- ⇨ How shall they hear without a preacher?
- ⇨ *'How shall they preach unless they are sent?'* (Romans 10:14).
- ⇨ *'So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God' (*Romans 10:17).
- ⇨ *'Whoever calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved' (*Romans 10:13).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) There are evangelical commandments in the Holy Bible. These commandments are for all Christians. Every Christian is to have in mind and to put into action to affect people and help them to draw nearer from God. A true Christian must be like a light in the world.

(2) The growth in the church is supposed to be not only biological growth but also evangelical growth.

(3) We have duties towards the non-Christians. We must affect them and lead them towards the salvation of their souls. Then when we stand in the final judgment day we will not be ashamed of ourselves because we did not care for others and help them out towards their salvation. It is the commandment of God.

NOTE: This series of lessons is taken from the writings of His Grace Bishop Antonios Markos.

NOTES

JUNE
FOURTH SUNDAY

AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY OF MISSION – (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a series of four lessons on the theology of mission. In this lesson the focus is on taking a series of positive actions in Evangelization. The requirements are carrying out an effective evangelization are the seriousness, readiness to sacrifice and work under the direction of God.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"Go therefore and make Disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you..."*** Matt. 28:19-20

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. AIMS AND TYPES OF "GOING"

1. Seeking Livelihood

This constitutes a genuine desire to endure all the sacrifices involved in going to a foreign land and facing all risks in order to achieve the ideal standard of living, saving money, furthering progress in academic or educational standards.

2. To Escape Danger

* 'Arise, take the young child and His mother, flee [go] to Egypt' (Matt. 2:13)
* 'Arise, take the young child and His mother, and go to the Land of Israel' (Matt. 2:20)

3. To Escape Tribulation

'At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered...those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word' (Acts 8:1-4).

4. Believing in the Lord and Being Committed to Obey Him; to Prepare a Chosen People, and Receive the Promise of Eternal Life

'The Lord said to Abram, "Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father's house, to a land I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you; and make your name great, and you shall be a blessed...' (Gen. 12:1-2).

5. To Preach the Gospel: Give Birth to Children of God, Born Through the Water and The Holy Spirit

* 'Go Therefore and make Disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matt. 28:19-20).

* 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned' (Mark 16:15,16).

* 'Go your way. Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves' (Luke 10:3).

* 'Go stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life' (Acts 5:20).

* 'Now an Angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Arise and go towards the south along the road..." so he arose and went ... opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and preached to him, Jesus...and they went both into the water and he baptized him...' (Acts 8:26-38).

* 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the Kingdom of God' (Luke 9:60).

* 'But the LORD said to me: "Do not say I am a youth. For you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak...Behold, I have put my words in your mouth'" (Jer. 1:7-9).

* 'And he said, "Go, and tell this people" (Isaiah 6:9).

* 'And as you go, preach saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt. 10:7)

* 'Go to my brethren and say to them...' (John 20:17)

* 'What man of you...And go after the one which is lost until he finds it.' (Luke 15:4)

B. Prerequisites and Constituents of Going, for the Gospel:

1. To Forsake All Things

When the Lord commanded us to go to remote and foreign places for the sake of the gospel, He also commanded us to leave behind all things because those who do will be rewarded by the Lord.

- 'Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother, or wife or children, or land, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold and inherit everlasting life.' (Matt 19:29)

- 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundred fold now in this time...and in the age to come eternal life.' (Mark 10:29-30)

- 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents, or brothers, or wife or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come, ever lasting life.' (Luke 18:29-30)

It is wise to abandon everything for the Lord's Name, or for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, or for the sake of the expansion of the kingdom of God on earth.

2. Not to Burden Oneself with Many Material Things

Materialistic objects hinder a person's free mobility and may expose them to dangers of robbers or greedy people who are desiring their treasures. (They need carry only one treasure, which is the Name and the Word of the Lord). Neither should they carry anything which may be interpreted as a self-defense weapon (e.g. a stick).

As to the needs of the flesh, the Lord assures us that these will be abundantly provided for: accommodation; food; footwear; clothing; currency (gold, silver or copper). It is an historic fact that when St. Mark arrived in Alexandria in 42 A.D., he did not carry any shoes in obedience to the Lord's commandment. One of the fruits of this obedience was the miracle the Lord manifested through him. This miracle opened the door, an evangelism among the Egyptians, for him: when St. Mark's sandals were torn, he took them to Anianus-the shoemaker; while repairing the sandals Anianus' hand was wounded, and through the name of the Lord Jesus, and the power of the sign of the holy cross, Anianus' hand was healed.

3. Sent Them Two by Two

'Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken' (Eccl. 4:9-12). If the apostles were subjected to martyrdom, the presence of a companion with the martyr enabled him to write his sayings and his biography for the benefit of the church.

- 'The LORD appointed seventy others...also sent them two by two before His face into every city and place' (Luke 10:1).

- 'By the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established' (Deut. 19:15).

4. To Be Wise As Serpents And Harmless as Doves

The spiritual power, commanded by the Lord to accompany us in the field of evangelism, opens many doors and spares us many dangers. Thus, the evangelists are protected, and at the same time, the hearts of the recipients are opened.

'Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves...' (Matt. 10:16)

5. To the Whole World

This includes crossing over all barriers, obstacles and limitations.

'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.' (Mark 16:15)

6. Proclaim

'And as you go, Preach saying the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' (Matt. 10:7)

7. Pray for the People

Pray for the sick to be healed, for the lepers to be purified, for those possessed by demons to be freed, for the dead to be resurrected...

8. Speak in New Tongues

The evangelist ought to learn the languages of the people amongst whom he ministers, as this is a very important medium to convey a comprehensive spiritual teaching, according to the gospel. It is worth noting that the first gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles and the Disciples on Pentecost Day, was the ability to speak in the tongues of the people among whom they were scattered for the purpose of evangelizing. "Learn the people's language, you will win their hearts." was advised by His Grace Bishop Shenouda - H.H. Pope Shenouda III - in 1966, when I first went to my missionary service in Africa.

- 'They will speak with new tongues.' (Mark 16:17)

- 'And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.' (Acts 2:4)

- 'And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born.' (Acts 2:8)

C. The Blessings of Going: The Gifts and Assurances of the Lord

1. '...shall receive a hundredfold and inherit everlasting life.' (Matt 19:29)

2. 'Receive a hundredfold now in this time - houses and brothers and sisters, mothers and children and lands along with persecutions - and in the age to come, eternal life.' (Mark 10:30)

3. 'Receive many times more in the present time and in the age to come everlasting life.' (Luke 18:30)

4. 'A worker is worthy of his food.' (Mark 10:10)

5. 'Stay there till you go out.' (Matt. 10:11)

6. 'It will be given to you in that hour what you should speak, for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speak in you.' (Matt. 10:19-20)

7. You will not lack any worldly needs or spiritual power:
   * 'When I sent you without money bag, sack and sandals, did you lack anything?' (Luke 22:35)

8. Do not be concerned as to what to say, and about what to speak:
   * 'When they deliver you up, do not worry about how and what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour, what you should speak.' (Matt 10:19)

9. Signs, miracles and powers which accompany the evangelist:
   * 'In my name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues.' (Mark 16:17)

10. He will give them immunity and protection against all dangers and threats:
    * '...they will pick up snakes with their hands, and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them...' (Mark 16:18)

11. 'The LORD worked with them and confirmed the word through the accompanying signs.' (Mark 15:20)

D. The Going Requires Courage

Irrespective of the motive for going, it requires courage to endure being a foreigner, facing the unknown, crossing long distances, learning new languages,

dealing with people of different races. Examples of courage can be found in the following:

The Courage of the Merchant: With the incentive of transient profit, hoarding of money, the merchant does not take into account the perils of land or sea, storms, pirates or highway robbers...he endures everything for the sake of the anticipated profit.

The Courage of the Farmer: For the sake of the consumable harvest, the farmer faces all the difficulties resulting from toil, sweat, labour. He faces storms, rains, floods, heat waves, cold and snow. He battles against pests, noxious weeds, thieves, etc.

Courage of the Soldier: Seeking earthly glory, victory and honour, the soldier is subjected to danger, torture, likelihood of captivity or imprisonment, death or amputation of a limb or more, the loss of one or more of his senses....

"The word of the LORD came to me saying: 'before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

Then said I: "Am, LORD God! Behold, I cannot speak for I am a youth."

But the LORD said to me, "Do not say I am a youth, for you shall go to all to whom I send you and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces. For I am with you to deliver you."

Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdom, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.' (Jer. 1:4-10)

'Thus says the LORD, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you and when you pass through the rivers, they shall not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD, your God. The holy one of Israel, your saviour. Since you were precious in my sight, you have been honoured, and I have loved you.' (Isaiah 43:1-4)

E. Going Requires Obedience to the Evangelical Commandments

- 'Go Therefore and make Disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.' (Matt. 28:19)

- 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.' (Mark 16:15)

- 'Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' (Luke 24:47)

- 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent me, I also send you.' (John 20:21)

- 'You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' (Acts 1:8)

'And in the church, God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.' (1Cor. 12:28)

* 'And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we come to the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' (Eph. 4:11-13)

* 'Then he said to me: "depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.' (Acts 22:21)

The Shift From "Going" to "Stability"; or the Shift of the Evangelist, to A Pastor/Minister, Consequently Transferring the Mission Into A Parish

- After St. Mark evangelized in Egypt, baptized many, established the church of Alexandria, and ordained Bishop Ananias in addition to a number of priests and deacons, would it be logical that St. Mark would stop his evangelistic mission to become a parish priest of a congregation or a bishop or a diocese looking over after the concerns of the congregation?

- Would it be logical that St. Mark would be content with establishing churches in Alexandria, without any plans to extend his evangelism to the rest of the Egyptian soil, followed by North Africa (his birthplace), then down to southern Egypt, Nubia and other countries?

- After the apostles and the Disciples saw the Lord Jesus with their own eyes, after they witnessed His miracles, listened to all His teachings and experienced His crucifixion and His resurrection, would it be logical that they would keep all this to themselves (or to their families), so that they alone might receive the redemption and salvation and inherit the kingdom?

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) A Christian must take a pro-active role in Evangelization i.e. "Go". Evangelization is not just thinking about it, but doing something about it.

(2) In "going" to evangelization we must be ready to sacrifice and leave something behind, do not worry about money, to be wise and simple in the same time and most importantly to pray for direction from God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(3) The rewards of "going" are several huge blessings now and eternal life.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

JULY
FIRST SUNDAY

AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY OF MISSION – (III)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson three in a series of four lessons on the theology of mission. In this lesson the focus is on the commission of the Lord for us to carry the message of salvation to the whole world and His support for us to carry the mission. The preacher must witness to the true life and his/her actual experience with the Lord.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"Do not say, I am a youth; for you shall go to all whom I sent you..."*** Jer. 1:7

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A) I SEND YOU, GO FOR MISSION

"As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" said Jesus the Lord

God sent the human race prophets and scribes of His word for whom He sent His Spirit for inspiration. Then He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He also sent His apostles and Disciples and gave them talents, power, tongues, courage and the authority to administer the seven sacraments.

It is an instruction by the Lord, to carry the message to fulfill His will for the salvation of the human race everywhere, and at all times. He rejoices in working within and through us. He lays down the basis of the mission for us; He sends us to accomplish it.

He first came, sent by the Father, to fulfill the most serious of tasks and the most important mission for the whole of humankind. This was the mission of

redemption and salvation. He emphasized that in the same manner the Father sent Him, He also sent us. If we were to keep all the various commandments of the Lord, and we were to ignore the missionary commandment, we would ignore a vital part of the church's mission on earth.

This mission did not come into being until they ascertained His resurrection. Alive, existing, glorified and giving them His Peace. After that, he gave them the mission, He gave them the authority to forgive the sins.

✞ 'Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them "Peace be with you..." Now when he had said this, He showed them His hands and His sides. Then the Disciples were glad when they saw the LORD.'

'Then Jesus said to them again "PEACE to you! As the father sent me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them "Receive the Holy Spirit". If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, If you retain the sins of any they are retained.' (John 20:19-23)

Many nations live in the darkness of sin because they are ignorant of anything different. The knowledge of the salvation, for which they are to be prepared and which is waiting for them, is the essence of this ministry and its mission. When a person responds to this vocation, it is then that God's love for these sinners and His yearning for their redemption and their salvation from sin and from the corruption of this world, is realized in their mission.

✞ 'You are our epistles written in our hearts, known and read by all men, You are manifestly an epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.' (2 Cor. 3:2-3)

✞ 'I must preach the Kingdom of God, to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent." And he was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.' (Luke 4:43-44)

✞ 'How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?' (Romans 10:14)

✞ 'Then he said to me, "Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles."' (Acts 22:21)

✞ 'I certainly seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt, I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.' (Acts 7:34)

✞ 'Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel out of Egypt.' (Exodus 3:10)

✞ 'Also I heard the voice of the LORD saying "whom shall I send and who will go for us?" Then I said "Here I am! Send me.' (Isaiah 6:8)

✞ 'Do not say I am youth, for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.' (Jer. 1:7)

✞ 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.' (John 3:28)

✞ '...sent them two by two ahead of Him to every town and place where he was about to go.' (Luke 10:1)

✞ 'I send you out like lambs among wolves.' (Luke 10:3)

✞ 'Show which of these two You have chosen, to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell.' (Acts 1:24-25)

✞ '...called to be an apostle and set apart for gospel of God...' (Romans 1:1)

✞ 'For He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me towards the Gentiles.' (Gal. 2:8)

✞ 'You are the seal of my apostleship in the LORD.' (1 Cor. 9:2)

(B) BE MY WITNESSES

To be an eyewitness is to proclaim what actually has been experienced, and the innermost feelings of one's heart, reaching a stage where you can no longer suppress your feelings, nor keep these feelings to yourself only. Instead, you must spread them to others, emphasizing their truth. A person greatly rejoices when his/her witness is well received and accepted by others. On the other hand, a person becomes greatly saddened if his/her witness is rejected. Generally, it is preferable that the witness be through the mouths of two or three witnesses.

✞ '...by the mouths of two or three witnesses...' (Deut. 19:15)

✞ 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in Samaria and to the end of the earth.' (Acts 1:8)

✞ 'And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness.' (Acts 10:42-43)

✞ 'Of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to that day when He was taken from us...one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.' (Acts 1:21-22)

✞ 'Most assuredly, I say to you, we speak what we have known and testify what we have seen.' (John 3:11)

✞ 'This is the disciple who testifies of these things and wrote these things and we know that his testimony is true.' (John 21:24)

✞ 'You killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses'. (Acts 3:15)

✞ 'And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.' (Acts 5:32)

✞ 'And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the Land of Jews and in Jerusalem.' (Acts 10:39)

✞ 'He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses to the people.' (Acts 13:31)

✞ 'Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, and you are witnesses of these things.' (Luke 24:47-48)

✞ 'And I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.' (John 1:34)

✞ 'Rabbi, he who was with You on the other side of the Jordan to whom you have testified... - behold, he is baptizing...' (John 3:26)

✞ 'You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, and these are they which testify of me...' (John 5:39)

✞ 'You say rightly that I am king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.' (John 18:37)

✞ 'John bore witness of him and cried out, saying, "this was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me. From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another."' (John 1:15-16)

✞ 'Now this is the testimony of John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him: "who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed "I am not Christ".' (John 1:19-20)

✞ 'And John bore witness saying "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and remain upon Him. I would not have known Him except the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is He who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.' (John 1:32-34)

✞ 'And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.' (John 19:35)

✞ 'So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.' (Acts 8:25)

✞ 'So God, who knows all the heart, acknowledged them, by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us.' (Acts 15:8)

✞ 'And with many other words, he testified and exhorted them saying: "Be saved from this perverse generation".' (Acts 2:40)

✞ 'To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.' (Acts 10:43)

✞ 'Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.' (Acts 14:3)

✞ 'When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was constrained by the Spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.' (Acts 18:5)

✞ 'Now I go bound in the Spirit of Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Spirit testifies, in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.' (Acts 20:23-23)

✞ 'The following night the Lord stood by him and said "Be good cheer, Paul; for you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness in Rome.' (Acts 23:11)

✞ 'And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.' (Acts 4:33)

✞ 'But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the Grace of God.' (Acts 20:24)

✞ 'And how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly from the house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.' (Acts 20:20-21)

✞ 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men, of what you have seen and heard.' (Acts 22:14-15)

✞ 'But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness, both of the things which you have seen and of things which I will yet reveal to you.' (Acts 26:16)

✞ 'Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day, I stand witnessing, both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come - that Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.' (Acts 26:22)

✞ 'The life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.' (1 John 1:2-4)

✞ 'And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him and he in God.' (1 John 4:14-15)

✞ 'And we also bear witness and you know that our testimony is true.' (3 John 1-12)

✞ 'And I brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' (1 Cor. 2:1-2)

✞ 'When He comes, in that day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.' (2Thes. 1:10)

✞ 'Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the suffering for the gospel, according to the power of God...' (2 Tim. 1:8)

✞ 'And there are three that bear witness on earth: The Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three agree as one. If we receive the witness of me, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself, he does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.' (1 John 5:8-12)

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) The call is from God to spread the world of the gospel of joy to all. He will send us equipped with spiritual strength and heavenly power no matter how weak we are physically.

(2) To have an effective preaching and evangelization one must have experience himself or herself in living his or her daily life with the Lord and witness to others on the work of the Lord.

NOTES

JULY
SECOND SUNDAY

AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY OF MISSION – (IV)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is the fourth lesson in a series of four lessons on the theology of mission. In this lesson we focus on showing that many Christians sacrificed their life on earth to preach the message of salvation reach the people who need it. Convey the good news to all the hearts (i.e. do the work of the evangelist).

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***" ... do the work of an evangelist ..."*** 2 Tim 4:5

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

(A.) PROCLAIM, PREACH

Evangelism is not a part of the religious responsibilities; it is the pillar and the backbone of the spiritual ministry. It is the main feature of church life and growth, and without it the church is weak and lifeless.

Evangelism was the first mission of the Lord Jesus. It was the fundamental work of the apostles and their successors - the believers in the early centuries.

Evangelism was the commitment of the believers throughout the generations i.e. delivering the message to many for the sake of their salvation. For the sake of the noble mission of evangelism, thousands of missionaries offered their lives to convey the message of salvation and redemption to souls who never heard of it.

The Catholic monks and nuns began the missionary work during the fifteenth century, in Africa; their arrival to the shores of East Africa was possibly in 1494

A.D. They were followed by the Protestants in the seventeenth century. They boarded huge ships, departing from the European shores in multitudes. On some ships, about one thousand missionaries would be on board, together with their families. The journey to African shores was a long one, under harsh conditions. Some of them suffered from malaria, and dysentery. At the time, diagnostic and medical facilities were not well developed. Many died, and their bodies were thrown in the sea. Those who remained, continued their journey to Africa approximately 60-70% of the total number who left Europe.

From the time they arrived on the African shores, until the time they reached their destination of evangelism, they had to travel for hundreds, even thousands of kilometers, either on foot, or on the backs of mules or donkeys. They were preceded by a guide, followed by a large number of porters, carrying their luggage.

The journey on foot took a long time. In the equatorial jungles, some were subjected to attacks by wild animals; some were infected by fatal illnesses which prevailed at that time e.g. fevers, bites of tsetse flies, pernicious malaria, dysentery. By the time they reached their destinations of ministry, large numbers had died and were buried on the way. In a marvelous devotion, deep love and self-denial for the sake of the mission, those who remained continued, until they reached the mission locations. They numbered less than 50% of those who had initially departed European shores.

They commenced their mission, and later, were followed by large numbers of missionaries who took their same routes. They were neither inhibited nor intimidated by the news of various dangers, obstacles, and losses of many of those who had preceded them; nor by other difficulties, nor stories of those who were buried at sea, or in the African jungles.

Those who eventually reached their mission stations, lived with their wives and children under very harsh conditions. They were deprived of all means of comfort, security, medical attention and education. As soon as they settled among the African tribes they tried to communicate with them. They made arduous attempts to learn the various African tribal languages, beginning by writing various expressions and terminologies for each dialect. Then they compiled a dictionary for each of these vernaculars, and eventually translated the gospel to the tribal languages.

Translating the New Testament, alone required between 50 and 70, perhaps even 100 years. This work was undertaken by successive groups of missionaries for

centuries, until both Testaments of the Bible had been completely translated into the relevant local languages.

Many of the missionaries established schools and hospitals. They taught the indigenous people how to read and write. They then evangelized the message of salvation, to win them over to become a prepared nation of believers. When they converted a believer he/she would become a co-worker to convert others, among his/her ethnic group (tribe), to the good news of salvation.

- 'And he *said to them "Go into all the world and preach the gospels to every creature.' (Mark 16:15)*
- *'Then the Disciples went out and preached every where and the Lord worked with them and confirmed His word by the signs that accompanied it.' (Mark 16:20)*
- *'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.' (Matt 24:14)*
- *'Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman had done will also be told as a memorial to her.'*
- *'And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.' (Mark 13:10)*
- *'Then He said to them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' (Luke 24:46-47)*
- *'He appointed twelve - designating them apostles - that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.' (Mark 3:14-15)*
- *'So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them.' (Mark 6:12-13)*
- *'Who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead.' (Acts 10:41-42)*

- *'And as you go, preach, saying "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' (Matt. 10:7)*

- *'Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke and exhort with all long suffering and teaching.' (2 Tim. 4:2)*

- *'Then He called His twelve Disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.' (Luke 9:2)*

- *'Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him ....' (Luke 8:1)*

- *'And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?' (Romans* 10:14-15)

(B) THE EVANGELISM - EVANGELIZATION. DO THE WORK OF AN EVANGELIST

Evangelism is when a person conveys good and joyful news to people who have never heard it before; these people are the ones most in need of this news; the "good news" is synonymous to the "gospel". The joyful tidings from the mouth of God are similar to the joyful news brought by the angel: the living spirit, **sent** by God to convey the **message** of good news - the gospel- , for such is the likeness of an evangelist and angel.

- *'For if I preach (evangelize) the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach (evangelize) the gospel! ' (1 Cor. 9:16)*

- *'But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.' (2 Tim 4:5)*

- *'O Zion, you who bring good tidings (evangel), get up into the high mountains; O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings (evangel), lift up your voice with strength, lift it up be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" . Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will father the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.' (Isaiah 40:9-11)*

- *'And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and evangelizing Jesus as the Christ.' (Acts 5:42)*

- *'Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching (evangelizing) the word.' (Acts 8:4)*

- *'But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching (evangelizing) the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, ... great number believed and turned to the Lord.' (Acts 11:20-21)*

- *'As it is written "How beautiful are the feet of those who evangelize the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:15)*

- *'And we declare to you glad tidings (evangel) - that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus.' (Acts 13:32-33)*

- *'And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.' (Eph. 4:11)*

- *'He came and preached (evangelized) peace to you who were far off, and to those, ear. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.' (Eph. 2:17-18)*

- *'So when they had testified and preached (evangelized) the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, evangelizing the gospel in many Samaritan villages.' (Acts 8:25)*

- *'Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached (evangelized) Jesus to him.' (Acts 8:35)*

- *' ...when they had evangelized the gospel to that city and had taught many.' (Acts 14:21)*

- *"... brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached (evangelized) to you, which also you received and in which you stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I evangelized to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.' (1 Cor. 15:1-2)*

- *'... the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received if from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.' (Gal 1:11-12)*

- *'But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach (evangelize) Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood.' (Gal 1:15-16)*

- *'But even if we or an angel from heaven, evangelize any other gospel to you, than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.' (Gal 1:8)*

- *' ... because he preached (evangelized) to them Jesus and the resurrection.' (Acts 17:18)*

- *'But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now evangelizes the faith which he once tried to destroy". And they praised God because of me.' (Gal. 1:23-24)*

- *'So they departed and went through the towns, evangelizing the gospel and healing everywhere.' (Luke 9:6)*

- *'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to evangelize the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed.' (Luke 4:18)*

- *'But He said to them "I must preach (evangelize) the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent." And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.' (Luke 4:43-44)*

- *'For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach (evangelize) the gospel not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.' (1 Cor. 1:17)*

- *'To me, who am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given, .. I should preach (evangelize) among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. ' (Eph 3:8)*

- *'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your god reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)*

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Everyone of us must maintain the faith which we obtained through the shedding of the blood of the Apostles. To pursue their footsteps, we must be ready to sacrifice with our time, efforts, money and comfort.

(2) We are responsible after tasting how sweet is life with the Lord and let other people's hearts also rejoice through the Gospel of joy.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

JULY
THIRD SUNDAY

PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT
DEBORAH - IMPORTANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of three lessons on the book of Judges. The focus here is on the importance and characteristics of leadership.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

INTRODUCTION: The book of "Judges"

After Joshua, the son of Nun, took over the leadership of the Israelites from Moses, he succeeded, with the Lord's help, in entering the land of Canaan, which God had promised. This took place around the year 1230 B.C.

The people settled down in the Land of Canaan, and were transformed from migratory nomadic state of living in camps, to a new urban way such as that experienced in Egypt but which they gave up of their own free will more than forty years ago.

The Book of "Judges" covers a span of about two centuries, following the entry into Canaan at the hand of "Joshua", starting with the death of Joshua and ending in the death of Samson, which was just prior to the commencement of Samuel the Prophet and the legacy of Kings, beginning with "Saul", followed by "David". Saul was anointed King around 1095 B.C.

Their new way of life took off quietly and monotonously, but gradually evolved into spiritual languor, mingling with pagan peoples, and becoming influenced by their culture, tradition and their fatally wrong religious concepts. The people compromised the continuity of their spiritual struggle, despising the greatest of Divine gifts. They started to languish, and most of them took to apostasy, sharing with pagan peoples the idolatry practices left in their midst.

Why did the people of God allow the pagan people to dwell amongst them, and why did they slacken to with the Canaanites? (The word "Canaan" means "agitation"). Therefore, retaining the Canaanites with the objective of putting them to tribute, instead of driving them out, points to the swaying of the heart to covetousness (Judges 1: 27-35). "... and it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out...".

The Lord commands us to drive out all spiritual agitation and confusion. But for the "extraction of tribute", i.e. love of money; we do no not cast it out, electing to maintain it for our material benefit. This degrades the spirit and erodes detrimentally our eternal life.

The slackening with the Canaanites (the evil people), allowing them to co-exist for the love of money and not utterly driving them out, was the cause of afflictions and harrowing deviation for the sons of Israel. Love of money is the root of all evil.

How numerous are those who lost everything for the love of money, such as: Judas and Demas, and many like them. The sons of Israel were, at that point, devoid of foresight that would have enabled them to anticipate the risk of congregation dwelling among pagan peoples, and the damage this would cause in the long run. It is imperative to contemplate the future with preconceptions, as did the "unjust Steward", which was quoted by the Lord Christ, Glory be unto Him, in "Luke 16:1-13", wherein it is said: "So the master commended not for the indebtedness to his master but he was praised for his foresightedness, having prepared himself for future eventualities. Likewise, we also ought to look to eternal life and be prepared by assigning everything for that objective through foresight and penance.

The Book of "Judges" demonstrates to us the power of the Hand of God and His repetitive measures of chastisement of His people as an inevitable consequence of their drifting away from Him. He allows that they fall into the bondage of pagan neighbors for a lapse of time that could extend to forty years!! Every time the people would cry to the Lord in contrition and penitence. Every time the Heavens answer and the Lord elect from within them and judge their litigations for the rest of his life. Such "rescuer" is called "Judge". His "terms of reference" are not as those applicable to present-day literal interpretation. The role of such judge was broader than implementing justice and passing sentences according to laid-down laws or verbal tradition. In other words, his message extended beyond enforcing justice through law application to restoring righteousness and reinstalling it in the lives of the members of the community, defending the rights of the congregation

and rescuing them from the tribulations that victimized them. These judges had authority but not like that of kings.

Every tribe managed its own internal affairs through the Chief of the Tribe. But as regards the major issues that concerned the community at the level of the conglomeration the community at the level of the conglomeration of all tribes, such as armed confrontation with enemies and the people overcoming of afflictions befalling the people, these would be referred to the Judge, whose duties include also the castigation of the obliquity of those taken to apostasy by turning to idolatry.

B. The Judge was appointed by GOD.

✞ **The judge symbolizes the Lord CHRIST:**

A brief comparison between the lives of the "Judges" as illustrated in this Book, and the life the Lord Christ - Glory to be unto Him - will reveal the following similitudes:

1) God appointed the Judge for the rescue of the people without the people having any nominations. The Lord Jesus Christ - Glory be unto Him - was preordained by the Father before all ages.

2) The judges appeared at a time when the people were in vital need for them. The Lord Christ came to the world at a time when the world was in desperate need of His coming.

3) The Judges liberated the Israelites from bondage. The Lord Christ liberated us from the yoke of sin, redeeming us from the state of bondage to adoption of children.

C. "Deborah" the Prophetess and Judge

(Judges Chapter 4):

In every age, God brings forth the positive role of women so that they may not live passively, but rather perform their role within the community. The Prophetess and Judge “Deborah" excelled quite beyond a multitude of the male Judges themselves.

"Deborah" is considered to be the only woman mentioned in the Holy Bible to have been placed in the top place and highest authority within the community despite having lived thirteen centuries before Christ.

"Deborah" was a wife to a man about whom nothing is known except that his name was "Lappidoth". When her faith was manifested as a mighty power to be reckoned within Israel God chose her to become The Judge of the People.

What is the secret lying behind Deborah's excellence as a Judge and Leader of the people during the time of war? Her faith in God, coupled with her ability to encourage others to trust in God's help and support, is the key in all her actions.

For twenty years, Jabin, the King of Canaan, was oppressing mightily the children of Israel. He spoiled their fields and slaughtered their children. Faced with this oppression, many of them renounced God and turned to idolatory.

"Deborah's" dwelling was in Mount Ephraim, situated on the way between Ramah and Bethel. She dwelt under the palm-tree, and the children of Israel came to her for judgment.

"Deborah" was sensing the trepidation of the people from the ferocity of Jabin's might with the captain of his army, Sisera, and their arsenal of 900 chariots of iron. At the same time, she was convinced of God's supporting power and that, if the people repented and offered contrite penitence, victory would be forthcoming from God, one way or another.

"Deborah" started by summoning a man called Barak from his own town Kedesh and imparted unto him that she feared not Sisera's army nor his 900 chariots of iron, that the power of the Spirit and the power of God are with them, and will provide them with the ability to overcome and vanquish the enemy and all his evil powers.

"Deborah" said: "Has not the Lord, God if Israel commanded saying: 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the river Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand?'" (Judges 4:6-7). Note: The ten thousand men symbolize the person who keeps the law (the figure "10") in a spiritual and heavenly way (the figure "1000"), or in a Divine way, because "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years".

Perhaps Deborah has reminded Barak that God Who had lead His people out of slavery in the land of Egypt and rescued them from Pharaoh and his chariots in the Red Sea, will deliver them also from the hands of their enemies who are much stronger and have all that number of chariots. Her speech was very encouraging that he felt a need for that mighty and powerful spirit that Deborah possessed, to accompany him at war. "And Barak said to her: 'If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go'" (judges 4:8).

What an astounding assertion from a man to a woman during that time!! If anything, it was an expression of the extent he trusted her and how much he valued her strong conviction. "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because He Who is in you, is greater than he who is in the world." (1 Jn. 4:4). "Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh" (Judges 4:9).

When they arrived, Deborah and Barak saw the armies of the enemies, she said, in a proclamation of great faith: "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?" (Judges 4:14).

How strong is the reliance on the Lord as evidenced by the expression: "Has not the Lord gone out before you?" How confident is Deborah's firm belief in God that is illustrated by this assertion!! Here lies the secret of the success of any person: Faith that works with love and trust in God, fulfilling His Commandments.

"And the Lord rooted into Sisera and all his chariots, and all his chariots, and all his army, with the edge of the sword before Barak" (Judges 4:15).

What happened? The answer lies in Deborah's hymnal praise as mentioned in Chapter 5 of the Book of Judges: "The Lord dropped heavy rain and the mountains gushed before the Lord, and the earth trembled upon Sisera and his army, crushing his chariots and all his host. Barak then advanced with his men upon them, vanquishing and killing them, to the extent that even Sisera himself - the Commander of the army -sought to flee on foot to save his own skin. And Jael went out (from her tent) to meet Sisera and said to him: Turn aside, my Lord, turn aside to me. Do not fear. And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket (because if the severe cold, of course!)" (Judges 4:18),and killed him. Thus was fulfilled Deborah's prophecy when she said to Barak: "For the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (Judges 4:9).

Thus, was achieved the victory of Deborah and Barak, not through enormity of numbers, nor preponderance of resources but through the Name of the Lord of Hosts.

St. Ambrose (4th Century) says: "The Church vanquishes the powers of the adversary, not with weapons of this world but with spiritual warfare." "Mighty is God for pulling down strong-holds, casting down imaginations" (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) We must be careful not to let any evil or sin stay in our heart because over time, this evil or sin will grow and cause a big problem.

(2) We need leadership, at home, in church, at school and at work. Faith in God is the most important characteristic of a good leader.

(3) Women must not be deprived from taking a leadership role. Thirteen centuries before Christ Deborah was chosen by God to be the leader.

JULY
FOURTH SUNDAY

PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT
DEBORAH - IMPORTANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP – (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a series of three lessons on the books of Judges. The focus here is on the importance and characteristics of leadership.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. Start by reviewing the previous lesson and discuss with the students.

B. Deborah's Hymnal Praise:

Origen (A learned Scholar of the early third century) attributes this Hymnal Praise to the person who strives actively as a "wasp" or "hornet", singing this hymn throughout his/her spiritual strife, when the Lord causes the rugged mountains to shake in front of us, granting us to emerge victorious and reign to Eternity.

(First part of the "Doxology" - Verses 1:11)
As a "Prelude" to the Hymn, Deborah sings a proclamation of God's bounty, praising Him, and mentioning the governors and people together. She describes the spiritual conquest of the community to God's work within the servers, the leader and the people - namely God's work through the communal body.

"Chanting" is the language of praise of the Heavenly Hosts. When we - as humans - chant, we sing to God hymnal praises of thanksgiving for His love, enjoying the savor of our companionship with Him. The person who sings to the Lord is one who takes pleasure in a heavenly way of living whilst still on earth. His/her heart, thoughts and all his/her senses join in the chanting. Thus providing an exquisite taste and a rapturous enjoyment in life. By contrast, the person who suffers depression, gloom, dejection and fury, leads a bitter life, which, at best, is tasteless and fraught with nothingness.

For a person to attain the sublimity of singing hymnal praises to God, he/she must first be thankful with all his/her heart. (Refer to Luke 17:11-19). Next, he/she should dedicate time for prayer and praise. The most striking examples that we have, is David the Prophet, who used to mingle his prayers with songs and his chants with prayers using musical instruments and sweet hymnal praises.

Would that we take interest in the sweet church hymns and the beautiful church songs!! Would that we care seriously about attending and participating in the midnight hymnal praise with all that it contains of serene and angelic chants!!

"Hear O Kings!" addressing pagan kings (because there were no kings yet in Israel). Give praise to the True God. **"I, even, I, will sing to the Lord;"** As if she wants to say: "Look and see that I - Deborah - the weak and humble person - I open my mouth to praise God for His wondrous act with me."

"Lord, when You went out from Seir, when you ascended out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens poured, the clouds also poured water." (Verse 4). This is her recollection of God's work with His people when he led them about through the way of the wilderness. He Himself, at this time, "When you went out... when you ascended out" redeems His people and stands not aloof of the person in his strife. The terminology "When you went out" and "When You ascended out" imparts the strong coherence that Deborah had with God.

Deborah then proceeds to recall God's work in the confrontation with Sisera: "The earth trembled and the heavens poured. The clouds also poured water. The mountains gushed from before the Lord." She goes on to describe the feats of God in the days of her predecessor, Shamgar the Judge of Israel.

"In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were deserted and the travelers walked along the byways" (Verse 6). This implies that the tribulation had befallen the people during the last days of the previous Judge "Shamgar". (Judges 3:31).

As for "Jael" in this text there are some who are of the opinion that this is "Jael" the wife of Heber that killed Sisera. Others believe that it was another "Jael" that played a role during the days of "Shamgar".

Deborah portrays for us the hard time that the Canaanites gave to the children of Israel, having closed the highways for them so that the Jews were compelled to use

crooked hazardous byways, the fields having become deserted of workers who fled to the cities to take refuge and save haven for fear of the assault of the Canaanites.

This is a portrait of the adversary actively engaged in ferocities against the humankind. He installs the barriers in the way leading to God through despair and evil enticement, trying to escort it along the distorted alleyways of ungodliness, in an attempt to diverting its course and converting its inner filed of arid land and its garden into desolate wilderness. The humankind remained in this state until the establishment of the spiritual church in the person of "Deborah", and she proclaimed her motherhood in the Lord; **"I arose a mother in Israel",** as if to emphasize that it is inevitable, in order to be liberated from the bitter bondage of the Canaanites, that Deborah be accepted as a mother, in other words, the acquiescence of the spiritual church. One of the Christian Saints said once: "Whosever desires that God may be a father to him must perforce take the Church as this mother".

"They chose new gods; then there was war in the gates: not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel" (Verse 8).

The afflictions of the children of Israel were not solely a result of harassment of the Canaanites externally. They had a bitter experience from within, stemming from the internal corruption that resulted from their choosing new gods in preference to the True God. For this reason, and as punitive measure the Lord left them until the war advanced to the gates. In such situation, what could Israel have done, even if its army consisted of 40,000 warriors, none of whom was carrying the shield of spirituality or the spear of faith?

The Canaanite deprived them of carrying weaponry, but they themselves deprived their own selves by relinquishing their spiritual armor through straying away to idolatry.

"My hear is with the rules of Israel, who offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the Lord" (Verse 9).

The state of the people, both internally and externally was deplorable. The Lord did not abandon them, but appointed Judges for their rescue: "Speak, you who rider on white donkeys, who sit in judges' attire, (referring to the rich) and who walk along the road (referring to the poor), give praise" (Verse 10). In other words, let everyone join in praising the name of God, Who works amidst His people to rescue them from their affliction.

"Far from the noise of the archers, among the watering places, there they shall recount the righteous, acts for His villagers in Israel: then the people of the Lord shall go down to the gates" (Verse 11).

The prevailing opinion about the "archers" is that it is they who divide the spoils - each having his portion - and they bring their portions of the spoils to the watering places for drinking. Celebrating the occasion, they praise the Lord for His righteous acts, having granted them victory over their enemies and provided them with extensive spoils that will escort them on entering the gates of the city.

Second part of the "Doxology" (Verses 12-31):
This part proclaims the redeeming work of God through Deborah. It represents a symbol of and preparation for the redemption to be offered by the Lord Christ through the Church of the New Testament:

"Awake, awake, Deborah: Awake , awake, sing a song: Arise, Barak, and lead your captives away, O son of Abinoam" (Verse 12).

Because humankind slept the sleep of death through the sin, Christ came to proclaim the resurrection of the Church that he will bring together from the four corners of the earth. Hence, the word "Awake" is repeated four times!

"Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles; the Lord came down, for me against the mighty" (Verse 13).

"The survivors", in this context, exemplify the children of Israel, the people who were in a lasted for long years, ruled over the nobles of the Canaanites. The same also happened with humankind, after having been oppressed and downtrodden by Satan, overpowered him and nullified his authority.

In her "Doxology" (Hymnal Praise), Deborah recapitulates the tribes that joined forces with Barak:

"From Ephraim were those whose roots were in Amalek. After you Benjamin, with your peoples. From Machir (the tribe of Manassi) rulers came down; and from Zebulun, those who bear the recruiter's staff" (Verse 14).

"And the Princes of Issachar were with Deborah; as Issachar, so was Barak, sent into the valley under his command; among the divisions of Reuben there were great resolves of heart" (Verse 15).

Here, Deborah commends the princes of Issachar, having each of them in person went out with Deborah to the battlefield. She also praises the tribe of Naphtali saying: "Zebulun is a people who jeopardized their lives to the point of death. Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield" (Verse 18).

As for those tribes that did not participate in the war and the strife, Deborah reprimanded them gently and courteously: they were Reuben, Gilead, half of the tribe of Manassi, the tribes of Dan and Asheer. About these, she said:

"Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, to hear the pipings for the flocks? The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of heart. Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and why did Dan remain on ships? Asheer continued at the seashore, and stayed by his inlets" (Verses 16-17).

Whilst Deborah the Judge commends the tribes that took part with Barak in the battle and reprimanded those that were indolent, she speaks about the enemy itself and about the battle. She says:

"The Kings came and fought, then the Kings of Canaan fought in Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they took no spoils of silver. They fought from the heavens; the stars from their courses fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away. That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O my soul marches on in strength (in honour), (Verses 19-21).

The enemy had thought that, going down to the city of Taanach, they would loot spoils and silver. But were surprised that Heaven itself was fighting against them. "O my soul marches on in strength." This is shown in certain translations such as: "Thou has trodden down strength," i.e., the person cleaving to our Lord treads on Satan and all his haughtiness.

"Then the horses' hooves pounded, the galloping, galloping of his steeds" (Verse 22). The horses that strike the earth with their hooves without providing rescue are but the trust of man in humans or in his own self for redemption.

" 'Curse Meroz', said the angel of the Lord, Curse its inhabitants bitterly, because they did not come to help of the Lord. To the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Most blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed is she among women in tents" (Verse 23-24).

The curse befell the city of Meroz and all its inhabitants, while the blessing was bestowed on Jael, because Meroz stood passively, having left Sisera to flee without arresting him or handing him over to those enjoying the Lord's support. As for Jael, she killed him.

The city of Meroz symbolizes the person that does not gather with the Lord, and therefore scatters. As for Jael, she exemplifies the person dedicated to work with the Lord against the kingdom of the devil. She also portrays the Church, having smitten though faith in the Cross, the serpent's head and crush the devil under her feet, helpless and devoid of any power over her, rendering him absolutely lifeless.

'"Thus let all your enemies perish, O Lord! But let those who love Him (meaning the people of God) be like the sun when it comes out in full strength.' So the land had rest (meaning our body had rest from the enticements and the wars of the devil, so long as the Lord Himself is working within us) for forty years" (Verse 31).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Victory in home or church or the community is a result of the work of God in all members. Let us praise His holy name.

(2) The Devil cannot stand against the children of God.

(3) Through Christ our Lord, the True leader of our life, we gain salvation and eternal life.

JULY

FIFTH SUNDAY

PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT DEBORAH – IMPORTANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP – (III)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is the third lesson in a series of three lessons on the book of Judges. The focus here is on the importance and characteristics of leadership.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. Start by reviewing the previous two lessons and discuss with the students.

B. Spiritual lessons to be derived from the life and struggle of Deborah, the Prophetess and Judge:

1) We should be obedient to God in an absolute sense:
The children of Israel had not obeyed God's commandment to drive out the Canaanites from their land. They elected to put them to tribute for love of money. Result? They co-existed with idolaters and became influenced by them. "Evil communications corrupt good manners.: They deviated from worshipping the True God, and thus God delivered them to the hand of their enemies who humiliated them.

As Coptic Christians, do we preserve our Coptic Orthodox heritage and proudly uphold the principles and ideals of out forefathers while living in the land of migration? Do we firmly resist being influenced by other faiths or religions and unfalteringly renounce practices and behaviors that contradict the teaching of our Bible? Wish that we never compromise or defile the right {Orthodox} faith that was handed over to us by our predecessors.

2) The Woman has a leading role to play, according to God's Grace:
Before the coming of Christ by about thirteen centuries, God employed a woman to become a Prophetess and Judge for the people, which position was the highest and most prominent at the time. Discrimination against women in whatever

position - not least in leadership - is in contradiction with Christian love. But in the issue which is in conformity with the Lord's Command in both Testaments of the Holy Bible. Not for once has a woman been made "Priestess", ever.

3) The Believer is a candle that gives light to others:
That strong faith, inculcated deeply within Deborah, was the cornerstone of the dynamic power of the people against their enemies. Likewise, the Christian individual is today a resplendent candle in society, dispelling the darkness of the devil and granting grace with blessings to others. "They see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven."

4) Would that we hand over to God the reign of our life:
Deborah said to Barak: "Is not the Lord Gone out before you?" (Judges 4:14). If we handed over the reign of our life to the Lord, we must inevitably succeed in everything. Would that we waited for God's work in our life, rather than rushing and pushing everything!! Let us pray for everything saying: "Thy Will be done." Let it be by Prayers, not just by the lips, but, from deep within our hearts, we ask that God may lead our way in everything.

5) Would that we thank God, always, from the heart:
We fail to thank God and to extol his bounties "for every condition, and in every condition." But Deborah "sang, and Barak the son of Abinoam on the day." (Judges 5:1). Thanks should not be delayed or procrastinated. Would that we thank God at work, at home, at school and indeed in every step we take. God does not need our thanks, but we benefit immensely from presenting these thanks, because it is here that we reciprocate the love of our Lord, through acknowledging gratefully His loving kindness towards us.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) A good leader must be totally obedient to the word of God.

(2) Discrimination against women in whatever position is against Christianity.

(3) We must be a light/witness to the whole world. We must praise God's name always from the heart.

AUGUST
FIRST SUNDAY

THE VIRGIN MARY'S MOTHERHOOD IN OUR DAILY LIFE – (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson one in a series of two lessons about the motherhood of St. Mary the Virgin. In this lesson the focus is on the effect of her motherhood in our daily lives.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:
The Virgin Mary's motherhood in the Bible:

A. The Virgin Mary is the Mother of God:

The Holy Bible bears witness to St. Mary's motherhood to God through clear phrases that Jesus Christ, Who was born by the Virgin Mary, was God:

- ✞ Isaiah the prophet said, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel". (Isaiah 7:14) which is translated, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). "and the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory" (John 1:14).

- ✞ When Elizabeth greeted the Virgin Mary she spoke out as she was filled with the Holy Spirit, "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). The Virgin Mary is the Mother of the Lord Whom she carried in her womb, and the babe leaped in Elizabeth's womb in joy and glory to his Lord.

- ✞ The virgin Mary gave birth to her Son and the Angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds announcing the good news saying "For there is born to you this day in the City of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the House of Jacob forever and of His Kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

As our Lord Jesus Christ is "God with us" then she, who gave birth to Him, is His Mother. For this reason, our Orthodox church values calling the Virgin Mary, "The Mother of God" or "the Lord's Mother."

B. The Virgin Mary is the mother of the new creation.

- The Holy Church says in the Tuesday Teotokia (Glorification for the Mother of God), "Hail St. Mary, Mother of the living. We ask you to intercede for us".

- As Eve has lost the proper meaning to be called mother of all the living, (Genesis 3:20), because of her disobedience, she brought death upon her children instead of life; but her daughter St. Mary took that position through her faith, humility and obedience and became through the Holy Spirit, the mother of all the living in Jesus Christ.

- This relationship that was formed between the New Eve and all believers through the Incarnation was formally announced by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself on the Cross. St. John the Evangelist says "when Jesus therefore saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son", then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother" and from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:26-27). It is clear from the words of our Lord that He gave His mother, St. Mary, as a Mother to his beloved disciple St. John and to all who love Him and believe in Him. He gave her to them as an intercessor with a mother's role in bringing them closer to her beloved son Jesus Christ.

- Through the mystery of the Incarnation, St. Mary became mother not only to the Head (Christ) but to the parts of His Holy Body (The church, because the church is the body of Christ), as Saint Augustine says.

- In the miracle of the wedding at Cana of Galilee we perceive the depth of St. Mary's intercession as a mother for her children. She asked her Son "They have no wine" (John 2:3) "Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not yet come". (John 2:4) He did not reject her but wanted to disclose to us her intercession and love to her children by asking Him for us; and that is from her side. When she said to the servants "Whatever He says to you, do it", (John 2:5) she showed us the meaning of intercession from our side. It is not a matter of worship to

her, but a demonstration of her ability to lead our hearts secretly to fulfill the will of her Son carefully.

THEREFORE, ST. MARY IS A MOTHER TO EVERY ONE OF US TO HELP HIM/HER AND INTERCEDE FOR HIM/HER

C. The Motherhood of St. Mary in the Prayers of the Agpeya

☩ In the morning prayer (**Prime**) we say "you are the honoured Mother of Light. Everywhere, from sunrise to sunset, people offer you glorification. O Theotokos (Mother of God) the second heaven..."

☩ In the prayer of the **third hour** we say "Mother of God who is filled with grace, you are the true vine that carries the fruit of life." Then we say, "O Mother of God, you are the gate of heaven, open to us the door of Mercy."

☩ In the prayer of the **sixth hour** we say "Because of our many sins, we are without liberty, pretext or excuse, we can only plead to you, O Virgin Mary, Mother of God, to pray to whom you gave birth, because your supplications are acceptable to our Saviour. O immaculate Mother, do not turn the sinners back, plead for them, because He to Whom you gave birth, is the merciful Redeemer". Then we also say "O Mother of the Lord, full of grace, the Virgin Mary, we praise you."

☩ In the prayer of the **ninth hour**, we say "You were born of the Virgin, for our sake ... Accept the supplications of your Virgin Mother on our behalf." Then we say, "When the Mother saw the Lamb, the Shepherd and Saviour of the world on the Cross, she wept and said, "the world rejoices at the acceptance of salvation, but my heart burns when I gaze at your hanging on the Cross which you endured for the sake of all; O my son and my God."

☩ In the prayer of sunset (**Vespers**), "Our Lady the Virgin Mary, guide me to the means of repentance, to you I plead and through you I seek supplication. I call you for help, lest I should fail. Come to my rescue, when my soul departs from my body; defeat the conspiracies of the enemy; shut the gates of hell lest they would swallow my soul. O immaculate bride to the true Lord."

✞ In the prayer **before sleeping** we say, "O pure Virgin, Cast the shadow of assistance on your servant ... You are a capable, merciful and helpful Mother, the mother of the Spring of Life, my King and God, Jesus Christ, my hope.

✞ In the midnight prayer, we say "O Virgin Mary, Mother of God, you are the bastion of our salvation, our impregnable fortress ..." "Then we say "O Mother of God, Mother of mercy and salvation, plead for the redemption of our souls."

D. The Virgin Mary, Ideal Example of Motherhood in the Christian Sense:

✞ When God wanted us to give example of caring and concern, He said that if the mother forgot her baby, I would not forget you. The Mother is the human example of caring, giving, continually following-up and taking responsibility. No one can find a better human example other than the Virgin Mary, who was called by St. Augustine, "The ideal part in the Church."

✞ When we talk about motherhood we do not mean it as a physical relationship with children, i.e. caring, loving; but our Lord Jesus Himself extended this relationship to a spiritual level and said, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). Accordingly, the spiritual mother takes care of her children and gives them the love, sympathy and sacrifice out of a Christian motive and not a human one. Likewise, the children honour their fathers and mothers out of Christian motives.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) St. Mary is such a great mother. Her intercession is very powerful for us. We must be friends with her and seek her intercession.

(2) We must follow her footsteps in our spiritual life: obedience, humbleness and service.

(3) We became part of the family of St. Mary the Virgin through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

AUGUST
SECOND SUNDAY

THE VIRGIN MARY'S MOTHERHOOD IN OUR DAILY LIFE – (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is lesson two in a series of two lessons about the motherhood of St. Mary the Virgin. In this lesson we focus on the role of mothers from a Christian viewpoint and on the role of mothers from the life of St. Mary the Virgin.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. Start by reviewing the previous lesson.

B. The praying mother who sticks near to God works on the growth of the Kingdom of God.

When the children see their mother kneeling down praying, lifting up her hands and asking for her children, herself and all the church. They see in her a living example of the commandments in the Bible. So, they grow up and enter into the school of prayers. This praying mother offers herself and her children to the kingdom of God. The mother who respects the church and persists on attending it, will have her children doing the same and so she will persuade them to win the Kingdom of God. The Virgin Mary learned to pray and stay close to the altar since she was 3 years old. St. Luke the Evangelist says "His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover" (Luke 2:41). Naturally, all these prayers and worship brought forth a pure immaculate heart to the Virgin Mary, the Mother, "The Royal daughter is all glorious within the palace" (Psalm 45:13).

God added to this blessing and through this internal power, the Virgin Mary became the ideal mother for God and for us, therefore, the basic point that every mother needs is this internal power, and the pure heart as an undoubted result of true prayer and worship. This internal power appears in the supernatural motherly love and humility, "Behold the maid servant of the Lord". (Luke 1:38). The humble mother wins her husband and her children and leads them all to the

Kingdom of God. Therefore, the basic needs she supplies her family with, but rather a true participation in reaching the Kingdom of God together.

The Virgin Mary said to her children, "Whatever He says to you, do it". She showed them the right way to the Kingdom of God. Here we remember St. Augustine's mother who used to pray with tears in order to save her son from corruption and sin. The Lord accepted her prayers and prepared for her son's salvation.

Every young girl should take care of her internal life and spiritual growth from now; so that when the time comes and she becomes a mother, she can bear her responsibility and become responsible for her children in front of God and make her small church at home, which is the Christian family. We should not forget what St. Paul said about the mother being the teacher of faith, "When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice" (2 Timothy 1:5).

C. The Mother Who Has Compassion For Her Children:

If the father, beside his love, is rather and responsible for material needs in life; the mother is the source of concentrated love, sympathy and pure feelings. There is no more compassionate heart than the mother's heart.

The first relationship that a person makes is with his mother, even before his birth when he is in her womb, feeding from her blood. Then when he comes out he stays near the bosom feeding her milk, love and care. To the baby the mother is the source of love and he owes it to her because if she were to neglect him, he would be lost. It is to be said here that the mother's care for her child does not cover only the above-mentioned stages but all his life. The Virgin Mary, the mother full of love, took the Lord Jesus into her arms since she gave birth to Him in the manger and went on until the age of 12. St. Luke the Evangelist says "But supposing Him to have been in the company (St. Mary & St. Joseph) they went a day's journey, and sought Him among relatives and acquaintances" (Luke 2:44). Even when the Lord Jesus was preaching in the upper room, "Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him "Look, your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you' (Mark 3:31-32). She followed Him to the Cross, "Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene" (John 10:25).

She was with His Disciples in the upper room waiting for the promise of God and the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplications, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brother" (Acts 1:14).

The Virgin Mary's love extends up to now, when she seeks the salvation of her children. All saints, without exceptions, took her as a mother knowing her role for salvation.

D. THE STORY OF ST. BAYESA

St. Bayesa loved Christ and the poor and she loved the Virgin Mary and took her as a friend. The evil one envied her and made her change her house into a place of corruption. The fathers of the wilderness used to come to Alexandria to get the supplies of the monastery. The Virgin Mary talked to them and told them not to leave this person to destruction. Anba Yuhannis went to her and when he came in they led him into the sitting-room. She came improperly dressed, so he started to cry. He asked her if there is a place where they can talk without God being there. She said, "No". He told her that this means when we sin God sees us and he started to talk to her about love of God and judgment when he finished, she asked him if she can repent. He told her, "Yes, but not in that place." So she asked him what he wants her to do. He told her to leave that place and go and stay in the Convent of Sisters. She followed him and on the way the weather became very cold. He told her to go back and get a coat. She said, "I do not want anything from this place." He took off his coat and covered her. Then they went to sleep each in his place. After a while, he saw a beam of light coming from her head up to heaven. He went to her and found that she had passed away. The monks were consoled because they knew that the Virgin Mary made this miracle. She is "the Gate of Heaven" as the prayers of the Agpeya says.

Therefore, the Virgin Mary is a mother full of love and all mothers should follow her example. A question comes up now, what does a son or a daughter do in return to this great love of mothers? We say that "Honour thy mother" is a commandment from God before saying "do not kill or commit adultery." He said, "Honour they Father and Mother so that your days on earth become longer." It is a commandment with a promise.

E. HOW COULD A PERSON HONOUR HIS/HER MOTHER?

The mother is honoured by being obedient to her, by loving her, taking care not to burden her and by giving her the respect she deserves. One should show love to her by nice words and simple presents on occasions:

- Do not argue proudly with your mother.
- Do not raise voice when speaking to her.
- Do not disobey her; do not challenge her and do not ignore her.
- Do not hurt her with bad words.
- Do not force her to fulfill your demands.
- Do not criticize her, especially in front of other people.
- Ask for her daily blessings.

F. The mother who endures, sacrifices and serves:

The mother sacrifices anything for the sake of her children. How many mother would rather have children in the best clothes and not thinking of her own clothing. How many mothers forget themselves for the sake of the safety of their children. Not only her children are the subject of her service, but she extends it to everybody in the family with endurance. She offers her services in the church in complete self-denial and sacrifice.

The character of the Virgin Mary appears across the ages, as the strongest example of painful endurance and sacrifice:

- The Virgin Mary endured being an orphan since her childhood.
- She did not question the good tidings and accepted to be the first and last mother to give birth without human association, thus putting herself in a place of doubt in relation to Joseph. She was truly ready to be stoned for the sake of accepting the word of God.
- She endured the journey and the trouble to go and serve Elizabeth the elderly who was pregnant with John the Baptist in her old days.
- She endured the escape to Egypt in along and tiring journey.
- She endured to see her Son hanging on the Cross.

If any mother, from our century, wants to take her as an ideal example of sacrifice emanating from love, diligence and service, she should look at St. Mary as a mother taking care of her children.

A True Story:

There was a monk who used to love St. Mary all his life, he used to learn all the hymns about her and enjoys giving praise to her. While he was working in the monastery, a piece of glass went into his eye and so his eye was bleeding. The monks took him of the nearest town to an eye specialist and collected all the money in the monastery which came up to 30 pounds. Unfortunately, the doctor asked for 100 pounds tfor the operation to get the glass out of his eye. At that moment the monk remembered that he had "an able and compassionate helper" and he said to the doctor to forget about the operation because St. Mary would be cheaper. He went back to the monastery and spent the night under the Icon of St. Mary and told her, "Mother, do not be cross with me because I went to someone else for help. And he slept. In the morning he found the piece of glass outside his eye, and his eye was perfect. Around the collar of his tunic were blood crosses. St. Mary still cares for the benefit of her children as the hymn says "As for her, you will find her willing to help."

G. How do we benefit from St. Mary the Mother?

- ✞ St. Mary is an ideal example to every girl and every mother. Every girls needs to take care of the depth of her spiritual life with Christ for the sake of her eternal life and to prepare herself for taking care of her children both physically and spiritually when she becomes a responsible wife and mother.

- ✞ Every Christian who loves the Lord Jesus Christ needs to be a friend of St. Mary. The church teaches us to talk to her in praying saying "You are the honourable mother of light..." and "You are the bastion of our salvation..." "You are the unchangeable and enlightened flower." The word "You" means that I speak to her and she listens to me and answers me in strong supplications and help.

- ✞ I see in St. Mary a living image of the product of the word of God and prayer. It is very clear in my mind what the world produces though knowledge and philosophies from people with corrupted minds, lacking peace and filled with evil. When I look at the character of St. Mary, who is the second heaven, equipped with prayers, meditation and humility, I see in her a living image of how the children of God should be; full of peace and joy above any mental concept. Her life and her character speak of glory of God and the work of His Hands.

✞ I see in St. Mary a living image of a person who fulfilled the Lord's commandments. Sometimes one looks at these commandments in the Bible as if they were imaginary or unsuitable for the humans but rather suitable for angels because of their difficulty. But looking at St. Mary we see an example of performing the will of God in complete obedience and simplicity. It is not surprising that we find St. John the Evangelist saying "His commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3). St. Mary and a lot of other saints had completely fulfilled God's will.

WHAT TO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) We must go deeper in our prayers as the most effective mother is the one who is deep in her prayers.

(2) We must grow in our mercy and compassion towards others as the mothers are always the best examples of kindness.

(3) We must honour and respect our mothers.

AUGUST
THIRD SUNDAY

THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST – (I)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is the first lesson in a series of three lessons about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this lesson, the focus is on the absolute necessity of the second coming of the Lord Jesus despite the fact that no one (except God) knows when this will be.

MEMORY VERSE:

> ***"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority"*** Acts 1:7

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

A. Introduction:
The importance of studying the subject of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the end of the world (Eschatology):

Our Coptic Orthodox church always takes the initiative, at the end of every Coptic year, of reminding us of eternity and the second coming of the Lord Jesus when He will execute His final ruling on the general judgment day. Therefore all the readings are concentrated on that subject. The purpose is to remind us all of eternity since passing one year of our life means coming closer and closer to eternity. The end of a year is therefore a symbol for the end of the whole chronological life.

The remembrance (thought) of eternal life is the main reason which makes the saints lead a life of holiness and purity. For this reason, those saints left everything

for the sake of their portion in heaven saying with St. Paul: "Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" Phil 1:23. Heaven was their desire and they felt life on earth is but a very small introduction to eternal life "a vapour that appears for a little time then vanishes away" James 4:14.

We do not want in this lessons to deal with any prediction of the second coming and the end of the world. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself said to His Disciples "It is not for you to know times or season which the Father has put in His own authority (Acts 1:7). Also He said "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" Mark 13:32. He wanted in that verse to tell His Disciples not to ask at all about the timing of the end of the world because it is a Divine mystery. Though it is set in God's plan, it is not revealed in any of His words. For a divine reason, God did not wish to reveal it to people or angels. Though our Saviour shares in the divine knowledge and knows this mystery He did not wish to admit that He knows it.

Despite that, many of the contemporary studies of the Holy Bible concentrated their efforts to precisely set the tune for the second coming. Furthermore, some denominations, like Jehovah's Witnesses, who are not considered as Christian, have changed the word of God from one for salvation and enjoyment of the Heavenly Kingdom a kingdom in the heart to intellectual discussions.

The great second coming of the Lord Jesus is the blessed hope of the church "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and Godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13).

In the Gospel of Matthew 24, St. Mark 13, St. Luke 21, the Lord Christ spoke in detail about His second coming and the end of the world. We call that branch of theology "Eschatology".

You notice in the Gospel of St. Matthew 24, the Lord Jesus answered two questions His Disciples asked. The first regarding a near event namely the destruction of Jerusalem and the second regarding a forward even, the second coming of the Lord Jesus, "Parousia" at the end of the world.

The first event of the destruction of Jerusalem took place in the year 70 A.D. by the Romans. The events were a symbol of the events to take place before the second coming of the Lord at the end of age. We also notice the words of the Lord

Jesus regarding the abomination of desolation - That event took place in the year 168 B.C. during the reign of Antichos Epiphanious. Also when the Romans surrounded Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in the year 70 A.D. A third abomination of desolation will take place before the end of ages when the Anti-Christ comes and gets in the temple of God asking that people worship him as a God as is mentioned in 2 Thess 2:1-14 "Now brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you ... showing himself that He is God." The word temple here means that an alter (Temple) will be built in Jerusalem at the end of days.

In these lessons we will attempt to give a glimpse of the second coming of the Lord Jesus to Him Be the Glory and the events surrounding it from the Holy Bible and some spiritual meditation for the sake of awareness and to be able to refute all strange opinions. Also to receive the spiritual benefit and to prepare for eternity required from all.

To cover this topic we will discuss the following points:

1. The absolute necessity of the second coming of the Lord Jesus and the purpose for it.
2. The rule of 1000 years and its relation to the events before and after the second coming (Review).
3. The first sign - the preaching of the Gospel in the whole world.
4. The 2nd sign: No peace and no true safety in the world.
5. The 3rd sign: The great Apostasy within the Christian church
6. The 4th sign: The spreading of inequity throughout the world.
7. The 5th sign: The Abomination of Desolation.
8. The 6th sign: The great tribulation that the faithful will suffer from the beast, and the tribulation will be short.
9. The 7th sign: The signs appearing in the sun, moon and stars.
10. The second coming of Christ.
11. The resurrection of the dead and the living will be caught up
12. The general judgment
13. The new heaven and the new earth.
14. Some questions and answers by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.
15. Prayer.

1. The Absolute Necessity Of The Second Coming Of The Lord Jesus And The Purpose For It.

The issue of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is a very important issue, it is mentioned often in the Holy Bible. For example, "then Jesus went out and departed from the temple: and his Disciple came to him for to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them "See you not all these things?" Truly I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the Disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of they coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them: "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that you be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." Dear reader, you may wish to read also Matthew 24:42-44, 25:1-13, 1 Thess 4:13, 5:18 & Rev. 4:1-11.

The first two epistles St. Paul the Apostle wrote were to the Thessalonians filled with words regarding the second coming of the Lord Jesus. Also the Book of Revelation speaks a lot about that subject.

Let us mention some verses confirming the necessity for the second coming of the Lord Jesus:

"In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come gain and receive you to myself that where I am, there you maybe also" John 14:2-4.

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God ...." (1 Thess 4:16).

"So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him. He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation," (Heb 9:28).

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

As for the reasons for the second coming of the Lord Jesus we summarize it in the following points still we go into more details later on in the booklet)

* The general resurrection.
* The general judgment.
* The beginning of Eternal Kingdom (the new heaven and earth.)

2. The Rule Of 1000 Years And Its Relation To The Events Before And After The Second Coming (Review)

Please read Matthew 24:29-51, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

The faith of our Coptic Orthodox Church (which is one of the Apostolic churches. Specifically states that we live in the 1000 years ruling of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is to say that the Lord Jesus has been ruling over the believers' hearts when He died on the Cross on their behalf and thereby bought the church paying the price His precious blood. Through the Cross, He delivered the church from the power of the devil and cast him out. "now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (Jn 12:31).

Christ is ruling now over the hearts of the believers and they are ruling with Him whether they are on earth or departed to heaven "Then I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection, on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison. And shall go out to deceive the nations, which are in the four quarters of the earth, God and Magog to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up o the breadth of the earth and compassed the camp of the saints about and the beloved city and fire came down

from God out of heaven and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The Kingdom of Christ means the Reign of Christ, this took place when the Lord paid the price of our souls on the Cross. That reign started by tying the devil so if he is hand-tied, how could he harm us? If our hearts are filled with the love of the world we are inviting the devil to enter the world loving heart for he is the ruler of the world. If we hold strong to Christ we overcome the devil through prayer, vigil and humility.

The number 1000 is a symbol for the book of revelation, is based on symbolism in the same book he says "The time is near" (Rev 1:3), "I am coming quickly" (Rev 22:20).

The previously mentioned text Rev. 20:1-10 tells us that at the last days the devil will be released from his prison a good while that he may deceive the gentiles and gather many nations, God and Magog and surround the believers. Fire will come down from heaven (over the devil, the beast and the false prophet). Why does God allow the release of the devil? To come with the world to an end. During this chaos, some will join the devil and the beast, some will be faithful to God in the gathering of the saints and will be under the protection of God even if some think that the devil is about to harm the saints.

NB. There are three opinions regarding the 1000 years rule. The one we already mentioned above, is the opinion of the Apostolic church. This is referred to as the Millennial view. That is we are living now in the rule of the 1000 years. There are two other opinions and they are wrong. The first is called the Pre-millennial view which says that Christ the Lord is going to start His rule at a certain time for 1000 years while in heaven following which He will come to judge the world.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Our Coptic Orthodox Church does everything possible in her readings, rites, liturgies, hymns etc. to remind us that eternal life is the most important thing in our lives. We must remember this at all times.

(2) Our Coptic Orthodox Church does not get distracted from her main goal (eternal life) by attempting to calculate the timing of the second coming of the Lord Christ. He told us in advance not to be busy calculating the exact timing of His second coming.

NOTES

AUGUST
FOURTH SUNDAY

THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST – (II)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This is the second lesson in a series of three lessons about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this lesson we will present the signs leading to His second coming.

MEMORY VERSE:

"The gospel ..... which was preached to very creature under heaven" Col. 1:23

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

Start by reviewing the previous lesson with the students and then proceed.

3. The First Sign: The Preaching Of The Gospel In The Whole World.

"And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). Why should the preaching of the Gospel in the whole world before the Second Coming? St. Peter answers: "The Lord is not slack concerning His Promise, as some count slackness, but is long suffering toward us not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Also, St. John the Apostle answers: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His son - He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself ....." John 5:9-12. This prophecy took place. St. Paul the Apostle wrote a few years after the ascension of the Saviour an epistle to the people of the city of colossi, one of the

cities in Asia minor, speaking about "The gospel ... which was preached to every creature under heaven." Col 1:23.

4. The Second Sign: No Peace And No True Safety In the World.

The second sign is the rarity of peace and true safety. From the Gospel according to St. Matthew 24:38-39, we read "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

St. Paul assures this by saying: "For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them as labour pain in upon a pregnant woman and they shall not escape, but you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this day should overtake you as a thief." 1 Thess 5:3-4. This means that the second coming of the Lord Jesus is for the saints not a sign of losing peace or disturbance and there is no surprise for they expect it and long for it. The opposite is for the evil ones. How many are the fears and loss of peace in the era we live in. If you ask any worldly person living in the world's desires, you find in his heart no inner peace, safety or a sense of settling.

5. The Third Sign: The Great Apostasy Within The Christian Church.

The 3rd sign before the coming of the Lord is the great apostasy within the Christian church. We read about this in the 2nd epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians Chapter 2 he says: "Let no one deceive you by any means, for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, ..." 2 Thess 2:3.

The translation of the word "falling away" is "apostasy". It means false teachers within the church. We find this in abundance in the churches nowadays. We also find the newly developed denominations which truly are not Christian churches as Jehovah's witnesses, the Mormons, and others. Many of those denominations do not believe in the Cross of Christ or in the Holy bible, the saints, the angels or heavenly life.

The sign has started and continues to grow as is apparent recently in the cults and all the changes taking place without any biblical basis within Christian churches.

6. The Fourth Sign: The Spreading Of The Great Inequity In The Whole World.

The loss of peace and safety from the world (the 2nd sign) then apostasy within the church (the 3rd sign), then spreading of inequity and corruption everywhere in the world (the 4th sign) are all introductions to the public manifestation of the Anti-Christ.

In this 4th sign, the human being wants to divine himself. Everyone says I want to do what pleases me. Don't order me, don't restrain me, don't put restrictions for me. As St. Paul says "And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way, and then the lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming" 2 Thess 2:6-8.

It is not strange that we now see denominations pretending to be Christians but at the same time do not believe in Christ as Lord and God, like Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons and the Church of Science, ... etc. They do not disagree that Jesus is the Saviour but not Lord and God. Even though St. Paul says it is essential in order to receive the salvation of Jesus Christ. "to believe in Him as a Lord and God. That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the Dead you will be saved", Romans 10:9. It is clear from the phrase "The Lord Jesus" in that sentence that the Saviour is our Lord and God Jesus Christ.

7. The Fifth Sign: The Abomination Of Desolation Or The Anti-Christ Appearance:

These are names that all mean the same thing. The Anti-Christ, the Abomination of Desolation, or the Man of Sin, or Gog, the Sound of destruction, The Beast, the number 666, all these names and others are used in the Eschatology.

Also the talk about the person of the Anti-Christ we find in many places in the Holy bible. The most famous of this we find in the 2nd epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, the whole chapter 2 and in the Book of Revelation the 13th Chapter (where he is called The Beast). In Daniel 12:1 "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time, and at that time your people shall be delivered , everyone who is found written in the book". And you the Son of Adam, prophesy against God and say "Thus says the Lord God, behold, I am against you O Gog, the Prince of Rosh, Meshech, and

Tubal," Ezek 39:1.

"Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is the Anti-Christ who denies the Father and the Son." 1 John 2:22.

The characteristics of the Anti-Christ are:

- A person who will pretend that he is God appearing in the flesh (Daniel11:36, 2 Thess 2:3-4)
- A very strong person drawing his power from the devil himself (Rev. 13:3-4, Rev. 13:12, 2 Thess 2:9)
- A person whose spirit comes from Hades (Rev. 11:7)
- A person whose coming the evil world bows down (Rev. 13:12, 17:8, 2 Thess 2:3-4)
- A person who sits in the temple in Jerusalem calling himself God (2 Thess 2:3-4)
- A person who will take all his evil power from the devil.

NB. The man of sin, Anti-Christ, has not yet been manifested. That sign has not yet been fulfilled. When it does, the devil will be loosened from his prison and will give all his power to that man of sin (Anti-Christ). This will be accompanied by a great tribulation on the earth.

8. The Sixth Sign: The Great Tribulation On The Believers From The Beast, But The Woes of God Will Not Affect Them And The Tribulation Will Be Made Short:

Then there will be a great persecution and tribulation for the believers from the Beast and his evil followers. "It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them and authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation." Rev. 13:7. Also in Matthew 24:21 "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."

Before the coming of the Lord Jesus, God will pour the censors of His wrath on the evil world but will not touch God's people and His saints with any harm "so not harm the earth, the sea or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads" Rev 7:3. Therefore the believers will be sealed so that the wrath of God does not befall them as the rest. As a witness of that, God did not hit His people in the Old Testament when they were in the land of Egypt with the 10

plagues as the rest. Also Noah was saved from the water of the flood, which drowned the old world on the whole.

NB. A wrong dogma having no biblical basis has risen in the year 1830 in Europe saying hat a secret rapture will take place in which the church will be taken to heaven for 7 days to protect it from the wrath of God poured over the evil in the world towards the end of the days. This is a wrong dogma starting to spread and is called the Rapture.

In Matthew 24:22 we read "and unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved, but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" therefore the wrath of God will not come over the believers but they will suffer and be persecuted from the Beast and the evil world.

That is nothing new. In the history of the Church throughout the times, true Christians were persecuted and hurt. This will continue until the end of the age. However, despite all this, the power of Christ and His glory helps them to bear all this with thanksgiving and become much stronger than their persecutors. Those persecutors diminish and the church remains forever. The Lord will keep His children until the end.

9. The Seventh Sign: Signs Will Appear In The Sun, Moon and Stars:

Before the second coming of the Lord Jesus, "signs will appear in the sun, in the moon and stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaming; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken" Luke 21:25-26. Those whose hearts will fail from fear are the evil ones only.

10. The Second Coming Of The Lord Jesus Christ - Parousia.

The Lord Jesus in His second coming will not come to rule over the earth - "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God." Thess 4:16. Also, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up unto Heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you unto heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw things unto heaven." Acts 1:11.

He will come visibly on the clouds, "He will come on the clouds and every eye will behold Him."

He will come without any warning "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night" 1Thess 5:2. Also, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements wil melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" 2 Pet 3:10.

11. The Resurrection of the Dead and the catching up of the rest of the living:

The resurrection of the dead at the 2nd coming of Christ is a true necessity "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen and if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty" 1 Cor 15:13-14. It is essential that the dead rise in incorruption and that this body wears incorruption, and this dead, undying. It is not possible that this body which bears sickness disintegrates and corrupts enters the kingdom of heaven. Its nature must first changed. The power for that change is hidden in the communion of the body of the Lord and His blood. "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:54.

In the resurrection, the corrupt wears incorruption and us when we die, the law of death is completed in us. But the nature of the resurrection must also be completed in us, that which the Lord offered to us through His salvation and great redemption. "Fro the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remains shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thess 16-17.

✞ **Is it possible that the resurrection of the bodies of the dead takes place after it has disintegrated and became dust and was spread over many places.?.**

St. Paul answers 1 Cor. 15:35-45 "But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds

another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

So will it be the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 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. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit".

The living will change in the twinkle of an eye at the second coming of the Lord Christ. The body of death and corruption and suffering will be changed to a body of resurrection similar to the body of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. A body not affected by suffering or corruption. A body in harmony with the nature of the spirit, a spiritual body. "As was the man of dust, such are they also that are earthly, and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor 15:48-49)

With what body do the evil one rise?

They rise with a non-material body but not possessing the spirituality of the righteous bodies. i.e. a dark spiritual body.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) Some of the signs that precede the second coming of the Lord Jesus have already happened. But we must not be distracted by any calculation for the timing of the Lord's second coming, but rather we must focus only on our repentance and leading a righteous life.

(2) The antichrist, the man of sin has not yet been manifested. There is much false information all over the world that the antichrist is already here. This is untrue. When it does, the devil will be loosed from his prison and will give all his power to that man of sin (anti-christ). This will be accompanied by a great tribulation on the earth.

For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

AUGUST
FIFTH SUNDAY

THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST – (III)

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:
This lesson is the third lesson in a series of three lessons about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this lesson we focus on the New Heaven and New Earth, which will follow the general judgment. Also, we will study some of the answers of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III to the subject of the second coming of Christ.

MEMORY VERSE:

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away ....." Rev. 21:1

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

12. The General Judgment:

The General Judgment was spoken about by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46

> "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of his glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides His sheep from the goats. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye clothed me. I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Then shall the righteous answer him saying: Lord when saw you hungered and fed you? or thirsty and gave you drink? When saw you a stranger and took you in? or naked and clothed you? Or when saw we you sick or in prison and visited to you? And

> the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left, "Depart from me you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungered and you gave me no meat, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you took me not in, naked and you clothed me not, sick and in prison and you visited me not. Then shall they also answer him saying, Lord when saw we thee a hungered, or a thirst, or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister unto you? Then shall he answer them saying, Verily I say unto you Inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And these shall to away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

And in the Gospel of St. John 5:28-29 "all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.

13. The New Heaven And The New Earth:

After the judgment the believers are wedded to the heavenly bridegroom the Lord Jesus Christ "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away and there was no more sea. I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, He will dwell with them, they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." Rev. 21:1-4.

They become one in Him "That they also may be one in us ... that they may be one just as we are one ... I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in one" John 17:21-23.

"Father I desire that they also whom you gave me may be with me where I am" John 17:24.

After that happy wedding and unutterable unity, the Son, head of the church gathers the believers in one and hands the reign to the Father" Heb 2:13, 1 Cor 16:24-28.

SOME QUESTIONS AND THEIR ANSWERS BY HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA THE 3RD

Q. In the Gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 24 which speaks regarding the second coming of the Lord Jesus, the Lord says, "Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! and pray that your flight may not be in winter" (Mat 24:19-20), the same is also repeated in Mark 13:17-18 where the subject of the second coming is discussed. What do these two verses mean?

A. In fact, Chapter 24 of Matthew and Mark 13 discuss two subjects. The second coming and the destruction of Jerusalem. The verses mentioned above "Woe to those who are pregnant in those days" and "pray that your flight may not be in winter refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. The second coming will be accompanied with the resurrection (John 5:28-29) and also Judgment (Mat 16:27) and (Mat 25:31-46). Clearly in the resurrection and judgment, there will be no flight and winter or summer will make no difference. However, during the attack of the Roman army and the destruction of Jerusalem fleeing will be difficult for the pregnant and those nursing babies since carrying a child in the womb or on the shoulders would be dangerous on the mountains of Jerusalem. What shows that the section is related to the destruction of Jerusalem is the saying of the Lord "Let these who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house" Mark 13:14-15. Obviously, that does not refer to the second coming or judgment.

Q. Is the False Christ born or not yet? Some say that he was born in the States and some say he was born and they are hunting him away?

A. The phrase "false Christ" was not mentioned in the Holy Bible. Perhaps what it meant is the Anti-Christ who will come towards the end of times and cause the great apostasy, through his works "with all power signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception ..... among those who perish, the coming of whom is according to the working of Satan" 2 Thess 2:9-10. He, who the bible describes as "the man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God showing himself that he is God" 2 Thess 2:3-4. Has a man appeared possessing these characteristics and lying wonders, has someone sat in the temple of God showing himself that

he is God or else if they know it is he, why don't they arrest him and rid the world from him?

Q. It is said that a red cow was born in Israel and that it is a sign of the end of the world and is related to Israel and its desire to rebuild the temple of Solomon. An article was published in the Telegraph Sunday magazine on March 16, 1997. What is the opinion of the Holy Bible regarding the red cow and the meaning behind its appearance?

A. The commandment regarding the red cow is in the book of Numbers 19. It is a regular commandment regarding the offering of a red cow as a sin offering, it is then burned and become ashes. It is a regular sacrifice among the many offerings that the Lord commanded to offer. He who reads what is whether in the books of Numbers 19:1-17, finds nothing regarding the end of the world or any political goals for Israel. it is sure that the first red cow was offered as a sin offering for the Lord in the days of Moses and Aaron (Num 19:2). The Holy Bible mentions that it will be an eternal statute (Num 19:10) that it will be continuously offered and has been offered across the ages many red cows without signifying the end of the world or the second coming of Christ and the rebuilding of the altar. When the time was for offering a red cow differs as sin offering, there was o altar or thinking about building an altar. The Hebrews at that time used to worship the Lord in the tabernacle. It was written regarding the laying of the red cow that some of its blood is sprinkled directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting (Num. 19:4). Now is this related to the altar? What is meant from the story in the book of numbers it was for purifying from sin and the water in which the ashes of the cow are kept is called water of purification (Num. 19:9).

Also what came in the letter to the Hebrews (Heb 9:13) regarding the dogma of the old testament and its symbolizing the blood of Christ is also to purify the sinful and has nothing to do with the end of the world. We notice in the newspaper that elders of the Jews have exaggerated in describing that red cow to make it is rare finding. They made mention of special specification regarding the nature of the red color. Some said that it will be the offspring of a mother and father neither of which is red and that way its birth is a miracle prophesying the building of the altar. They also said that the red heifer born six months prior to the publication, in the suburbs of Haifa carries the scriptures (appearing in the Talmud) though in true fact the description have nothing to do with the scriptures. All what is mentioned in the Talmud regarding the red cow to be offered as a sacrifice is a "red heifer

without blemish", in which there is no defect and on which the yoke has never come. Numbers 19:2. That it has not been used in plowing and has no blemishes. The Holy Bible did not add anything more and it is not logical that God commands and eternal statute to be a rarely occurrence sacrifice or miraculous existence.

If the Jew have a political purpose, it is not right for them to incorrectly quote the scriptures regarding the description of the cow, its parents, the purpose for presenting it as a sin offering or what it symbolizes. The Torah is innocent of what they say. As for the end of the world, the New Testament explains what events precede it. There is nothing of what they say is in the gospel.

When Christ spoke of the events preceding the end of the world (Mat 24) He made no mention of a red or other cow. There is also no mention of that anywhere in the New Testament. There is no need therefore for preachers to make an opportunity to encourage people to repent. The call for repentance has spiritual reasons, much deeper than a red cow.

Q. You mentioned in one of the Easter Sermons that the resurrected body does not retain infirmities ...?? How is this in harmony with the Bible's saying "It is better for you to enter into eternal life lame or maimed rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire" Mat. 13:8, Mark 9:47.

A. Do not take the words of the Holy Bible in a literal fashion. It is not possible for a man to be blind, or lame in eternal bliss for what bliss would that be? What is meant is to enter the eternal Kingdom while you have been lame or blind on earth but once you enter eternal life you get rid of any disability, or else what would be the martyrs condition, those who were dismembered, whose eyes were plucked and were disfigured will they enter heaven in that condition? St. James the Dismembered for instance, whose arms and legs were cut off does he live in eternal life like that?

Is it possible that the martyrs live in eternity disfigured? It is impossible. They accepted disfigurement because of their great love to the Lord and steadfast faith. Also some lost their eyes and hands to evade temptation (Mat 5:29-30) and (Mark 18:8-9). Is it possible that the reward of a person who preferred to lose one of his members for the sake of righteousness be disfigured in eternity. Is it possible what is meant by "It is better for you to

enter into life lame or maimed" (in your life on earth) Mat 18. Or "It is better that one of your members (on earth) perishes rather than your whole body thrown into everlasting fire" Mat 5. Also do not forget that we will rise from the dead with spiritual heavenly bodies (1 Cor 5:44-46). The spiritual heavenly body does not fall under the same laws as the present material body. The eyes sees what is material, in eternity it will not need a materialistic vision but will see a spiritual sight (1 Cor 2:9). If you lose an eye on earth you will not need it in heaven for the Lord God will give you a spiritual vision. Also being lame on earth will change in eternity for you will be like angels of God in heaven moving from place to place just like angels. Nevertheless, it is not possible that we would be disfigured in heaven, for disfigurement does not correspond with the continuous joy enjoyed in eternal life. There is no deficiency in eternal life or a feeling of incompetence. God would not allow it, He who comforts the lowly in heart and gives them "Beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

(1) For Christians leading a righteous life the general judgment day and the great party in heaven are the center of their hope and delight.

(2) The devil or the people who followed his way will not attend this great party in heaven. If anyone wants to be part of this greatest party in heaven he or she must get ready from now. By repentance, enjoying the reading of the word of God and uniting with the Lord Jesus Christ.

MAJOR REFERENCES

(with permission)

(1) Books by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III up to March 2005.

(2) El-Keraza Magazine, head publisher: His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, all issues up to March 2005.

(3) Recorded Sermons by His Grace Bishop Rowiss up to March 2005.

(4) Books by His Grace Bishop Moussa up to March 2005

(5) All books by Mr. Kamal Habib (Late Bishop Biman Bishop of Mallawi)

(6) Books by His Grace Bishop Youanis, the Bishop of El-Gharbia.

(7) Books by Late Father Pishoy Kamel of St. George Coptic Church, Alexandria, Egypt.

(8) All issues of "Sout El-Rahi" magazine, St. George Church, Alexandria, Egypt.

(9) Books by Father Tadros Y. Malaty, St. George Coptic Church, Alexandria, Egypt, up to March 2005.

(10) "Bahgat El-Aiad" by Yassa Mansour, 1970.

(11) "The Seven Church Sacraments" by Late Mr. Habib Girgis, 1968.

(12) All colouring books, Father Tadros Y. Malaty, St. George Coptic Church, Alexandria, Egypt.

THE FOLLOWING TABLES OF CONTENTS REFLECT THE CHANGES IN THE TIMING OF EASTER AND THE ASSOCIATED, BEFORE AND AFTER, CELEBRATIONS IN VARIOUS YEARS

EXTRA TABLE OF CONTENTS

(When Easter is on the first week of April)

(In the following Years: 2007, 2010, 2018, 2029, 2034, 2037, 2045, 2048)

SEPTEMBER

1st week of Sept., ***THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS…,*** page 10
2nd week of Sept., ***NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (I)…,*** page 15
3rd week of Sept., ***NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (II)…,*** page 21
4th week of Sept., ***CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING… (I)…,*** page 28

OCTOBER

1st week of Oct., **CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING… (II)…,** page 33 2nd week of Oct., ***EVIL COMPANY – (I),*** page 38
3rd week of Oct., ***EVIL COMPANY – (II),*** page 43
4th week of Oct., **PERSONAGE *FROM THE OLD ...,*** page 48
5th week of Oct., **PERSONAGE *FROM THE OLD ...,*** page 54

NOVEMBER

1st week of Nov., ***ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(I)…,*** page 62
2nd week of Nov., ***ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(II)…,***page 70
3rd week of Nov., ***SERVING THE LORD – (I),*** page 75
4th week of Nov., ***SERVING THE LORD – (II),*** page 82

DECEMBER

1st week of Dec., ***JOB'S WIFE - NARROW LOOK AT GOD,*** page 87
2nd week of Dec., ***THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MIDNIGHT PRAISE,*** page 93
3rd week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (I),*** page 97
4th week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (II),*** page 103
5th week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (III),*** page 108

JANUARY

1st week of Jan., ***THE JOYS OF JANUARY,*** page 112
2nd week of Jan., ***STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (I),*** page 116
3rd week of Jan., ***STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (II),*** page 120
4th week of Jan., ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (I),*** page 124

FEBURARY

1st week of Feb., ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (II),*** page 130
2nd week of Feb., ***PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD …(I)…,*** page 134
3rd week of Feb., ***PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD …(I)…,*** page 141
4th week of Feb., **GOD'S LOVE AND HIS…. (I),** page 146

MARCH

1st week of March, **GOD'S LOVE AND HIS…. (II),** page 153
2nd week of March, ***MY COPTIC CHURCH HAS TAUGHT ME..,*** (taken from the 1st week of May, page 201)
3rd week of March, ***PALM SUNDAY…,*** (taken from the 2nd week of April, page 184)
4th week of March, ***GOOD FRIDAY….,*** (taken from the 3rd week of April, page 189)

APRIL

1st week of April, ***RESURRECTION - OUR NEW LIFE,*** (taken from the 4th week of April, page 194)
2nd week of April, ***WHY SHOULD WE PRAY WITH THE AGPEYA? – (I),*** (taken from the 2nd week of March, page 159)
3rd week of April, ***WHY SHOULD WE PRAY…. (II),*** (taken from the 3rd week of March, page 167)
4th week of April, ***FORGIVENESS – (I),*** (taken from the 4th week of March, page 174)

MAY

1st week of May, ***FORGIVENESS – (II),*** (taken from the 1st week of April, page 179)
2nd week of May, ***AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ICONS OF…,*** page 204
3rd week of May, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (I)..,*** page 211
4th week of May, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (II)..,*** page 217

JUNE

1st week of June, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (III)..,*** page 225
2nd week of June, ***THE HOLY SPIRIT THE PARACLETE….,*** page 233
3rd week of June, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY… (I),*** page 238
4th week of June, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(II),*** page 245

JULY

1st week of July, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(III),*** page 254
2nd week of July, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(IV),*** page 261
3rd week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(I)..,***page 268
4th week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(II)..,***page 274
5th week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(III)..,***page 280

AUGUST

1st week of Aug., ***THE VIRGIN MARY'S… (I),*** page 283
2nd week of Aug., ***THE VIRGIN MARY'S… (II),*** page 287
3rd week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(I),*** page 293
4th week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(II),*** page 299
5th week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(III),*** page 306

TABLE OF CONTENTS
(When Easter is on the Second week of April)
(In the following Years: 2012, 2015, 2017, 2023, 2026, 2028, 2031, 2039, 2042, 2050)

SEPTEMBER

1st week of Sept., ***THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS…,*** page 10
2nd week of Sept., ***NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (I)…,*** page 15
3rd week of Sept., ***NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (II)…,*** page 21
4th week of Sept., **CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING… (I)…,** page 28

OCTOBER

1st week of Oct., **CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING… (II)…,** page 33 2nd week of Oct., ***EVIL COMPANY – (I),*** page 38
3rd week of Oct., ***EVIL COMPANY – (II),*** page 43
4th week of Oct., **PERSONAGE *FROM THE OLD ...,*** page 48
5th week of Oct., **PERSONAGE *FROM THE OLD ...,*** page 54

NOVEMBER

1st week of Nov., ***ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(I)…,*** page 62
2nd week of Nov., ***ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(II)…,***page 70
3rd week of Nov., ***SERVING THE LORD – (I),*** page 75
4th week of Nov., ***SERVING THE LORD – (II),*** page 82

DECEMBER

1st week of Dec., **JOB'S WIFE - NARROW LOOK AT GOD,** page 87
2nd week of Dec., **THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MIDNIGHT PRAISE,** page 93
3rd week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (I),*** page 97
4th week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (II),*** page 103
5th week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (III),*** page 108

JANUARY

1st week of Jan., ***THE JOYS OF JANUARY,*** page 112
2nd week of Jan., ***STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (I),*** page 116
3rd week of Jan., ***STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (II),*** page 120
4th week of Jan., ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (I),*** page 124

FEBURARY

1st week of Feb., ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (II),*** page 130
2nd week of Feb., ***PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD …(I)…,*** page 134
3rd week of Feb., ***PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD …(I)…,*** page 141
4th week of Feb., **GOD'S LOVE AND HIS…. (I),** page 146

MARCH

1st week of March, **GOD'S LOVE AND HIS…. (II),** page 153
2nd week of March, ***WHY SHOULD WE PRAY WITH THE AGPEYA? – (I),*** page 159
3rd week of March, ***WHY SHOULD WE PRAY…. (II),*** page 167
4th week of March, ***PALM SUNDAY…,*** (taken from the 2nd week of April, page 184)

APRIL

1st week of April, ***GOOD FRIDAY….,*** (taken from the 3rd week of April, page 189)
2nd week of April, ***RESURRECTION - OUR NEW LIFE,*** (taken from the 4th week of April, page 194)
3rd week of April, ***MY COPTIC CHURCH HAS TAUGHT ME..,*** (taken from the 1st week of May, page 201)
4th week of April, ***FORGIVENESS – (I),*** (taken from the 4th week of March, page 174)

MAY

1st week of May, ***FORGIVENESS – (II),*** (taken from the 1st week of April, page 179)
2nd week of May, ***AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ICONS OF…,*** page 204
3rd week of May, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (I)..,*** page 211
4th week of May, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (II)..,*** page 217

JUNE

1st week of June, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (III)..,*** page 225
2nd week of June, ***THE HOLY SPIRIT THE PARACLETE….,*** page 233
3rd week of June, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY… (I),*** page 238
4th week of June, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(II),*** page 245

JULY

1st week of July, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(III),*** page 254
2nd week of July, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(IV),*** page 261
3rd week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(I)..,***page 268
4th week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(II)..,***page 274
5th week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(III)..,***page 280

AUGUST

1st week of Aug., ***THE VIRGIN MARY'S… (I),*** page 283
2nd week of Aug., ***THE VIRGIN MARY'S… (II),*** page 287
3rd week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(I),*** page 293
4th week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(II),*** page 299
5th week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(III),*** page 306

TABLE OF CONTENTS
(When Easter is on the third week of April)
(In the following Years: 2006, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2022, 2025, 2033, 2036, 2038, 2041, 2044, 2047, 2049)

SEPTEMBER

1st week of Sept., ***THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS…,*** page 10
2nd week of Sept., ***NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (I)…,*** page 15
3rd week of Sept., ***NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (II)…,*** page 21
4th week of Sept., **CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING… (I)…,** page 28

OCTOBER

1st week of Oct., **CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING… (II)…,** page 33 2nd week of Oct., ***EVIL COMPANY – (I),*** page 38
3rd week of Oct., ***EVIL COMPANY – (II),*** page 43
4th week of Oct., **PERSONAGE *FROM THE OLD ...,*** page 48
5th week of Oct., **PERSONAGE *FROM THE OLD ...,*** page 54

NOVEMBER

1st week of Nov., ***ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(I)…,*** page 62
2nd week of Nov., ***ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(II)…,***page 70
3rd week of Nov., ***SERVING THE LORD – (I),*** page 75
4th week of Nov., ***SERVING THE LORD – (II),*** page 82

DECEMBER

1st week of Dec., **JOB'S WIFE - NARROW LOOK AT GOD,** page 87
2nd week of Dec., **THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MIDNIGHT PRAISE,** page 93
3rd week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (I),*** page 97
4th week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (II),*** page 103
5th week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (III),*** page 108

JANUARY

1st week of Jan., ***THE JOYS OF JANUARY,*** page 112
2nd week of Jan., ***STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (I),*** page 116
3rd week of Jan., ***STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (II),*** page 120
4th week of Jan., ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (I),*** page 124

FEBURARY

1st week of Feb., ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (II),*** page 130
2nd week of Feb., ***PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD …(I)…,*** page 134
3rd week of Feb., ***PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD …(I)…,*** page 141
4th week of Feb., **GOD'S LOVE AND HIS…. (I),** page 146

MARCH

1st week of March, **GOD'S LOVE AND HIS…. (II),** page 153
2nd week of March, ***WHY SHOULD WE PRAY WITH THE AGPEYA? – (I),*** page 159
3rd week of March, ***WHY SHOULD WE PRAY…. (II),*** page 167
4th week of March, ***MY COPTIC CHURCH HAS TAUGHT ME..,*** (taken from the 1st week of May, page 201)

APRIL

1st week of April, ***PALM SUNDAY…,*** (taken from the 2nd week of April, page 184)
2nd week of April, ***GOOD FRIDAY….,*** (taken from the 3rd week of April, page 189)
3rd week of April, ***RESURRECTION - OUR NEW LIFE,*** (taken from the 4th week of April, page 194)
4th week of April, ***FORGIVENESS – (I),*** (taken from the 4th week of March, page 174)

MAY

1st week of May, ***FORGIVENESS – (II),*** (taken from the 1st week of April, page 179)
2nd week of May, ***AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ICONS OF…,*** page 204
3rd week of May, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (I)..,*** page 211
4th week of May, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (II)..,*** page 217

JUNE

1st week of June, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (III)..,*** page 225
2nd week of June, ***THE HOLY SPIRIT THE PARACLETE….,*** page 233
3rd week of June, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY… (I),*** page 238
4th week of June, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(II),*** page 245

JULY

1st week of July, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(III),*** page 254
2nd week of July, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(IV),*** page 261
3rd week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(I)..,***page 268
4th week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(II)..,***page 274
5th week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(III)..,***page 280

AUGUST

1st week of Aug., ***THE VIRGIN MARY'S… (I),*** page 283
2nd week of Aug., ***THE VIRGIN MARY'S… (II),*** page 287
3rd week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(I),*** page 293
4th week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(II),*** page 299
5th week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(III),*** page 306

TABLE OF CONTENTS
(When Easter is on the first week of May)
(In the following Years: 2013, 2016, 2021, 2024, 2027, 2032, 2040, 2043)

SEPTEMBER

1st week of Sept., ***THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS…,*** page 10
2nd week of Sept., ***NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (I)…,*** page 15
3rd week of Sept., ***NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (II)…,*** page 21
4th week of Sept., **CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING… (I)…,** page 28

OCTOBER

1st week of Oct., **CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING… (II)…,** page 33 2nd week of Oct., ***EVIL COMPANY – (I),*** page 38
3rd week of Oct., ***EVIL COMPANY – (II),*** page 43
4th week of Oct., **PERSONAGE *FROM THE OLD ...,*** page 48
5th week of Oct., **PERSONAGE *FROM THE OLD ...,*** page 54

NOVEMBER

1st week of Nov., ***ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(I)…,*** page 62
2nd week of Nov., ***ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(II)…,***page 70
3rd week of Nov., ***SERVING THE LORD – (I),*** page 75
4th week of Nov., ***SERVING THE LORD – (II),*** page 82

DECEMBER

1st week of Dec., **JOB'S WIFE - NARROW LOOK AT GOD,** page 87
2nd week of Dec., **THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MIDNIGHT PRAISE,** page 93
3rd week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (I),*** page 97
4th week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (II),*** page 103
5th week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (III),*** page 108

JANUARY

1st week of Jan., ***THE JOYS OF JANUARY,*** page 112
2nd week of Jan., ***STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (I),*** page 116
3rd week of Jan., ***STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (II),*** page 120
4th week of Jan., ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (I),*** page 124

FEBURARY

1st week of Feb., ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (II),*** page 130
2nd week of Feb., ***PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD …(I)…,*** page 134
3rd week of Feb., ***PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD …(I)…,*** page 141
4th week of Feb., **GOD'S LOVE AND HIS…. (I),** page 146

MARCH

1st week of March, **GOD'S LOVE AND HIS…. (II),** page 153
2nd week of March, ***WHY SHOULD WE PRAY WITH THE AGPEYA? – (I),*** page 159
3rd week of March, ***WHY SHOULD WE PRAY…. (II),*** page 167
4th week of March, ***FORGIVENESS – (I),*** (taken from the 4th week of March, page 174)

APRIL

1st week of April, ***FORGIVENESS – (II),*** (taken from the 1st week of April, page 179)
2nd week of April, ***MY COPTIC CHURCH HAS TAUGHT ME..,*** (taken from the 1st week of May, page 201)
3rd week of April, ***PALM SUNDAY…,*** (taken from the 2nd week of April, page 184)
4th week of April, ***GOOD FRIDAY….,*** (taken from the 3rd week of April, page 189)

MAY

1st week of May, ***RESURRECTION - OUR NEW LIFE,*** (taken from the 4th week of April, page 194)
2nd week of May, ***AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ICONS OF…,*** page 204
3rd week of May, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (I)..,*** page 211
4th week of May, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (II)..,*** page 217

JUNE

1st week of June, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (III)..,*** page 225
2nd week of June, ***THE HOLY SPIRIT THE PARACLETE….,*** page 233
3rd week of June, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY… (I),*** page 238
4th week of June, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(II),*** page 245

JULY

1st week of July, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(III),*** page 254
2nd week of July, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(IV),*** page 261
3rd week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(I)..,***page 268
4th week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(II)..,***page 274
5th week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(III)..,***page 280

AUGUST

1st week of Aug., ***THE VIRGIN MARY'S… (I),*** page 283
2nd week of Aug., ***THE VIRGIN MARY'S… (II),*** page 287
3rd week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(I),*** page 293
4th week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(II),*** page 299
5th week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(III),*** page 306

TABLE OF CONTENTS
(When Easter is on the second week of May)
(In the following Years: 2051)

SEPTEMBER

1st week of Sept., ***THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS…,*** page 10
2nd week of Sept., ***NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (I)…,*** page 15
3rd week of Sept., ***NOT EVERYONE IS RIGHT – (II)…,*** page 21
4th week of Sept., **CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING… (I)…,** page 28

OCTOBER

1st week of Oct., **CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING… (II)…,** page 33 2nd week of Oct., ***EVIL COMPANY – (I),*** page 38
3rd week of Oct., ***EVIL COMPANY – (II),*** page 43
4th week of Oct., **PERSONAGE *FROM THE OLD ...,*** page 48
5th week of Oct., **PERSONAGE *FROM THE OLD ...,*** page 54

NOVEMBER

1st week of Nov., ***ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(I)…,*** page 62
2nd week of Nov., ***ANSWERING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES –(II)…,***page 70
3rd week of Nov., ***SERVING THE LORD – (I),*** page 75
4th week of Nov., ***SERVING THE LORD – (II),*** page 82

DECEMBER

1st week of Dec., **JOB'S WIFE - NARROW LOOK AT GOD,** page 87
2nd week of Dec., **THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MIDNIGHT PRAISE,** page 93
3rd week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (I),*** page 97
4th week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (II),*** page 103
5th week of Dec., ***HOLY BIBLE STUDY – (III),*** page 108

JANUARY

1st week of Jan., ***THE JOYS OF JANUARY,*** page 112
2nd week of Jan., ***STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (I),*** page 116
3rd week of Jan., ***STEPS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL LIFE – (II),*** page 120
4th week of Jan., ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (I),*** page 124

FEBURARY

1st week of Feb., ***QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - (II),*** page 130
2nd week of Feb., ***PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD …(I)…,*** page 134
3rd week of Feb., ***PERSONAGE FROM THE OLD …(I)…,*** page 141
4th week of Feb., **GOD'S LOVE AND HIS…. (I),** page 146

MARCH

1st week of March, **GOD'S LOVE AND HIS…. (II),** page 153
2nd week of March, ***WHY SHOULD WE PRAY WITH THE AGPEYA? – (I),*** page 159
3rd week of March, ***WHY SHOULD WE PRAY…. (II),*** page 167
4th week of March, ***FORGIVENESS – (I),*** (taken from the 4th week of March, page 174)

APRIL

1st week of April, ***FORGIVENESS – (II),*** (taken from the 1st week of April, page 179)
2nd week of April, ***MY COPTIC CHURCH HAS TAUGHT ME..,*** (taken from the 1st week of May, page 201)
3rd week of April, ***AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ICONS OF…,*** (taken from the 2nd week of May, page 204)
4th week of April, ***PALM SUNDAY…,*** (taken from the 2nd week of April, page 184)

MAY

1st week of May, ***GOOD FRIDAY….,*** (taken from the 3rd week of April, page 189)
2nd week of May, ***RESURRECTION - OUR NEW LIFE,*** (taken from the 4th week of April, page 194)
3rd week of May, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (I)..,*** page 211
4th week of May, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (II)..,*** page 217

JUNE

1st week of June, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD… (III)..,*** page 225
2nd week of June, ***THE HOLY SPIRIT THE PARACLETE….,*** page 233
3rd week of June, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY… (I),*** page 238
4th week of June, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(II),*** page 245

JULY

1st week of July, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(III),*** page 254
2nd week of July, ***AN INTRODUCTION INTO THEOLOGY…(IV),*** page 261
3rd week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(I)..,***page 268
4th week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(II)..,***page 274
5th week of July, ***PERSONAGES FROM THE OLD …(III)..,***page 280

AUGUST

1st week of Aug., ***THE VIRGIN MARY'S… (I),*** page 283
2nd week of Aug., ***THE VIRGIN MARY'S… (II),*** page 287
3rd week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(I),*** page 293
4th week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(II),*** page 299
5th week of Aug., ***THE MAIN EVENTS CENTERING ….(III),*** page 306